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# UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

## **Social Work Students Managing Emotions: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Utilising Poetry and Prose as an Autoethnographic Turn**

by

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## Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Education has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis reports on research exploring how student social workers experience, express and manage the emotional content of practice learning in a relational context. It considers how social/supervisory support promotes emotional management for student social workers. Student respondents reflect on a variety of placement experiences ranging from a third-sector advice centre; a service supporting people who are homeless; local authority child protection services; a hospital discharge team and statutory adult mental health teams. Their responses reveal organisational interventions with a wide range of people from children and families to adults engaging with health and social care services.

New knowledge is produced through an identification of unpaid emotional labour as well as how discretion informs developing professionalism within managerialist organisations. There is limited current research or theory illustrating how social workers manage emotions within organisations and even less concerned with how emotions are experienced in generic social work, or which consider emotions from a student social worker perspective in order to develop educational theory. This is the premise of my research.

An autoethnographic approach evolves during the life of the research, part of the iterative process on which the premise of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is founded. This facilitates the presentation of my own lived experience as part of the research, thus confirming my place as both researcher and researched.

My sense-making leads to co-creation whereby student respondents' voices are illuminated either directly through I-poems utilising interview excerpts, or through my own poetic/prose responses to the event of data gathering and subsequent analysis.



The oscillation between my experience and that of student respondents aims to achieve authenticity and enable performative research as a means of fostering the third hermeneutic of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This methodological development contributes to new knowledge in the field of qualitative research.

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## **Preface**

### **Why this, why now?**

Writing can be seen as part of the care of the self – a space where we can crystallize our ideas, overcome our fears, understand our desires to be a scholar in the first place, learn to feel less guilty, and develop our sense of the kernel that will stay with us throughout our academic working lives. (Jaworski and Bryant, 2005: 133)

My motivation for engaging in the doctorate in education stems primarily from both my previous career in social care and current role as a social work academic. These parts of my life are interlinked and at times difficult to disaggregate, the learning from one influencing and informing the other. My work history has been one in which interprofessional working and peer support has been an inherent part. I have worked in educational establishments supporting the needs of children with disabilities and their families, in health and social care settings where advocacy has been an integral part of my role and as a social worker supporting adults with a diverse range of needs. Over time, these roles have shaped and defined my working practice, underpinned by a strengths-based and feminist philosophy, where people's hopes, dreams and aspirations are given credence (Rapp, 1998; Saleebey, 2013) and their concerns are considered in terms of health inequalities and wider structural disadvantage in order to challenge oppression (Dominelli, 2002; Bywaters, 2015).

Having had a very 'hands-on' experience in the workplace for more than two decades, the move to academia presented a significant shift in my world of work and came as something of a shock. I became acutely aware of my lack of understanding of how the academy functions and how interprofessionalism and peer support are not always favoured and so are sometimes difficult to initiate and develop. I also

missed, and continue to miss, engagement with people using social care services and the learning they offer relating to social justice.

In order to demystify the environment in which I was now becoming immersed, I took the Learning and Teaching in Higher Education course, which rekindled my interest in research as a method of personal learning as well as an opportunity to share my worldview. Once this was complete, I looked for further avenues to develop my research-mindedness and the EdD seemed ideal as a means of transitioning from social worker to social work academic.

Whilst making these forays in developing my research profile, I have also been developing my teaching and leadership roles and have been programme lead on the undergraduate social work programme since 2014. This role has reminded me of the challenges inherent in making changes within organisations. It has also demonstrated the importance of boundary spanning in order to promote interprofessional working in a neoliberal bureaucracy where discretion is challenged (Bellinger et al, 2016) and emotional labour can lead to burnout and a disenfranchised team culture (Niven et al, 2013).

### **Heated discussion - March 2019**

Non-conciliatory contempt seeping and oozing  
between us. No kindness.

Not of our choosing  
this loggerhead meeting.

Defeating, repeating, unable to listen.

Too much history, no mystery  
that we're not completing  
and joining together in mutual regard.

Animosity unerring and hard to endure.

Built over time and making me sure  
that our failure to manage  
is certain to damage our work here  
as colleagues, disjointed and fractured.

Conversations and kindness are just manufactured.

Punitive places where we're disconnected.

Sadly not just us who'll now be affected.

Fortunately, this poem is not representative of the majority of relationships within the team. I wrote this in response to a difficult conversation, necessitated by the vagaries of teaching and learning practice in the academy.

Since engaging with the EdD programme I have relished the learning opportunities which have freed me from the less pleasurable aspects of my role. Initially I was intimidated by the prospect of how to complete the research and resulting thesis, however a number of aspects enabled me to make sense of my learning.



**I realised** that how students engage in practice learning is an important and under-represented aspect of research in professional programmes. It also became increasingly clear that my own history as a social work student and social work lecturer had a part to play in how this research developed.

**I discovered** interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) from an occupational therapist and realised that there was a way of capturing the voices of student respondents which also enabled me to develop my own thoughts and feelings. The generosity of the student respondents was a trigger to my deeper engagement with not just what they had to say but how this impacted me as a researcher.

**I found** autoethnography and how this can be incorporated into my work in a variety of ways from both a sociological and educational perspective.

**I relied** on my supervisors to lend their views and offer valuable insights into the research process.

**I wrote** poems and prose to help make sense of the world in which I was immersed. This enabled me to open up and begin to explore a new part of my identity. A part previously curtailed and kept under wraps but which I am now embracing as a means to share my worldview while maintaining emotional resilience. Suffice to say, **this research has been transformative.**

## **Chapter 1 – Setting the scene**

### **1.1 The aim of my research**

This thesis reports on qualitative research carried out as part of my doctorate in education. The aim of the research was to consider how student social workers engage emotionally with their learning, particularly in relation to their engagement with practice placements. The research utilised interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a means of making sense of the world of the student social workers while also looking at my own sense-making in this regard. Integral to this methodology, I introduced an autoethnographic turn, through engagement with poetry and prose. This allowed me to make sense of my own place as researcher and to locate myself as part of the learning experience. In order to explore the emotional engagement of social work students, I focused primarily on the theories of Hochschild (2012) in relation to emotional labour and Lipsky (2010) with regards the use of discretion. Both have helped to inform and shape my thinking.

This chapter elucidates the world in which student social workers in the UK find themselves, through a consideration of the profession in general terms. I look at how practice placements form a critical source of learning for students and consider how these important learning opportunities are sustained by practice educators and supervisors. Consideration is made of how engagement with peer support is a fundamental source of learning which students can take forward into their professional careers in order to promote positive team dynamics and foster wellbeing. I introduce the concept of discretion as per the work of Lipsky (2010) and suggest that the use of discretion can present a positive means of dealing with the often over-bureaucratized systems in which social work exists. Discretion may also

offer a means of demonstrating compassion and empathy and as such clearly promotes emotional engagement with people using services. As a new contribution to knowledge, this thesis identifies congruence between the work of Lipsky (2010) and that of Hochschild's emotional labour (2012). Social work is an inherently emotionally engaging activity. The dearth of research into the emotional aspect of learning as a student social worker has provided the impetus for me to engage in this research in order to contribute to the limited understanding of this important area of practice learning.

## 1.2 The current state of social work in the UK

Social workers... find themselves looking two ways as they represent the individual to society and represent society to the individual... As the personal and the political began to meet, an area, a space was defined which became known as 'the social' (Howe, 2014: 2).

The neoliberal agenda is a global phenomenon in which there is a significant shift away from liberalism to a form of 'radical capitalism with no other law than the return of maximum profit, an unfettered capitalism ... pushed to the limits' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 35). The neoliberal tenet of 'accumulation by dispossession', in which resources are redistributed to the rich, leads to a significant rise in inequality, poverty, insecurity and precariousness (Garrett, 2010: 340; Corbett and Walker, 2019). This inevitably increases pressure on service provision and has led to national concern relating to the proficiency of the welfare state in which social work plays a part (Corbett and Walker, 2019).

Previously, along with colleagues I have considered how 'neoliberalism concerns itself with markets and profits rather than social justice and human rights, and with individualism rather than the promotion of community and citizenship' (Bellinger et al, 2016: 204). A premise of this ideology is the erosion of the welfare state, whereby public institutions have been 'hollowed out' (Corbett and Walker, 2019: 91), with preference given to privatisation. This impacts significantly on social work and social care, both previous bastions of public services. 'Globally, the public sector is being turned into a zone of the precariat' (Standing, 2011: 51). From the privatisation of residential and nursing provision for disabled and older people to similar instances in service provision for children such as fostering agencies and care homes (Garrett, 2010), the commodification of care has directly influenced changes in working

practice for social workers. An additional layer of bureaucracy has been introduced to source ever-dwindling provision and social workers may be employed by private companies with precarious working practices.

The neoliberal workplace is replete with regulations and directives leading to an erosion of professional autonomy through the practice of managerialism and 'occupational dismantling', in which state regulation of professions has subsumed the notion of self-regulation (Standing, 2011: 38). Managerialism here refers to the bureaucratic standardisation of practice and financial rationalisation founded on evidence-based organisational values. This leads to an erosion of both professional values and the use of autonomy and discretion in decision-making (Thompson and Wadley, 2018).

Rather than mitigating the complexity of supporting service users and carers, managerialism with its focus on risk and performance measures leads to defensive practice. In so doing, managerialism directly challenges attempts by workers to acknowledge and manage intense emotions (Lees et al, 2013). This is an interprofessional concern first identified by Menzies Lyth (1988) in respect of the role of nurses and emotional containment. Munro (2011), in her review of child protection social work, echoes this concern around managerialist defensive practice and exhorts the social work profession to instead provide appropriate supervision, training and research in order to facilitate professional judgement alongside emotional containment.

The premise of commodification leads to workers themselves being commodified and subject to a managerialist imperative, often at odds with professional compassion and autonomy (Warner, 2015). This commodification lends itself to the erosion of a boundary between work and home, clearly articulated in the Social Work England Professional Standards for social workers (2019), in which as a social worker I must not 'behave in a way that would bring into question my suitability to work as a social worker while at work, or outside of work'. Whilst this regulatory standard can in principle be considered as promoting the protection of both workers and service users (or consumers), it encroaches on the personal world of the social worker and is a pertinent example of the imposition of state regulation on the profession.

Much of social work takes place in the public sector and as such, I suggest that it is subject to the extremes of managerialism, to which successive governments have subscribed. This neoliberal ideology has transformed social work practice to one where the marketization of care is rife and relationship-based working is under-resourced and marginalised (Rogowski, 2011; Cummins, 2018). Social work is facing a crisis due to ongoing cuts in finances combined with increasing demands for services (Hood et al, 2019). These concerns are reflected not only in the workplace but also within an educational context. The number of entry points to social work degree level programmes has increased over recent years, bringing with it the demise of some long-standing university provision (Bellinger et al, 2016). The regulation of social work standards has been revised with the passing of the 2017 Children and Social Work Act in England in order to provide a focus on 'knowledge and skills' requirements for those entering the profession (Cleary, 2018). I agree with

Giroux (2014) that changes such as these, entrenched as they are in neoliberalist ideology, have become the perceived common sense approach by which we must adhere. Variations in social work education have been informed in part by the ongoing review of social work education set up by the Conservative government (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014). This creates a tension between the view of the state, which defines the profession by functionary roles and agency to the state and chooses to 'ignore or cancel out social injustices in the existing social order' (Giroux, 2002: 425) and the international definition of social work which is concerned with social justice and ethical principles (Cleary, 2018). This tension is unhelpful when supporting the diverse needs of people using social work services. As Howe (2014: 37) explains, 'clients, their needs, and the lives they live really are just too idiosyncratic and unpredictable to be fully dealt with by centrally generated, managerially controlled formulae'.

In conclusion, rather than simply a means of cutting service funding and introducing bureaucratic processes, the pervasive international dominance of neoliberalism impacts adversely on both social workers and those either seeking or indeed in receipt of scant resources (Marthinsen et al, 2019).

### **1.3 Social work and the capacity for discretion**

Much of what social workers do hovers interestingly, even awkwardly between following the rules and thinking on your feet (Howe, 2014: 29).

In this challenging landscape, the work of Michael Lipsky (2010) is as relevant as ever. He considers how social workers are part of 'street-level bureaucracies', these being 'schools, police and welfare departments...and other agencies whose workers interact with and have wide discretion over the dispensation of benefits or the allocation of public sanctions' (p.xi). The use of discretion supports public service employees in 'the daily struggle...to perform their jobs well and, in the process, to do good for their communities and society (Brodkin, 2012: 941)'. Discretion is integral to social work practice as a means of resisting the limits placed on service users and carers while at the same time developing trusting relationships with them. Discretion also enables practitioners to bend the rules and to be creative in retaining some of the vision they hold for their practice while adapting policy and theory to fit the realities of practice (Howe, 2014; Shdaimah and McGarry, 2018). Evans (2013: 739) notes how social workers continue to exercise freedom and discretion despite the proliferation of 'rule-saturated organisations'. In terms of the professional use of discretion, Bamford (2015) reminds us that the review of social work by Munro (2011) endorsed the exercise of discretion when forming judgements and this evaluation was well-received by social workers.

Whilst the work of Lipsky is still pertinent today, it is worthy of note that changes to the way in which policy is implemented, often through the marketization of service provision, has opened up the concept of discretion to a wider demographic (Scourfield, 2015). The use of discretion is no longer the sole domain of public sector



workers, as service delivery now incorporates a broader network of contributors including people using services and their carers via co-production (Fisher et al, 2018). In my view, this makes for a more complex and nuanced relationship with policy and how it is implemented, thereby making the role of the social worker increasingly complicated and inherently relational.

I am interested to consider how the concept of discretion marries with the consideration of emotional labour in social work. The expectation of bureaucracies is that social workers should act rationally rather than emotionally (Howe, 2014). However, perhaps discretion provides a coping mechanism, a way of navigating this perception. Certainly, the use of discretion encourages compassion and humanity when responding flexibly to 'the unexpected, the personal and the particular' (Howe, 2014: 37). As such, the political and emotional aspects of social work co-exist. Warner (2015: 2) even goes so far as to suggest that 'emotions can thus be seen as the driving force behind policy and practice as currently constituted'. Here she is considering legislation relating to children and families in particular, however I would argue that this is also the case across the spectrum of those requiring support within the legislative context of social work and social care. Appropriate emotional engagement within the helping professions promotes a reasoned response leading to successful action (Barbalet, 2002). I suggest that this is particularly the case within the messy ambiguity of social work, prone to the potential for failure and therefore of itself an inherently risky activity (Warner, 2015). Lipsky (2010: 209) promotes the professional development of social workers through engagement with practice as part of the process of learning, 'where there is opportunity for constant confrontation with the realities of practice'. How Lipsky's concept of discretion can influence policy

at a local level is further considered in appendix 2 through engagement with a case study relating to social work in adult social care.

#### **1.4 Social work as an emotional activity**

Social workers are in the business of caring for human beings; to legitimate their capacity to feel and their ability to create communities to support real feeling is to give them the capacity to do their work as whole people. Yet as simple as that sounds, such capacity is currently suspended within the dominant discourse, which privileges rationality and “professionalism” and translates those concepts into a dualistic choice of rational over emotional, thus mandating emotional control (Meyerson, 1998: 113).

By its very nature, social work is an activity in which emotional engagement and emotional management are vital. Many of the people who engage with social workers are enduring hardship and ‘it is through its proximity to suffering that social work also reflects the deeper understanding born of knowing people in distress at first hand’ (Stevenson, 1974:2, cited in Warner, 2015:160).

There is an inherent power imbalance in social work between those employed to carry out social work tasks, or indeed those preparing to do so through education and training, and those service users and carers who engage with services, either of their own volition or as directed by legislation and social policy. As such, social workers must undertake suitable education and training opportunities and continuing professional development throughout their professional careers. Social workers were accountable to a professional Code of Conduct, regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council and from late 2019, this regulatory responsibility was taken on by Social Work England.

An expectation placed on social work students is that they develop into practitioners who are ‘empathetic, reflexive and resilient’ (Rajan-Rankin, 2014: 2426). This

immediately presents a challenge for some, as these attributes are not easily assimilated and are rather ways of being that advance over time. In order to develop these attributes, emotions need to be taken into account, however the management of emotion as an embodied experience is often little considered, more favour being given to the technical-rational aspect of social work professionalism. Reflecting this lack of engagement, there is relatively sparse research elucidating the lived experience of student social workers when engaging with the emotional aspect of their training. This, despite an acknowledgement that the role of the social work student can be very stressful, even more so than that of qualified social workers. This is partly due to the additional stressors relating to financial concerns, life-stage and living with significant change, academic stress and the vagaries of engaging in practice placements (Rajan-Rankin, 2014; Wilks et al, 2010). Adamson (2006) endorses the importance of consideration of emotions by suggesting that the development of self-hood through an internal and external transformation promotes a deeper appreciation of emotionality and resilience.

A positive way of promoting the development of these attributes for students is through supportive supervision and emotionally intelligent practice placements where reflection and empathy are actively acknowledged as potential means of mitigating or acknowledging stress and burnout (Collins et al, 2010; Grant and Kinman, 2012; Rajan-Rankin, 2014). Meyerson (1998: 113) exhorts us to provide safe and supportive environments where 'if people could legitimately encounter and admit to feelings of stress and burnout – or more generally feel out of control – others could honor them, respond to them, and create the capacity to heal'. Sadly, the dominant discourse in the academy mandates emotional control, rationality and

professionalism. As a result, students appear wary of sharing their feelings, particularly when they perceive themselves as not coping, for fear of having to engage in prescriptive 'Fitness to Practise' academic processes, which often seem inflexible, punitive and time consuming.

## 1.5 Practice placements in social work education

Social workers deal with a complex mix of needs, problems, client groups, service provision, policy changes, statutory demands, human behaviour, value dilemmas, and environmental stresses (Howe, 2014: 190).

Practice placements in social work education are acknowledged internationally as the 'signature pedagogy' (Crisp and Hosken, 2016: 506) and are a central feature of professional training (Brodie and Williams, 2013; Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Domakin, 2015; Finch, 2015). They facilitate the development of a professional identity alongside practice skills through active engagement with social work practice (Zuchowski, 2016). However, fieldwork education or practice learning as it is more usually referred to in the UK, is a sometimes underrated area of learning on professional social work programmes, where the academy has a tendency to give greater credence to more traditional forms of knowledge (Bellinger et al, 2016; Morley and Dunstan, 2013). This ambivalence is unhelpful, especially when considering how practice education is central to the development of professional identity, within an environment where practice skills are encouraged to develop in a real world context (Zuchowski, 2016). Anecdotally, students regularly provide feedback to suggest that their practice placements offer the most significant learning opportunities of the entire programme, and for the majority, their preference is to learn by doing. They perceive placements as critical to their preparation as social work professionals (Crisp and Hosken, 2016). The value of this critical learning experience is recognised internationally by professional regulatory bodies, who consider this an integral part of social work programmes. There are, therefore, regulations in relation to the number of placement days, levels of student engagement with complexity and the amount and suitability of support offered to provide the best possible experiential learning opportunities.

The degree in social work was introduced in 2003 with the expectation that much of the learning would take place in practice settings (Department of Health, 2002). The number of practice days increased at this time and currently stands at 170 assessed days in practice and 30 days preparation for practice. Alongside this increase, the term 'social worker' became a protected title (Care Standards Act, 2000). In 2009, in response to the death of a child, namely Peter Connelly, the then Labour Government set up a Social Work Task Force (SWTF) to develop practice education. This resulted in the College of Social Work's formation and implementation of a Professional Capability Framework in 2013, thus moving from a competency-based model of practice learning to one where capabilities are assessed. A further change at the time was the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) becoming the regulator for social work in the wake of the government's abolishment of the General Social Care Council (GSCC) in 2012. In late 2019, the new regulator, Social Work England will assume responsibility and social work education will once again exist in a state of flux.

Practice placements are not a widely researched area within the academy, in part perhaps due to a lack of credibility given to practice as a legitimate form of learning (Bellinger et al, 2016). Examples of studies to date include research into practice learning in relation to its value and purpose (Brodie and Williams, 2013; Parker 2006) and the importance of learning from practice in terms of pedagogy (Bellinger, 2010a; Domakin, 2014). The experiences of practice educators has also been considered (Bellinger, 2010b) and the role of tutors is beginning to receive attention (Finch, 2015). To date there is scant engagement with the lived experience of social work students when involved in placement activity, though Domakin (2015) promises

that a study is currently investigating the experiences of academics and students. The research on which this thesis reports has developed this area of study.

In the UK, the roles of social workers who take responsibility for supporting student learning in a practice setting are usually described as practice educators; practice assessors or practice supervisors and these roles differ in terms of the level of engagement they may have with students. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the term practice educator predominantly when identifying these roles, though I acknowledge that they may involve different expectations. Suffice to say, much of the success of practice placements depends on the relationship between the student and practice educator, who either works within the agency or is external to such but appreciates the context of the placement. Their role, as experienced social work practitioners, is to support the student in becoming actively engaged in placement activity as a mode of learning, whilst having a support mechanism with whom to explore organisational culture and practices along with policies, theories and social work methods appropriate to the circumstances (Zuchowski, 2016).

Due to neoliberal efficiencies driven by financial imperatives, many agencies, particularly those in the third or independent sector, choose not to employ qualified social workers or prefer not to offer development opportunities to those social workers in their employment, to undertake the additional training required in order to become a practice educator. Social workers within agencies find themselves managing increasingly higher caseloads with little time to commit to the education of students either as practice educators or in a supervisory role. Research by Domakin



(2015) suggests that the absence of workload relief in these instances is of significant concern. These agencies often provide day-to-day supervisory support to student social workers but not the additional level of support offered by the practice educator role. Therefore, in such circumstances this support is provided instead by qualified practice educators, whose employment is negotiated through the university and so is external to the agency. These practice educators are appointed by the university specifically to work with students on placement (Zuchowski, 2016).

Despite this connection, research suggests that practice educators feel a sense of isolation from the academy, which in turn potentially impacts their engagement with the social work curriculum. This has led to concerns about the quality of the practice learning experience for students and can lead to the practice educators experiencing emotions ranging from guilt to anxiety (Domakin, 2015).

Sadly, the reduced opportunities for social workers to train as practice educators due to efficiency savings along with the limited financial rewards offered by universities, has led to a shortage of suitably qualified practice educators, which is of significant concern to the longevity of social work education in its current form.

## **1.6 The supervisory role**

The role of a supervisor in a social work learning context is to facilitate critical reflection and the integration of theory into practice, while developing a relationship which acts as a building block for practice learning (Cleak and Smith, 2012; Zuchowski, 2016). This in turn promotes the ability for students to engage with the complexities and challenges of social work, its core values and changing contexts, through the development of critically reflective skills (Bellinger, 2010a; Morley and Dunstan, 2013). It is important to acknowledge that like the profession, supervision is not a 'politically innocent' space (Adamson, 2012:185), and as such is influential in developing a critical awareness of the lived experience of service users and practitioners alike. The dynamics of an organisation and whether or not supervision is viewed as valuable can impact significantly on the developing student (Ruch, 2005; Vassos et al, 2018). Jack and Donnellan (2010) consider how poor managerial support resulting in lack of supervision can stunt the ability for students to develop key attributes of the profession. Howe (2014) asserts that supervision can be used as a bureaucratic tool to minimise the use of discretion through the monitoring of work, which then ensures that social workers keep to their procedural role and function. Further exploration of supervision as a vital aspect of social work support is available in appendix 3.

## 1.7 Emotional labour

Most adults spend a large percentage of their waking hours in work contexts, and a growing number of people are engaged in service sector jobs. These jobs usually involve working with colleagues as well as clients, often in a hierarchical work environment. Given the power of social interactions and social hierarchy to elicit emotions, it is inevitable that emotions – and their regulation – figure prominently in many of our lives (Gross, 2013).

The regulation of emotions, often precipitated by organisational expectations (Leeson, 2010) is defined by Hochschild (2012:7) as emotional labour. She defines emotional labour as ‘the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display’. Hochschild (2012) considers how emotional labour is a characteristic of the work done in public services and the private sphere to regulate emotion. This is achieved through processes of surface and deep acting to enable the maintenance of an appropriate external expression. Feelings are induced or suppressed to deal with any given situation. Surface acting involves the practitioner pretending to feel what is expected, deep acting is where the practitioner displays necessary emotions by drawing on their own personal reserves.

Hochschild (2012: 136) notes how ‘emotional labour poses a challenge to a person’s sense of self’ and posits a link between employee wellbeing and emotional labour strategies. She considers how employees engage in emotional labour through a process of surface or deep acting as a response to social norms or ‘feeling rules’. These determine how to display our feelings in a way that best suits the organisational context (Lively, 2013). Surface acting involves the simulation of emotions through an outward display of verbal and non-verbal cues. Conversely, deep acting focuses on inner experienced feelings, these then actively shape our emotions and are acted out or suppressed in order to encourage a state of mind in

the recipient, depending on the situation (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2007; Hochschild, 2012). Hochschild draws on the work of Stanislavski, a method actor and Goffman's (1959) metaphor of the theatre in order to define these. Surface acting is 'the ability to deceive others about how we are really feeling without deceiving ourselves' whereas in deep acting 'we deceive ourselves about our true emotion as much as we deceive others' (Hochschild, 2012: 33).

Both Hochschild (2012) and subsequent research into the phenomenon of emotional labour, make clear that surface acting is likely to lead to negative outcomes such as lack of engagement with 'self' and subsequent emotional exhaustion whereas deep acting is associated with emotional performance and customer satisfaction (Groth et al, 2013). Research suggests that one of the reasons why surface acting impacts on wellbeing may be the challenge of continuously regulating emotions and the emotional burden this may present on the personal resources of an individual (Groth et al, 2013). Conversely, Ashworth and Humphrey (2013: 276) suggest that, particularly for new employees, or perhaps for students, whilst aspiring to role identity, the development of emotional projection through surface and deep acting allows them to 'fake it until they make it' and that if this is done in good faith, there is little threat to their sense of self. They also consider how as well as surface and deep acting, there should be a third form of emotional labour identified. They identify this as the spontaneous and naturally felt emotion that complies with the rules of the organisation. This does not require acting at all and is instead a genuine expression of expected emotion. Yin et al (2013) have similarly added the expression of naturally felt emotion as a third technique. Further research supports this third form of emotional labour as distinct from surface and deep acting and as a natural

expression of felt emotions, leading to positive wellbeing (Diefendorff et al, 2005). Indeed, Dahling and Perez (2010) also found that genuine emotional labour where naturally felt emotions are displayed was more likely to be expressed by older and more mature workers. Due to the confines of this thesis, I have not considered these aspects as part of my research but it would be interesting to study this further in the future.

## **1.8 Authenticity and emotional labour**

When considering emotional labour, Hochschild (2012: 192) makes clear the substantial societal value placed on authenticity through expressed or 'natural' feelings. She suggests that our response to a marketization of feelings has been a determining factor for why we place such importance on authenticity. 'The more the heart is managed, the more we value the unmanaged heart'.

The complexity of this area of working practice means that research findings with regards the management of emotions and subsequent impact on workers' wellbeing are varied (Sloan, 2007). For example, Hochschild (2012), supported by a number of theorists including Erickson and Ritter (2001) and Sloan (2007), considers that a worker may feel distanced from their true self or true feelings through the act of controlling and managing internally felt emotion. The term used for this being emotional labour. Doing so in order to meet organisational display rules by presenting emotions in a way considered appropriate within the context of the workplace, may lead to feelings of not being true to oneself, so creating a sense of inauthenticity. This in turn may lead to psychological distress and ultimately to burnout.

However, whilst the impact of emotional labour and management of emotions in order to meet display rules is often viewed in a negative light and linked to inauthenticity (Hochschild, 2012), there is subsequent evidence that in some instances emotional labour can be benign and include consequences such as a feeling of authenticity and sense of accomplishment (Salmela and Mayer, 2009).

This authentic emotion is described by Salmela (2009: 135) as one's '...actual psychological state, and is expressed sincerely, without suppression, inflation, or other modification of the underlying emotional state. Sincerity associates with the lack of emotional dissonance: there is no incongruence between the felt and the expressed emotion'.

The research narratives from the student respondents who are not paid to engage in emotional labour and my own poetry/prose included in this thesis are efforts to demonstrate this inherent tension when managing emotions through unpaid emotional labour.

## 1.9 Emotional labour in the helping professions

Emotional labour is about action and reaction, doing and being, and can be demanding and skilled work (James, 1992: 500).

Erikson and Stacey (2013:179) make an interesting point when noting that the origins of literature around emotional labour and also carework, of which social work is considered a part, both came from similar international feminist influences (Hochschild, 2012; Finch and Groves, 1982). As such, they can be considered as 'complementary dimensions of emotion practice that are theoretically and empirically entwined'. These influences challenged the essentialist view of cultural demands around 'natural' care providers being women and made clear the gender disparity of the distribution of both formal and informal care. Erikson and Stacey (2013:178) suggest that the relational aspect of carework makes it somewhat complex, ambiguous and often of high intensity. They suggest that emotional labour as 'caring labour' is less commodified than Hochschild's (2012) original description due to the inherent tension between rules and relationships in a caring context. They also acknowledge that both carework and emotional labour are socially undervalued and undercompensated if recognised at all. Perhaps then, this difference around the relational aspect of the emotional engagement lends itself more naturally to deep acting through the development of empathetic relationships with service users and carers.

Theodosius (2008:42) writes about emotional labour in the nursing profession and suggests that this differs from Hochschild's (1983) research of flight attendants in that interactions in the helping professions involve an 'interactive emotional exchange' and a level of trust, this being crucial to the mediation of power dynamics.



Theodosius (2008) goes on to note that emotional labour itself is part of the therapeutic and collaborative relationship and as such is a relational and interactive activity. This is also true of emotional labour in social work. Once again, perhaps this level of engagement and emotional reciprocity mitigates the need for an extensive use of surface acting as part of engagement with service users and carers. The same, however, may not be true of the emotional labour in use between students and team members within organisations. Theodosius (2008:178) describes this as 'collegial emotional labour' used to manage emotions arising from any particular social order. She notes how nurses are often a conduit for information between professionals and as such, they engage in this form of emotional labour extensively. Social workers are also often in a position of bringing together a range of professional viewpoints in order to make informed decisions prescribed by law and as such, collegial emotional labour is important for them too. It is noted that sometimes the personal values and beliefs of the practitioner are at odds with organisational expectations. This dissonance can have a detrimental impact leading to compassion fatigue, burnout or emotional withdrawal (Horwath, 2015; Yin et al, 2013).

In an educational context, curriculum content should prepare and support students in their ability to effectively engage in the 'hard, sad and potentially isolating nature of emotion work' (James, 1992: p500; Williams, 2013). The use of empathy has long been considered an important communication skill for social workers and is an inherent part of curricula pertaining to communication skills. Hochschild (2012) builds on the work of Stanislavski, the Russian director, to suggest that this particular skill is employed when utilising deep acting as a means of getting in touch with our feelings.

She also suggests that training within the workplace is used in part as a way of controlling the emotional activities of employees. This resonates with the in-house training provided in local authority settings which concentrates on process to the detriment of feelings and pays little attention to the emotional labour in which social workers are regularly engaged.

Whilst Hochschild (2012) considers the commodification of the smile in relation to workers in the airline industry, the social worker's skill of interpersonal communication becomes commodified through the engineering of assessments underpinned with the desire of the state to curtail public spending. Particularly in adult social care settings, the use of resource-driven eligibility criteria makes social workers responsible for determining whether service users are worthy of support (Bellinger et al, 2016). Whilst clearly a key component of work in health and social care settings, emotional labour is often 'unseen, unrecognised and undervalued' (Williams, 2013: 6). Engaging in emotional labour without an adequate support system and within an organisation which manipulates and distorts this work is indeed a challenge. Hochschild (2012) highlights how the use of genuine emotion is an important protective factor for those involved in work in settings where human contact is significant. Therefore, this would suggest that when true feelings are denied due to a managerialist imperative, the protective factor of engaging with true feelings is lost and the subsequent outcome for social workers is often one of dissonance and alienation from true feelings and values. Social work students are often learning in environments where this is the case and where the fragmentation of values in response to a neoliberal agenda is tangible. Engagement with emotional labour could potentially threaten their own individual perspective, value-based

feelings and in some instances their sense of purpose. The current constraints on the caring professions through resource deficits increase the need for emotional labour in an effort to maintain an appropriate and authentic response to the public. This places significant emotional demands on workers in addition to those demands which are already part of their role (Williams, 2013). Hochschild (2012: 153) warns that emotional labour is 'seldom recognised, rarely honoured and almost never taken into account by employers as a source of on-the job stress'.

### **1.10 Social work in an interprofessional context**

Although lip-service might be paid to the value of the caring relationship, compassion and empathy are easily crushed under the weight of heavy caseloads and performance-anxious managers (Howe, 2014).

It is clear that the interprofessional nature of social work leads to engagement with other workers who are involved in emotional labour and following similar ethical codes of practice. For example Theodosius (2008) writes about the concept of emotional labour from the perspective of the nursing profession, exhorting a holistic working practice in which a biopsychosocial approach includes learning from a range of disciplines.

An unfortunate similarity between relatable health care professions lies in the concern around lack of compassion for service users or patients leading to the potential for loss of dignity and subsequent emotional vulnerability (Theodosius, 2008). In 2013, both the Francis Report (2013) in relation to nursing standards and Michael Gove's challenge to the social work profession (DfE, 2013), indicates the need for significant change in order to re-energise a purportedly uncompassionate workforce in need of reform. This is not a new concern within the helping professions. Theodosius (2008) suggests that reasons for a decrease in emotional labour within the nursing profession could be due to the increased pace and quantity of nursing work; the lack of prestige given to emotional labour within a medical environment along with the commodification of health care where patients feel they have a right to a service. This leads to surface acting and an alienation of their true selves while nurses suppress their genuine feelings of frustration and emotional labour becomes invisible. Similarly, Ferguson (2013) challenges Gove's

condemnation of social workers in this regard, suggesting that the concerns raised could be better managed by providing social workers with more time, resources and continuing professional development. Previously, Hoggett (2006:146) highlighted issues around presenting compassion in a collective, emotional and political sense. He implores us 'to move away from a concept of compassion which is infused with the sentimentality of pity towards a concept which is more akin to solidarity. In other words, I argue for the fusion of compassion towards social suffering with anger at the injustices which underlie that suffering'. I agree with Warner (2015: 6) that this perhaps presents a perspective in which 'emotions can be understood as political, not least because they have the potential to generate political actions'.

The other concern often raised in relation to interprofessional working relates to lack of information sharing leading to instances of neglect of citizens or worse, death in some instances. It is unsurprising therefore, that a recent addition to the Standards of Education and Training Guidance for educators of health professions approved by the Health and Care Professions Council (2018), is one clarifying that: 'the programme must ensure that learners are able to learn with, and from, professionals and learners in other relevant professions', in order to ensure that an understanding of interprofessional working is a feature of the curriculum. It is anticipated that this will continue when the social work profession becomes regulated by Social Work England in late 2019.

It has been posited that emotional labour can be overwhelming to students in health settings. As a result, throughout nursing programmes, relatively little attention has

been paid to the emotional elements of supporting people requiring services. This is due, in part, to the predominance of the medical model leading to a task-orientated rather than relationship-based approach (Menzies, 1960). Williams (2013) suggests that in order to mitigate the issues generated by emotional labour, management strategies in health education programmes have led to practice placements which are usually arranged in a number of diverse settings. The intention being that students do not remain in one consistent setting for a long period of time and are therefore neither expected nor in a position to develop relationships with patients. This depersonalisation along with a task-centred model of working helps to manage and minimise the need to deal with the emotional content of the work (Williams, 2013). However, it could be argued that rather than protecting students from emotional labour, a service-led response to need is taking precedence and the impact on emotional labour is an unintended consequence of government policy. This reduces engagement with key aspects of care including empathy, respect and the emotional nature of the work. This resonates with concerns in social work that relationship-building is replaced with service-driven principles. Recent failings in the care of people in a hospital environment may well encourage a rethink of this model in order to meet the recognised need to promote dignity and respect for people using health services. 'Every breach of human dignity not only affects the individual victim, but also society as a whole, by raising the question of how we choose to live (and die) and relate to each other. It thereby calls into question the state's role in protecting our dignity' (Care Quality Commission, 2015; Dupre, 2011).

In social work education, the emotional context of practice is afforded significant credence. Social work is socially constructed as a relationship-based activity and

students are actively encouraged to develop relationships with service users and carers (Ruch et al, 2010). In order to promote the development of meaningful relationships, practice placements in years two and three take place for seventy and one hundred days respectively and each of these takes place in the same organisation. The length of these placements invariably leads to students experiencing emotional labour. Social work is considered as an emotionally challenging activity for students and this may well reflect in the student perception of the demands put on them and how these are managed. Certainly, great importance is placed on support for students in placement both in terms of practice supervision and tutorial support (Ruch et al, 2010). However, despite these strategies there is still, at least for some, a sense of this emotional labour placing significant demand on learners who are already feeling under stress. Add to this the increasingly bureaucratic and complex environments in which students are placed, and it becomes clear that social work education must be acknowledged as taking place in a very challenging environment for all concerned.

### **1.11 Emotional labour and relationship-building**

Organisations are not gender-neutral but are instead based on values not normally associated with women. As such, there is an expectation that emotions are harnessed or set aside to avoid these interfering with organisational goals.

Emotional labour is an aspect of customer-focussed relational work and so fits well with the social work role. It considers the efforts made in managing, shaping, evoking and suppressing feelings both of the worker and those with whom they engage.

Hochschild (2012) was concerned that this commercialisation of feelings makes it challenging for workers to maintain their sense of self and to continue to be in touch with their true feelings. She noted how this became increasingly difficult as the behaviour became more entrenched and was concerned with what happens to how workers relate to their feelings:

...when rules about how to feel and how to express feelings are set by management, when workers have weaker rights to courtesy than customers do, when deep and surface acting are forms of labour to be sold, and when private capacities for empathy and warmth are put to corporate uses (Hochschild, 2012: 89).

Hochschild's (2012) concern was that emotional labour though not exclusively, was predominantly an expectation for women, particularly those who have to work face-to-face with customers and do not have the 'status shield' of a professional or manager. Whilst I agree that gender norms are often exploited in order for emotional labour to take place, I do not feel that lack of professional status necessarily leads to greater engagement with emotional labour, at least not in the world of social work. It appears more the case that the management of emotions is also a considerable task when negotiating management structures and working alongside peers often



involves mutual emotional support as a coping strategy. So, emotional labour can be perceived as a positive aspect of relational work in some instances. As Mann (2010: 365) suggests, 'the world would undoubtedly be a less pleasant place if we stopped faking it'.

Lively (2013) notes how emotion rules differ for men and women across contexts. However, social work students, along with the general population of those in 'carework', appear not to be treated differently based on their gender to the same degree as those in other occupations, in relation to their emotional engagement with the work. When analysing the data it became clear that gender is not perceived to be a significant factor as part of the student respondent's engagement with practice learning. Mann's (2010) quantitative research of emotional labour in 12 UK companies supports the finding that gender does not impact significantly on levels of emotional labour used. Interestingly, her research finds that status is a more likely indicator, with those holding most power engaging less in emotional labour. It is worth noting that Hochschild (2012) acknowledges how women tend to engage in more emotion work in their private lives. Further consideration of these issues is not achievable within the confines of this thesis but is warranted due to the limited studies in this regard and changes in how gender is socially constructed since Hochschild's research.

Wolkowitz (2006) notes how emotional labour can be used to the benefit of both recipient and worker and how the decision about how to implement emotional labour and the discretion used in so doing, is empowering for the worker and provides a

sense of control and achievement. It is often in the worker's gift to determine how best to make a connection with the customer. In social work, this relationship-building with people engaging in services is considered to be one of the key communication skills which is an inherent part of the role. Unfortunately, Korczynski (2003) notes how many of the interactions between worker and customer are constrained in order to meet the needs of the organisation in relation to productivity. As such, discretion is not always possible and certainly not to the degree preferred by worker and customer alike. Many of the goals set by management lead to conflictual relationships between worker and customer and this raises concerns when managing emotions. Hochschild (2012) considers the dissonance between a worker's 'true feelings' and those employed during interactions with customers and is concerned that this causes undue stress. However, Wolkowitz (2006) notes how subsequent research suggests that this is not a significant concern and suggests that perhaps we have become more adept at dealing with the emotional aspect of work.

Overall, it is clear that continued research into Hochschild's (2012) original concept of emotional labour continues in her wake to successfully engage across both disciplines of sociology and psychology and presents a useful biopsychosocial cross-fertilization of ideas. She makes clear that 'emotions reflect the individual's sense of the self-relevance of a perceived situation' (Hochschild, 2012: 202). Subsequent research has developed Hochschild's (2012) work further whilst continuing to acknowledge the significant influence of emotional labour for employees (or students for the purpose of my research); service users and carers; organisations and work colleagues and the broader network of support i.e. families and/or peers (Mann,

2010; Ashkanasy and Daus, 2013; Lively, 2013). Similar to Hochschild (2012), my research seeks to analyse emotional experiences through the language used by student respondents and so continues in a social constructionist vein, recognising that language is both socially and culturally constructed. Aligned with Hochschild (2012), I accept that emotion and cognition are intrinsically linked and have not chosen to delineate them.

### **1.12 Emotional labour and emotional intelligence**

I chose not to consider the concept of emotional intelligence in the research reported here, though I acknowledge that there are similarities between this and emotional labour (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2013). Emotional intelligence is more concerned with self-awareness, motivation, self-control and persistence on an individualistic basis (Goleman, 1996) rather than emotional labour, which focuses more as a response to external factors and may support a consideration of relationships within the workplace. To date, research has been contradictory when considering whether there is an association between emotional intelligence and emotional labour. Studies tend to focus on job satisfaction, rather than considering the impact of emotional labour in relation to support networks (Psilopanagioti et al, 2012; Ponniah et al, 2016). Much of the research in this field is quantitative due to the measurements used to ascertain levels of emotional intelligence. This is a further reason why I chose not to engage with this concept. However, I recognise that I could potentially develop my work to consider this perhaps in an interprofessional context, particularly in light of research from Karimi et al (2014) which suggests that emotional intelligence could potentially minimise the negative effects of emotional labour and perhaps be introduced into nursing training.

Emotional intelligence presents a close association with the self-regulation of emotions on an individual basis. Research in this area seeks to develop links between emotional intelligence and emotional regulation, often through a physiological, medicalised lens (Zysberg and Raz, 2019). This atomised consideration of rationalised emotions sits well with the neoliberal agenda in that individualism is favoured over broader structural issues (Cummins, 2018). In

contrast, the concept of emotional labour considers at its heart the human cost of the commodification of emotions (Williams, 2013). It moves away from an individualised neoliberal concept, to the consideration of a more relational and participatory use of emotions, much needed in the welfare state (Cottam, 2014; Warner, 2015). As such, it is of more relevance for my research. Cottam (2014: 105/106) sums up the experience of those engaging with people using services to good effect:

Spending time in people's lives, on their sofas, in their communities across Britain, it becomes clear – of course – that it is social relationships and emotions which play a determining role in people's lives.

### **1.13 Social support to aid practice learning**

One important way we learn is through expressing and articulating to others what we know or understand. In this process of self-expression, we construct an evolving understanding of increasing complexity (Liu and Carless, 2006: 281)

Social work is a relationship-based activity and social work students engage with the affective as well as rational elements of building a relationship whether with service users and carers, professionals or peers. As such, a reflective practice approach provides the best opportunity for them to develop relationship-based practice (Ruch, 2002). Supervision and reflective discussion with peers enables students to make sense of their learning in a safe and supportive environment. Ideally, engagement with peers promotes good practice, which will follow them into their careers, through the development of questioning and listening skills; group facilitation skills and an ability to engage with other in supporting the emotional aspect of practice learning (Staempfli and Fairtlough, 2018). Research by Ravalier (2018) on behalf of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) found that peer support from colleagues enabled social workers to survive stress and extremely poor working conditions, now unfortunately an inherent feature of social work in the UK. From a learning perspective, whilst reflection is often considered as an individual activity, there is growing evidence that group-based reflective approaches offer significant benefits. As well as developing co-operative strategies and considering a range of perspectives, group-based reflection promotes critical thinking skills and in turn encourages emotional containment (Domakin and Curry, 2018; Fook et al, 2016; Ruch, 2007; Staempfli and Fairtlough, 2018).

The student respondents in this research all engaged in 'study groups' or 'tutorials' where students meet regularly in the same small group over the academic year as an adjunct to learning in placements and teaching. The groups are an integral part of the social work programmes and they are each facilitated by an academic tutor. The premise is that these groups provide a safe space in which students are able to develop their skills whilst sharing the emotional context of the work. Clarke (2019: 7; 10) considers how 'thinking is necessarily social' and that dialogical learning enables us to acknowledge 'the coexistence (not necessarily comfortable) of different voices and ways of thinking'. Furthermore, in terms of educational attainment, Carless, (2015) explains how working with the process of group feedback helps to develop understanding and improve academic work. I have further explored peer learning in the context of social work in appendix 4.

In conclusion, the profession of social work is ever-changing, and social work education reflects this. Social work is an inherently emotional activity and emotional labour as well as naturally felt emotion both present means of regulating the impact of this aspect of the role and as such can be perceived as protective factors. Emotional labour may also promote co-production through developing trust and relationship-building. As my research demonstrates in the following chapters, reflection and empathy are key components in developing self-awareness and practice placements ideally should be supported by educators and supervisors well-versed in supervision techniques. This level of support helps to minimise the significant impact of managerialism and the bureaucratic imperative whilst encouraging the use of discretion as a means of mediating rationality and engaging with the emotional aspect of policy and practice.

## **Chapter 2 – Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Having chosen to consider the emotional engagement of student social workers, my research methodology developed significantly throughout the process and the extent of my own learning has been overwhelming. This chapter explores the choices I made when carrying out the research. Some of these choices have been informed by my own personal narrative, others by what I have discovered along the way. Initially I was surprised by the lack of research utilising interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in relation to social work in general and to the worldview of student social workers in particular. My research seeks to address this deficit and to further develop the notion of autoethnography through poetry and prose as a useful adjunct to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Therefore, my research methodology helps to create new knowledge both in the world of social work education, and that of qualitative research.



## **2.2 My research journey**

My writing style has developed from my own primary and secondary education whereby as a child of the 1960s and 1970s, I was actively encouraged to write in an autobiographical style, more usually referred to as 'creative writing' (Steedman, 1997: 110). This interest in writing using an autobiographical style has remained over time and when it came to light as part of my doctoral endeavour that autoethnography may be conveyed through poetry and prose within the research (Leavy, 2010) and that all research may be considered an auto/biographical practice (Letherby, 2014), I chose to develop this aspect of my writing. My hope is that my thesis provides for a 'sincere response' to the stories of the student respondents, which have been considered individually while also considering patterns in their narratives (Steedman, 1997: 111). The frame in which I contextualise these stories is that of practice placements; elongated learning events into which students are socialised from the outset of their social work education. No matter how disparate the student experiences, for example whether engaged in practice with children or adults; involved in statutory interventions or advocacy; they all share a commonality with regard to the expectations and discourse around placement activity (Steedman, 1997).

Having supported students as a tutor, I am concerned by the expectations placed on them when in a practice setting. For example, they are sometimes expected to take on large caseloads more fitting for qualified social workers. In order to manage the vagaries of the practice placements, students require an ability to integrate into an often emotionally charged work setting while still maintaining a student persona, which is no mean feat. The student respondents speak of practice learning

opportunities which are complex and demanding, and they quickly become immersed in emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012). Lipsky (2010) suggests that using discretion, though often unknowingly, is one of the ways in which people working in the public services self-care and establish ways of dealing with the bureaucratic imperative in which they play some small part. The collective themes emerging from the research are analysed by considering the respondent's engagement with both emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012) and the use of discretion (Lipsky, 2010) in dealing with experiences on placement.

In order to give voice effectively to the student respondents, I initially thought that action research would be the most appropriate methodology. Part of the appeal was its underpinning emancipatory nature and pragmatic approach leading to actionable theory. It has been described as 'simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations' with a view to improving practice (Car and Kemmis, 1986: 162; Lewin, 1948 in Atkins and Wallace, 2012). From the outset, I was clear that I prefer to engage with the student respondents as partners rather than potentially more passive subjects, in order to minimise differences in power dynamics. Although I appreciate that a number of methodologies may facilitate this, one way of achieving this is to become immersed in the 'nuts and bolts' of their circumstances (Kincheloe et al, 2011: 168). This in turn enables me to work in partnership while recognising the dominant ideologies at play (Freire, 1972; Ormston et al, 2014).

As part of the EdD process, my preparatory work for the research was scrutinised by an expert commentator. Following feedback from the expert commentator during the planning stage of my research, I decided to revisit the plan to use action research. It has been suggested by Atkins and Wallace (2012) that this might not be the most suitable method due to timeframes with regards completing the cyclical aspect of the method. It also became clear that if I were to use action research, I may not be interpreting the data in the way promoted through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and so not engaging with the double or triple hermeneutic that so appeals to me (Smith et al, 2009).

### **2.3 Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), first introduced by Smith (1996), has since developed as a research method predominantly in psychology but also in social and health sciences. It is designed to provide an in depth account of the lived experience of respondents and how they make sense of this. As such, this method is well-suited to my research (Houston and Mullan-Jensen, 2011). As researcher, it is important to not only consider the lived experience of the student respondents but to also interpret their meanings based on my own subjective experience. Smith et al (2009: 80) describe this as the 'double hermeneutic' whereby 'the end result is always an account of how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking'. Smith et al (2009: 80) also make it clear that, 'there is no clear right or wrong way of conducting this sort of analysis', and actively encourage innovation in how the research is completed. They do however suggest that those engaging with this methodology for the first time may well benefit from following their clear guidelines introducing steps to analysis. As a novice researcher, I have readily taken their advice, though with some considered adaptations to reflect my own research persona and experience of social work students. So for example, in order to procure a significant level of depth in the student responses, I have introduced a narrative device as part of the interview process, which I will discuss in more detail later.

## **2.4 Research as a creative endeavour**

Whilst choosing to engage with IPA, I was keen to maintain the creative element of my initial proposal. I am influenced by critical theory from the work of Freire to the Frankfurt School, and am excited to work in a way that acknowledges research as both reflective and a value-based political activity (Freire, 1972; Ormston et al, 2014). One of my own previous educational experiences when studying performing arts at undergraduate level enabled me to consider the work of the Frankfurt School movement through a cultural lens. At an early stage of the research I intended to conclude the research with a short piece of atonal music to complement the research outcome and pay homage to this creative influence. Doing so would align itself with my constructivist ontology in which the historical and cultural context of the research assumes some importance as does my own position as intrinsically engaged in the process (Crotty, 2013). For me, it is important that the research reported on here does not just deal with the 'here and now' but also engages with my past and acknowledges that this informs my position as a researcher. As the research developed, I moved away from the initial notion of creating a piece of music as I became more aware of the benefits of poetry and prose as a research method. I replaced the concept of a musical piece and instead became actively engaged in the use of poetry as a means of articulating this relevance with my past and present and of making sense of my fieldwork (Darmer, 2006).

By developing my position to one that better works with interpretative phenomenological analysis, I have also modified my initial plan in relation to data gathering. Whilst still engaging with student respondents via semi-structured interviews, I have increased the number of respondents to fit with the expectation of

this research idiom. I have utilised critical incidents as reflective episodes to enable the student respondents to feel prepared for the interview. They were, I hoped very familiar with the concept of critical incidents from their social work education and so this method enabled them to feel at ease and in control. Tripp (2011) explains that a critical incident is a value judgement or interpretation of a situation or event created for professional reflection. This method helped to minimise power dynamics through the active engagement of participants who were creating their own fundamental way of knowing through this narrative device.

## **2.5 My role as researcher**

I came to this research with a sense of naivety. My background has not previously enabled me to consider the research process in depth. I now realise that my research as part of an MA in social work was relatively superficial in most aspects, though it did enable me to work through the process of undertaking primary research. Prior to undertaking the Masters programme, I had no engagement with research and limited understanding of the academy. However, I have since come to realise that my own history and values form the scope of my research horizons and as such any research I undertake, particularly that of a qualitative nature, becomes a personal endeavour (Bryant and Jaworski, 2015).

My early education took place in South Wales and I was considered a bright pupil. I am from a working class background, my father was a fitter and turner and my mother engaged in a number of low-paid jobs including that of cleaner and then cook in the secondary school I attended. This single sex school was a large comprehensive with a somewhat negative reputation. Pregnancy while still at school was seemingly an expectation for many of the girls whilst the school catchment area covered the most impoverished areas of the city.

My educational success was almost entirely dependent on sheer determination. More than anything, I wanted to do something different and be somewhere different. Almost all the females in my family seemed either taken up with finding a man or looking after men and their offspring. However, I was extremely fortunate in also having female role models who bucked this trend. My parents appreciated the arts in

all forms and instilled this love of creativity in my two brothers and me. Despite having very little disposable income, my parents encouraged us to take piano lessons. The teacher was a feisty woman in her seventies; the first older woman I ever saw who wore jeans. She was single, lived alone and my admiration for her was boundless. Similarly, the dance and drama teachers at school were two prominent women in my life. They were a gay couple who were open about their sexuality. They produced the most amazing drama productions in which I always took part. I admired how they were able to draw on the hitherto unrecognised skills and abilities of the students and develop confidence where there had seemingly been none. These, along with an aunt who had brought up her son as a post-war single parent living in the Bronx in America, were the women I aspired to be. Much though I loved my mother deeply, I knew I could not live the life she wanted for me, to get a safe job, perhaps in a bank and settle down in domestic servitude.

Wilber (2019: 98) notes how at this period in time in the UK, 'university was an escape hatch for working-class kids'. In an unwitting affirmation of meritocracy (Cummins, 2018), I escaped to undertake a degree in the performing arts at Kent University, far from everything I knew. The cultural shift was significant, particularly as the majority of students came from wealthy backgrounds and oozed cultural capital of which I had little. It was here that I realised how suited I was to academic endeavour and I enjoyed three years of hedonistic bliss.

On returning to South Wales, it seemed that my education had ended and I now had to deal with reality. I think this is why I almost feel guilty when now engaging in



research as though it is not a pursuit fitting for someone of my background. Bryant (2015: 21) supports this embodied experience when she writes that 'working class women commonly feel a lack of ability and self-worth in the masculine and middle-class settings of the academy'.

A few years after leaving university I had a child and took on the responsibility of single parenthood following a divorce. Some 13 years later I had another child and so have parented a dependent child(ren) for 30 years until recently. Alongside this responsibility, I began working in the caring professions. This suited me and I continued in this vein for almost 20 years. Throughout my occupation, I was actively engaged in learning whenever possible, so developing my knowledge and skills and building my career profile. I chose to study a postgraduate degree in social work in 2005 and engaged in a small piece of primary qualitative research. On completion of my degree, I realised that academic work gave me huge pleasure. I took up a lecturing post in 2008 and began the doctorate in education as soon as was practicably possible.

I have considered myself a feminist since my teenage years. How this looks and what it has meant to me has altered over time and continues to do so. I identify myself as a radical social worker and socialist-feminist. This stance leads to me recognising and wanting to engage with 'the rejection of distance and objectivity in the researcher-researched relationship' (Ramsay, 1996: 133). As well as being aligned to a feminist methodology, this also fits with a social constructionist perspective where 'the research process itself must be seen as socially constructing

a world, or worlds, with the researchers included in, rather than outside, the body of their own research (Steier, 1991: 2). As a feminist researcher I am aware that my own values in this regard have developed over time through interactions within the academy, both on an individual level and within a group context as part of my studies. Ramsay (1996: 132) notes how 'values are not created or reproduced in a vacuum'. Objectivity does not prevent bias which every researcher brings based on their own values, experiences and prejudices. The key is to recognise and acknowledge these biases and how they impact the research process and product (Letherby, 2003).

It is important to acknowledge what I bring to the research from my own background both personal and professional. I should identify which aspects of my own personhood may influence my subjectivity and objectivity. I am aware that my consideration of the word 'personhood' may differ from some in that I closely align this term to the work of Kitwood (1997) who writes about this word in relation to people whose lives are affected by dementia. Kitwood describes personhood as that essence of 'self' which we all have and which cannot be taken from us. For me this word is evocative and helps me to understand how my own identity has been shaped by the lives of those around me. My father spent several difficult years living with dementia and I cannot think of personhood without thinking of him. Neither can I think of my professional choices without relating these to his influence, this being that I should consider all people as equal and not to consider myself as better than anyone else, nor others better than me. I think this value is the motivating factor behind my search for a better understanding of peer support and facilitative working practices which are non-hierarchical and acknowledge the knowledge and skills

inherent in each of us. Muncey (2010) reminds us of the significant influences of certain individuals in our lives, whoever they may be. These individuals may be well known to us, or fleeting glimpses into the other's world. However, these acquaintances impact on our lived experience, and what we take from them becomes the stories influencing our autoethnographic research narrative.

This research has allowed me fleeting glimpses into the lives of the student respondents when involved in practice learning. Hugely grateful as I am to the student respondents for taking time to share incidents in their lives with me, I am concerned with attempting to portray the emotional impact of their practice learning. Through its engagement with the double hermeneutic, IPA fosters an engagement with the complexity of the task. Including a reflective account as part of the interview enables me to consider a multi-layered approach drawing not only on verbal but also textual information, which holds meaning for the student respondent. At times during the research, the responsibility of the role has felt considerable. I am in agreement with Bryant, (2015: 1) that 'Sometimes we pause and the awareness of the complexity of the task, like a mist of doubt, covers our consciousness'. She writes of how qualitative research allows us an attempt at reaching answers rather than expecting to obtain these with any sense of certitude. Acknowledging the researcher/respondent interaction as the located source of creative power allows me to consider the agency of both student respondents and myself as part of a fluid process of becoming (Bryant, 2015). This may be achieved through the sharing of imagination, which 'thrives at the edge of things, between the gaps' in search of social justice (Wilson, 2010: 368).

My research engages with 'social creativity' emerging through agentic engagement with others (Wilson, 2010). Bryant suggests that 'social creativity requires researchers to question, rethink and evaluate their own and others' embodied emotional connections and responses to specific social conditions, practices, discourses and imaginaries – we are called to dialogue and reflexivity' (2015: 2).

## **2.6 Methodological approach**

As previously alluded to, in general there is a paucity of qualitative research which considers the views of students engaging in social work practice (Lishman, 2012; Finch, 2015) and very little which illuminates the student experience through engagement with an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Indeed, there is relatively little social work research in any aspect utilising this methodology (Houston and Mullan-Jensen, 2011; Vicary, 2017). This is surprising to me, as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is devised to encourage reflection and so presents a good fit with a social work perspective where students are actively encouraged to reflect on their practice as part of their learning (Ruch, 2010). This ability to examine and link the perceived with the perceiver in order to gain a deep understanding of the essence of a particular event, can be particularly helpful when coming to terms with the personal and political experiences underpinning the social work student's engagement in practice settings (Houston and Mullan-Jensen, 2011). It is encouraging to see that recently there has been a gradual engagement with IPA when seeking to understand the worldview of people using services. For example, Clarke et al (2017) use IPA to consider the views of parents who have been subject to violence and abuse from their adolescent children and Nordberg (2015) has used IPA when considering the impact of the court system in the US for offenders with mental health issues.

There are always alternative possible research approaches for any research project and I acknowledge that I could have employed other useful approaches over IPA. The two that otherwise seemed most feasible were action research or a longitudinal approach.

From the outset I was clear that qualitative research would present the closest alignment with my social constructionist perspective which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2.5. Whilst taking a more positivist quantitative approach may not prove the best fit with constructivist research, focused primarily on the experiential, I concur with Crotty (1998: 15) that ‘the ability to measure and count is a precious human achievement and it behoves us not to be dismissive of it’. Due to the size and scope of my research being very small scale along with the emphasis on the experiential, I did not employ a mixed methodology. However, in future work I could indeed initiate the use of quantitative methods within a constructivist paradigm which could lead to using a mixed methodology, particularly should I choose to develop a longitudinal study in which a consideration of developments over time could lend itself to quantitative methods of data collecting incorporating scale and depth (Crotty 1998). This would fit with my note in chapter 6 where I mention that a future study could explore “not so much whether or how emotions are managed but more importantly who is managing our emotions and to what end”.

Just as a longitudinal approach was not manageable for the purposes of this research study, so action research was similarly put to one side, both predominantly due to a lack of resource particularly in relation to researcher and student participant time. An action research approach could have afforded me the opportunity to implement changes and explore the validity of said changes but unfortunately did not seem viable within the confines of the doctoral programme timetable. Similarly, a longitudinal study in the timeframe was not feasible.

However, in moving forward, I can see potential in developing longitudinal qualitative (LQ) research (Nikischer, 2015) to capture the changing emotional identities of students over time. This could illuminate the temporal impact and consequences of practice learning on emotional development. A longitudinal qualitative (LQ) methodology would present minimal challenge, as I have ready access to students over the course of their studies. Engagement with research could be introduced at appropriate stages in their learning trajectory, where involvement in such could offer a reflective space. A limitation however would be the potential for students to perhaps anticipate their emotional encounters within a practice learning context, rather than reflecting on these retrospectively. As such it may prove challenging to separate the research from the overall experience of student learning, with associated concerns around researcher bias and the impact of research on the student experience. I could perhaps overcome these potential issues by incorporating the research into their learning around reflection and reflexive practice and by clearly separating their engagement with research from the process of student assessment.

As mentioned, having been impressed by the effective delivery of qualitative research by an occupational therapist, I was drawn to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Once I reached a decision to engage with this methodology, it became clear to me that semi-structured interviews would arguably provide a greater opportunity to delve into individual personal experiences than focus groups, as these are more likely to elicit attitudes and opinions (Smith et al, 2009). So, despite the value of focus groups and their correlation to student study groups, I resisted these potential benefits in preference for individual interviews where the

phenomenological aspect of IPA could be more easily identified and developed (Smith et al, 2009).

I chose to engage with a narrative device in order for students to bring a prior written reflection for discussion (see chapter 2.13). In future research I could develop this to encourage the use of reflective diaries by participants. This would emulate my own use of a reflective diary (see chapter 2.15) and could promote and encourage research participant engagement with poetry and prose. '...Memories are a temporal and special interrelation of the personal, social and cultural' (Bryant and Livholts, 2015: 110) and as such, diaries could elicit rich data, perhaps including i-poems. However I am aware that reflective diaries can be poorly completed by participants, hence one reason for not attempting to use them in this research'.

A narrative device was chosen in preference to engaging with visual data, such as photos or other imagery, as I wanted the research to place as little imposition as possible on the student respondents. As they were well-versed in writing accounts of critical incidents, this was not something novel for them to have to negotiate and was well-received, adding much to the value of the data. However, for future developments I would consider the use of a non-verbal approach, particularly image-based data collection and analysis, in order to move beyond words when considering experiences (Matthews, 2011). For example, perhaps a photo to depict an emotional response or to capture the essence of their critical incident through an abstract representation. If the student respondents engaged with this method with limited instruction, it could further counter power imbalance and research bias as well as increase the accessibility of research findings (Matthews, 2011). Huss et al (2015) clarify how arts based methods making use of metaphors can promote a



phenomenological reflective methodology which may prove emancipatory for students in connecting with their own experiences and emotions. This, therefore would be a valuable next step in order to further develop creative components of future research.

## **2.7 Nuts and bolts of the research**

The research reported here informed my doctoral thesis as part of the EdD programme at a university in the South West of England. Ethical permission was granted from the University Ethics Committee to recruit student respondents from the two social work programmes at the university; the BA (Hons) and MA in Social Work (please see Appendix 7). As the research was exploring practice placement activity, students on stage one of the BA (Hons) Social Work programme were not invited to participate as they do not engage in the appropriate level of placement activity required.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure consistency with the qualitative methodology. IPA is concerned with seeking out insights into experiences chosen by the researcher and therefore students who could represent a perspective of placement activity were offered the opportunity to engage. The idiographic nature of IPA leads to a small sample size of a predominantly homogenous group. Smith et al (2009) suggest that a professional doctorate should include between four and ten interviews and that higher numbers do not necessarily lead to better work as this can impede the reflective space and time required. Eleven students responded positively to me and nine eventually engaged with the semi-structured interviews. The remaining two interviews proved difficult to organise due to other commitments and the students both withdrew though made it clear that they would revisit their decision if I required further respondents. The first interview was treated as a pilot in order to consider how best to present the interview schedule and to refine it as part of an iterative process. Of the remaining eight student respondents, two were men and the remainder were women. This variation over-represents men as within cohorts

they are usually in a greater minority. With the exception of the pilot interviewee who was 50-plus, their ages were all over 20 and under 40.

The purposive sample of respondents was chosen by utilising criteria which I widened from the original. Initially I planned to invite students who were engaged in adult social care practice placements. However, it became clear to me that this would have two negative aspects; potentially there would be less interest from students and the research question did not lend itself to this narrow perspective. Having completed the ethics proposal, students in years two and three of the social work undergraduate programme and students in both years of the social work postgraduate programme were invited by email to attend a semi-structured interview with me as researcher. The invitation did not include a specific question but instead invited the students thus, 'I would like to talk to you about your experience of peer support in your placement and your views about this in relation to interprofessional working'.

The information sheet provided to the research recipients explained how 'I am exploring how social work students engage with peer learning in an interprofessional context. As my background is in adult social care, I am interested to consider peer learning and interprofessional working in this context'. I then broadened my scope to also consider social work in child care settings, following requests from students who had an interest in taking part but who wished to consider their practice placements in children's services. As a result of responding to this request, it seemed to me that this openness to redirecting my research question led to positive outcomes both in

terms of numbers of respondents but also in relation to the richness of the subsequent data. This reflexivity demonstrated my willingness to adapt in light of student feedback and helped to minimise power differentials between me as researcher and the student respondents. A further attempt to empower the student respondents was introduced by encouraging their active engagement. The information sheet presented them with an optional task: 'In order to prepare for the interview, I am inviting you to bring along a brief reflection on an incident(s) when peer support was evident or missing from the experience. This reflection would only need to be brief i.e. a few sentences to enable us to have a starting point for discussion'. This proved an extremely useful part of the research interview where rich data was provided with minimal interruption from me.

Initially, the primary research question composed, was one planned to encourage student respondents to think about their experiences within a practice setting. The question was 'Does peer learning promote boundary spanning in social work?' However, as I developed the information sheet for participants (Appendix 7), I chose to move away from the presentation of a specific question to avoid both a narrowing of the scope for a range of responses and the potential for a range of interpretations of the phrase 'boundary spanning'. I have a clear appreciation of what this concept means and how boundary spanners as those who 'work between systems whose goals, though superficially complementary, may carry inherent conflicts requiring mediation, negotiation and strategy' (Oliver, 2013:777). However, I was aware that student respondents may not share this understanding. I have explored the concept of boundary spanning in appendix 6 of this thesis.

In line with an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology, the object of concern was presented to the student respondents in order to elicit their own experiences and understandings, which could then be interpreted by me in an inductive way through engagement with appropriate theory. The specific context of practice placement was employed as a vehicle for exploration though student respondents could diversify from this if they so chose. As I was looking for 'detailed analysis of lived experience' (Smith et al, 2009: 47), the question was simple in order to allow for exploration and individual interpretation.

## **2.8 Ethical practice**

The university research ethics protocol was adhered to and permission was granted to undertake the research (see appendix 7). Whilst securing informed consent, it was made clear to the respondents that their semi-structured interviews would be treated in a confidential manner and that the inclusion of verbatim excerpts in publications would be edited for anonymity. I also made it clear that service user confidentiality would be maintained. I gave the student respondents pseudonyms and removed names of agencies or other identifying features when analysing the data. Student respondents were given the option to withdraw from the research up to the end of the data gathering, though none chose to do so. They were also invited to keep in touch in order for me to share my findings with them on completion. To date, three of them have provided me with their details for this purpose.

Student respondents were made aware at the outset that I would be available to discuss issues or concerns following the interview, should talking about sensitive issues have made them feel uncomfortable or upset in any way. Two of the student respondents did have conversations with me following the interviews in order to manage their feelings and debrief from the interview process. I also ensured that each interview began and ended with phatic communication in order to put the student respondents at ease (Lishman, 2009).

## 2.9 Phenomenology

The phenomenological aspect of this methodology encourages reflection, particularly in relation to our intersubjectivity, or how we make sense of each other. Heidegger proposes that this relational engagement with the world defines us each as a 'person-in-context' (Smith et al, 2009: 17). This view developed from that of his mentor Husserl, who posits the notion that as people, we are interconnected with the world in which we inhabit and are therefore a part of reality, immersed and embedded in the experiences brought about by being in the world (Larkin et al, 2008). Heidegger coins the term Dasein, or 'being there' to explain how we are always located in the world and engaged in some meaningful context (Larkin et al, 2008). My role within this research was to illuminate and consider where the student respondents were located both in their personal accounts and in their engagement with me. At the same time I was able to consider and reflect on my own position within this and how my interpretation of their lived experience is formed from my own location in the world, both personal and political. I adopt the position of a hermeneutic realist in that 'what is real is not dependent on us, but the exact meaning and nature of reality is' (Dreyfus, 1995 in Larkin et al 2008). So phenomenological inquiry encourages a deeper appreciation through interpretation:

It must be stated that the entity as an entity is 'in itself' and independent of any apprehension of it; yet, the being of the entity is found only in encounter and can be explained, made understandable, only from the phenomenal exhibition and interpretation of the structure of encounter (Heidegger, 1985: 217).

According to Larkin et al, (2008) a Heideggeran phenomenology is based on an empathic approach which is sensitive and responsive to the subject matter despite our own preconceptions. Merleau-Ponty suggests that our personal experiences

have a 'structure that spreads [or extends] across space and time that can be communicated to others through appropriate expression' (Giorgii, 1995: 37). In my view, an empathic use of semi-structured interviews can produce the reflective space and time in which a respondent can feel safe enough to communicate their engagement with a personal experience and, having done so, achieve a sense of catharsis.

My research acknowledges the ease with which humans engaged in ontological security through the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life (Thompson, 2003) and the wallpaper of everyday existence. My desire was to move away from this to what Husserl describes as a 'phenomenological attitude', which 'involves describing the world the way it is experienced by humans; what the world is and means to humans, what it means for humans to have a world, and how humans relate to this world, to each other, to different situations – to all possible 'things' of the world' (Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nystrom, 2008: 36). For me this meant offering an opportunity for the student respondents to reflect on and take time to consider elements of their practice learning experience in detail and without fear of recrimination. The terminology 'student respondent' has been used rather than 'participant' as I am aware that participation can never be fully assumed whereas a response necessitates engagement on the responder's terms rather than mine.



## **2.10 Hermeneutics**

As a hermeneutic phenomenologist, Heidegger has influenced the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). He posits that we understand the world through an interpretative lens and that 'the thing itself' needs to be made sense of and has to be uncovered or gradually comes to the surface (Smith et al, 2009: 24). The interpretative aspect of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) presents an opportunity to 'draw out or disclose the meaning of the experience' (Larkin et al, 2008: 115) in order to bring together empathy and analysis in the pursuit of a clearer understanding of the experience for both researcher and respondent. Engaging therefore in this project of shared discovery enables us to become more attuned with our relationships both within and outside the research process. So for example, having engaged in this activity, I have reflected on my other role with students as academic tutor, and doing so has impacted both on my relationship with students and how I develop the social work programme.

## **2.11 Idiography**

Along with phenomenology and hermeneutics, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is also influenced by idiography. This engagement with the particular as opposed to considering only generalised nomothetic claims, which function to better understand groups or general populations, is again well-suited to my research (Smith et al, 2009). I have been interested to explore not only how students may have similar ways of being in their world but also to consider the particular aspects of their narratives, which promote an appreciation of their individual worldview. An idiographic perspective allows me to engage with relatively few purposively-selected student respondents with whom I can create individual case studies which then develop further into more general claims. In my view, this enables me to 'do justice' to the individual worldview and in so doing to acknowledge the time and commitment of the student respondents, by making extensive use of their efforts.

Idiography allows me to consider the interviews in depth in order to provide thorough and detailed accounts achieved through systematic analysis. Thereafter, these individual accounts not only provide case study material in their own right but are also incorporated into my generalization of the particular. This is a cautious approach to making wider claims and one which I fully endorse.

The unique perspectives of the student respondents' experiences are also embedded and immersed in a wider involvement in relationships with people and the world in which they are engaged. 'Dasein's experience is understood to be an in-relation-to phenomenon, it is not really a property of the individual per se. However,

a given person can offer us a personally unique perspective on their relationship to, or involvement in, various phenomena of interest' (Smith et al, 2009:29).

Engagement with the data has enabled me to consider the existence of something particular which I can then consider in more general terms from an interpretative perspective which enables me to problematize and theorise in an informed manner. 'Delving deeper into the particular also takes us closer to the universal' (Smith et al, 2009: 31) and therefore working with both and avoiding the temptation to favour the case study over the more generalised interpretation or vice versa is not helpful. The student respondents were likely to have much in common alongside potential differences due to their individuality both personal and from a practical perspective. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) allowed me to initially focus on and consider relevant data from individuals and to retrieve this throughout the process, while also moving from these individual accounts to a representation of more generalised statements. This holistic approach enabled me to engage thoroughly in the double hermeneutic; making sense of the student respondents' stories while they were making sense of their experience of importance. This attention to detail promotes validity and active, holistic engagement with the student respondent's narrative. More than anything, then, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) pays due regard to the experience of importance and so offers a respectful interpretation of the respondent's worldview. Whilst so doing the research engages with the similarities and differences experienced by the respondents in order to consider the shared themes and variations, all of which make for 'fine-grained accounts of patterns of meaning' (Smith et al 2009: 38).

## **2.12 The decision to choose interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)**

Social work is a complex relational activity offering significant challenges to those who make attempts to measure activity in terms of evaluation for effectiveness in the pursuit of certainty (Smith, 2009). As such, it is generally agreed by Corby, (2006) and Howe, (2014) that social work values relate well to constructionism and related research methods. A social constructionist approach lends itself well to a consideration of emotions as it acknowledges environmental and social as well as biological factors as influences on the production and meaning of emotions (Harlos and Pinder, 2007). My research engages with a critical perspective in that rather than attempting to measure or evaluate the worldview of the participants in search of truth, it is deemed of greater importance to consider the lived experience of those offering and using services and to draw on these experiences to inform the development of appropriate social work practice. IPA affords me the opportunity to do this through detailed inquiry as opposed to seeking an evaluation or solution to issues raised. My exploratory engagement with the student respondent narratives enables me to provide a theoretical context in which to interpret and offer explanation of their transitory experiences and to promote better understanding of these. Their lived experiences enabled me to consider the 'social order...a continually emerging texture of meanings produced by individual human actors' (Johnson et al, 1984: 77). The use of IPA allows the development of an understanding which is underpinned by a sound methodology demonstrating rigour, credibility and coherence while attempting to minimise power dynamics associated with evidence-based practice and the pursuit of knowledge (Smith, 2009). This critical perspective resonates with social work professional values of anti-oppressive practice in which a socio-political context and the relationships therein is scrutinised

and questioned (Dominelli, 2002). Taking a critical or interpretivist perspective led me to engage with methods which lend themselves to an exploration of subjectively constituted meaning rather than a more empiricist engagement with the research. The meaning was negotiated rather than fixed whilst ensuring that the robust nature of the research remained.

My position has been influenced depending on how the research endeavour shaped my thinking. However, my starting point and the perspectives and preconceptions which I held were managed by declaring my position (Smith, 2009). My role and purpose had been clearly identified and shared with the student respondents and the use of a reflective journal enabled me to consider what preconceptions I held and how best to put these to one side or bracket them off. I am aware that my own construction of the world is implicated in every part of the research process and as such I too am a participant of sorts. Letherby et al (2013) and Tufford and Newman (2010) consider the importance of emotional engagement with the research process in order to reflect on both subjectivity and objectivity. Through the process of data gathering, I became increasingly aware of the variations of experience between my ongoing research supervision and that of the participants and their own use of supervision in a practice setting. For instance, the value I place on regular and consistent support was mirrored by the student respondents, though not always available to them. This is but one example of how the research process has impacted on my positionality and engagement with the material and has been explored more fully as part of the data analysis through poetry and prose. So, my own practice has been modified through the experience of making sense of the practice experiences of students. To take this a step further, considering my identity

in this aspect of my life to be that of a student and researcher myself, then my research could be socially constructed as peer learning. There have most definitely been some interviews where this has felt to be the case. For example when Julie considers the difficulties she experienced, these led to me writing the poem Fxxx (x7) = EL + change. The connections formed between me and the student respondents were a fascinating aspect of the process and one which affected me greatly. Engagement with poetry and prose enabled me to demonstrate this aspect of the research. Just as social work knowledge is constantly developing through hypothesising and testing out, so this research was an exploratory process generated through human relationships and reflexivity (Sheppard, 1998). By their very nature, human relationships are complex and multi-faceted. The rigour of IPA data analysis through the use of a double hermeneutic which incorporates both a questioning and empathic stance helped to negotiate a path through the rich diversity of narratives presented (Smith et al, 2009). The iterative nature of the analysis allowed me to revisit my thoughts and hypotheses and so develop a network of paths, which at times either joined together or divided to present alternative routes of inquiry. Smith et al (2009) also consider the third hermeneutic where the reader makes sense of the researcher making sense of the research. This notion has been made real through dissemination of findings utilising performative methods, as further discussed in section 2.21.

I felt extremely privileged to have received such a positive and engaged response from the student respondents. Without exception, they demonstrated a willingness to engage with the process which subsequently led to extensive data gathering. They openly shared their experiences and reflections both in verbal and written form, so

meeting and demonstrating their professional capability in relation to the British Association of Social Work Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (2015). PCF domain 9 exhorts students to 'recognise the value of sharing and supporting, or contributing to and supporting the learning and development of others'. Interestingly, no mention of this link to our professional standards was made by either myself or the students and in hindsight I could have included this as part of the initial request for participants. However, by doing so the student respondents may have associated the interview with their ongoing assessment of professionalism and the altruistic nature of their offer could have been compromised. The motivation behind their engagement was in some instances clear and other times less so. Interest in the topic of peer learning was undoubtedly the main deciding factor though there was also an element of wanting to support my development and to better understand the technique of interviewing in qualitative research.

Having shared their sense-making of peer learning in an interprofessional context, the students have initiated the double hermeneutic process which is a key aspect of IPA. Their interpretation of the phenomenon was considered by me through two different ways; empathising with the interpretation while also promoting a questioning stance. This cyclical engagement promoted quality and validity and is an important aspect of IPA (Vicary et al, 2016). However, I endorse the suggestion of Rodham et al (2015) that rather than using empirical terminology such as quality and validity, it felt more fitting to consider the importance of curiosity in order to suspend belief and trustworthiness. The double hermeneutic allowed me to consider the student perspectives and to consider them from a different angle (Smith et al, 2009). So I

was trying to understand the research question while also gaining an appreciation of how this impacted on the lived experience of the student respondents.

In order to consider the idiographic aspect of IPA I aimed to maintain the particular within the student's individual experiences while also considering similarities and differences relating to their shared experience (Smith et al, 2009). Skills of reflexivity assumed more importance here in order to avoid me perhaps affording more credence to one voice than another. Reflexivity supported the dialogic relationship between me as researcher and students as participants and how meaning was made through our mutually agreed engagement bound by time and space (Le Vasseur, 2003). According to Shaw (2010: 234), reflexivity is 'an explicit evaluation of the self'. I utilised a reflective journal which was used in the development of my poetry and prose in order to enact bracketing which I will explain in further detail later (see 2.15). Doing so and clarifying the purpose of such is a measure of the quality of this research (Vicary, et al, 2016). Tufford and Newman (2010: 81) contend that 'bracketing facilitates deeper levels of reflection for the researcher including during the interpretation of the data'. In order to engage with the IPA double hermeneutic I needed an awareness of my own preconceptions and their potential impact on the research. 'Maintaining a curious stance and actively engaging in reflexivity are...key skills for doing IPA' (Rodham et al, 2015: 62).



### 2.13 Making use of a reflective account

In order to encourage a reflective encounter between the student respondents and me as researcher, as mentioned earlier they were invited to bring along a brief reflective account pertaining to their practice experience:

I am inviting you to bring along a brief reflection on an incident(s) when peer support was evident or missing from the experience. This reflection would only need to be brief i.e. a few sentences to enable us to have a starting point for discussion. It would also be helpful for me to keep this for future reference.

This narrative device secured a phenomenological approach whereby the students were encouraged to actively engage with 'an experience of importance, rather than... just experience' (Smith et al, 2009: 188). So the reflective accounts offered a focus to the student respondents prior to and then as part of the semi-structured interview. This enabled the student respondents to feel prepared for the interviews and to take relative control of the situation when they were invited to share their reflection as part of the process. When summing up the interviews, I introduced a question about what they felt regarding the interview experience. All gave favourable responses and some made particular reference to the benefit of the reflective piece.

For example:

(Beth) How did you find writing that?

(Richard) Yeah fine. I found that I wrote it quite quickly really. I was surprised by how quickly I wrote it. I remember you asking for a few sentences but I ended up writing a good three paragraphs. And I think that was helpful in just getting my thoughts around the case out of my head down on paper which aided my whole reflective process. So that in itself as a process was really helpful'.

(Beth) Maybe something you might want to do again?

(Richard) 'Yeah definitely, definitely. Because like I said I would want to do it again because it was helpful and interesting as well. I like writing anyway so quite happy to sit down and write something (370).

Introducing these narrative accounts enabled student respondents to consider significant experiences which were important to them and with which they were trying to make sense. These significant experiences, which could also be termed major events, stimulate mental activity and are existentially significant experiences, and are exactly what interpretative phenomenological analysis seeks to illuminate (Smith et al, 2009). Introducing this element to the semi-structured interviews also meant that I could be assured of a depth of reflection which negated the need for me to ask many probing questions. It felt that the interview was more balanced in terms of who was controlling the content and validated the student respondent's experience.

This form of facilitated 'deliberate controlled reflection' (Smith et al, 2009: 189) provides a phenomenological inquiry based on pre-reflective and reflective layers. This produces richness and depth, as the student will have reproduced the account during the interview through 'honing it, stretching it, and employing it with a particular degree of determination and rigour' (Smith et al, 2009: 189). Certainly, it felt that the student respondents were determined to present their reflective accounts in a much focussed manner, evidencing reflection-in-action as they discussed the narrative with me (Schon, 1995). The use of this narrative device also helped me with the double hermeneutic of interpretative phenomenological analysis, whereupon I was engaged with making sense of the student respondent making sense of their lived experience (Shinebourne and Smith, 2009).

## 2.14 Bracketing

It is not possible to view without viewing from somewhere (Fischer, 2009:584).

Husserl, considered to be the founder of phenomenology believed in the Lebenswelt or 'life world' and the importance of lived experience. He considered how bracketing enables us to understand without prejudice through the suspension of our own natural assumptions in order to explore the thing itself. However, many including Heidegger consider this to be a somewhat idealistic notion and perhaps untenable. So for many, bracketing is more a temporary suspension enabling a questioning stance rather than a negation of preconceived ideas, which is not possible (Le Vasseur, 2003).

Fischer (2009:584) describes bracketing as a reflexive activity taking place throughout a piece of research and 'a mindfulness that one brings to bear regularly, asking about assumptions that have gone into what one saw and into how one has "language[d]" what was apprehended'. However, I agree with Heidegger that a phenomenological approach is essentially a subjective endeavour in which it is impossible to completely bracket my preconceptions. Indeed, these are an important aspect of how I gather, interpret and present data (Tufford and Newman, 2010). I consider that engagement with subjectivity allows me to better appreciate the lived experience of research participants. Like Heidegger, I consider it important to be in the world of the participant and to acknowledge and engage with the interpretative aspect of the research (Heidegger, 1962). So for example, while gathering data, I was affected by the varied motivations of each student and the deep feelings which they were willing to share. This emotional engagement was translated into poetry

and prose in order to demonstrate the reflexive and emotional nature of the research (see 2.15).

I would not wish to preclude my own feelings when faced with this powerful material by using bracketing as a protective device (Tufford and Newman, 2010) because to do so could eliminate the powerful emotional discourse underpinning the interactions between me and the participants. In fact, the thoughts and feelings evoked for me were a substantial part of the overall perception and interpretation. According to Gearing (2004: 1430), Husserl suggests that bracketing promotes 'das unmittelbare sehen' or the opportunity of 'direct seeing' which 'looks beyond constructions, preconceptions and assumptions (our natural attitude) to the essences of the experiences being investigated' However, I align my thinking more closely with that of Heidegger again, in that bringing all of me to the research and not bracketing off any part of my 'self' makes it more likely that I will be able to practice in 'engagement as a means of knowing' (Tufford and Newman, 2010: 83). For example, I have been emotionally challenged by the participants' narratives and have reflected on this in order to present a considered analysis while acknowledging the significant impact on my own personal and professional development. Thereby, I acknowledge my preconceptions and the part they play in my writing rather than leaving them to one side by bracketing them. The engagement with the student respondents assumes greatest importance and enables me to acknowledge and in so doing manage (or bracket) my preconceptions or 'fore-conceptions' safely through a cyclical process (Heidegger, 1962: 195; Smith et al, 2009). This avoids over-emphasising and problematizing my preconceptions and instead engages with these proactively through 'a process of self-discovery' (Tufford and Newman, 2010: 48).

## **2.15 My position as a reflective researcher**

As previously mentioned, from the early stages of data gathering I was aware of my own thoughts and feelings and used a reflective diary to consider the past experiences and feelings which I later revisited and rediscovered in light of engagement with the material. Doing so was my version of bracketing and became an ongoing developmental process throughout the research, enabling me to maintain a reflexive stance (Ahern, 1999). So for example, some of the concerns raised by participants led to shifts in my own practice and developments in how teaching was delivered. Creating a diary as an artefact to capture my reflections not only provided a bracketing strategy but also promoted quality and validity (Vicary et al, 2016). As a reflective practitioner, I felt comfortable in this space and could not perceive of working in any other way, believing it to be the most useful engagement so that the research questions were responded to most effectively. Making use of my reflections in order to create poems and prose enabled me to capture the essence of my ruminations in a coherent and, I hope, tangible way. Rather than my reflective diary remaining an unexplored and unavailable artefact, it has been presented as poetry and prose (Appendix 1).

I agree with Letherby (2013: 2) that 'research is an endeavour characterised by politics, power and emotion, and it is important to reflect on the implications of this'. I consider it vital to acknowledge my part in the process in order to make sense of the research experience and my subjectivity therein. I hold that research can maintain rigour and criticality while still incorporating the subjective experience. Indeed, without an appreciation of this, the research could lack depth and a sense of personhood. The iterative nature of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

afforded me opportunities to reflect throughout the process and to acknowledge my preconceptions at various stages (Tufford and Newman, 2010). The use of a reflective space proved valuable in enabling me to make sense of and manage my immediate emotional responses to the data. It also encouraged me to pay attention to these in order to develop my thinking. For example, as the data gathering progressed, I became gradually more conscious of the importance of the environment in which interviews took place and the space within which the student respondents and I interacted. Each interview took between 25 and 50 minutes and were situated where best suited the student respondents. So the venues ranged from familiar rooms on campus to roadside cafes. The influence of environment created a fascinating addition to my initial thoughts, from seating arrangements to unplanned distractions; whether on or off campus. Reflecting on person-in-environment as well as individual participants' narratives, enabled me to consider the inherent power dynamics and how, perhaps, the dynamic between the student respondents and myself mirrored their engagement with practice placements. This in turn has impacted on my own practice through my pursuit for equity of provision and anti-oppressive practice as part of the engagement with placement activity (Dominelli, 2002). For example, I have felt better equipped to challenge the power dynamics inherent in the relationship between student, practice supervisor and practice educator both within the academy and the practice placement. I am reminded that 'a researcher's ability to hear previously silenced voices and shifting centers of oppression relies on the ability to silence, for a time, his or her own voice and give precedence to the voice of the participant' (Tufford and Newman, 2010: 93).

Just as this narrative presents a cultural construction of who I am not merely in the content but also the use of language through written communication, so the student respondents' accounts provide a depth of understanding of the cultural influences which informed and shaped their verbal (and non-verbal) and written communication with me. Whilst commonalities were expected as all students have shared learning experiences to a degree, how this was portrayed differed between participants. Taking a semantic record of each interview through a complete transcript enabled a consideration of nuances of language through interpretative noting. IPA addresses descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments and brings these together to present a holistic picture of the participant's world (Smith et al, 2009).

## **2.16 Hochschild's and Lipsky's work as underpinning theoretical concepts**

When analysing the verbatim accounts, I used both cumulative coding where I considered each individual transcript and looked for patterns of meaning within; and integrative coding, where I considered the whole range of transcripts and identified patterns of meaning across these. In order to identify, develop and make sense of these themes I engaged with particular theoretical concepts which assumed importance as part of the research process. In particular, I engaged with the work of Hochschild (2012) concerning emotional labour and Lipsky (2010) in relation to the use of discretion by public sector workers. Both are American sociologists whose theories were developed initially in the early 1980s and both have enjoyed continued interest in their work in the intervening decades. Both have influenced sociological thought in relation to how workers manage the challenges of engaging with the public though neither pay attention to the work of the other in their writing as far as I am aware. As part of my interpretation of the data, I introduced secondary, theory-driven research questions relating to the work of Hochschild and Lipsky in order to develop the interpretative aspect of the methodology. So I considered what the impact of emotional labour and discretion had on the lived experiences of student respondents.

Whilst engaged in this research activity, I was cautious of the editorial power held by me throughout the process and made efforts to minimise this power dynamic through engagement with my own autoethnography. I agree with Letherby (2014) that acknowledging this editorial power promotes a sense of responsibility. In addition to this, I was also aware of my power as an academic tutor and took pains to ensure that the student respondents were aware of my role and purpose as a researcher



and learner and not as a tutor. We shared a commonality in that we were all pursuing an academic endeavour and I was striving to privilege their voices over mine whilst acknowledging my own learning through this shared activity. Within this, I was conscious of the multi-dimensional aspects both of my identity and that of student respondents (Letherby, 2014). They were sharing their learning in a way unconstrained by needing to 'get it right' and freed from academic requirements.

## **2.17 Carrying out the research**

In a good IPA study, it should be possible to parse the account both for shared themes and for the distinctive voices and variations on those themes (Smith et al, 2009: 38).

As previously discussed, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) involves a double hermeneutic whereby as the researcher, I have made efforts to make sense of the respondents making sense of their world. This qualitative work also considers the third hermeneutic, that of the reader making sense of me making sense of the student respondent making sense of their practice placement. I hope, therefore, that this explanation of how the research was accomplished will encourage and promote the third hermeneutic through clarification of the research process.

## **2.18 Gathering the data**

IPA research explores lived experience in a detailed way by asking open questions in order to elucidate reflective personal accounts which are both phenomenological and interpretative in nature. Due to the level of detail, Smith et al (2009) warn against being overly ambitious when devising the research questions and to be prepared for deviation from the original question as the research develops. They also suggest that secondary research questions should also be considered in order to manage the emerging material. As mentioned above, my secondary or theory-driven questions were developed throughout the research and these collective themes (Steedman, 1997) were informed by a growing interest in how student respondents engaged with the concepts of discretion (Lipsky, 2010) and emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012).

Through active engagement with the case studies elucidated by student respondents, themes emerged. Each case study encouraged the student respondent to engage with their own critical reflection of a shared experience, that of being a student on a practice placement. The combination of student identity and placement activity provided a framework for their 'disparate and different accounts' along with a commonality of language and understanding through their socialised student status (Steedman, 1997: 107). These accounts were examined individually in detail to consider emergent themes and also to present idiographic accounts of the particular and in addition were considered in a holistic context in order to consider similarities and differences relating to the experiences of the student respondents. This enabled the production of 'fine-grained accounts of patterns of meaning' (Smith et al, 2009: 38). This methodology enabled a detailed examination not only of what was the personal meaning for the individual student respondents but also what they shared

and what set them apart in relation to their particular context. It also enabled me to consider my own experiential learning and the impact on such. This resonates with Schleiermacher's assertion 'that everyone carries a minimum of everyone else within themselves' (1998: 92).

The critical analyses were incorporated within semi-structured interviews where student respondents were encouraged to take part in a predominantly one-sided conversation with the student respondent doing most of the talking. In order to ensure that both researcher and student respondents were active participants, the interviews comprised of a loose, flexible agenda along with the invitation for student respondents to present a critical analysis of an incident. This analysis encouraged 'unexpected turns' and ensured that 'the participant is the experiential expert on the topic in hand and therefore they should be given much leeway in taking the interview to 'the thing itself' (Smith et al, 2009: 58).

My experience as a social worker and lecturer enabled me to take the role of empathic active listener and co-producer and to provide space for the student respondents to provide rich and fascinating data about what was important to them, whilst monitoring their engagement and adapting the schedule accordingly. However my background also meant that I needed to carefully explore my remit and research persona and to make the student respondents aware of this. I was not there to engage in either a pastoral or teaching role and was instead a facilitator of their narrative.

As mentioned earlier, the audio-recorded interviews were between 25 and 50 minutes long. However the subsequent verbatim transcriptions which I completed myself, took several hours each to notate and became a labour of love through the immersion of which my depth of understanding grew and encouraged reflection. I maintained field notes throughout the process to capture these reflections and inform my analysis. Many of these notes later informed my writing of poetry/prose. The relevant disclosure of the student respondents' experiences, thoughts and feelings together with their ability to present detail in a thoughtful and respectful manner filled me with admiration. Occasionally, I reminded the student respondents that their voice was the most valued element rather than their consideration of general issues for student social workers. This scant guidance was all that was required in order to shift their contribution from description to affective and embodied narratives. Their engagement was rarely superficial and the experience of these interviews was, I hope as cathartic for them as it was enlightening for me. Certainly, I have been approached by three of the of the student respondents with a request for copies of the disseminated findings once complete and I have also received thanks for providing an opportunity to share difficult learning experiences in a safe manner.

## **2.19 Analysing the data**

The semantic record of each interview is a requirement of IPA, which provides an idiographic text with which to develop the analysis (Shaw et al, 2016). Following the guidance of Smith et al (2009), I recorded the interviews on line-numbered transcripts with space either side for exploratory comments (on the right) and emergent themes (on the left) (please see an example as appendix 8). The exploratory comments included notes of semantics including repetition as well as metaphor and imagery. Relationships and the position of the student respondents within their placement agency and the university were also noted. I also introduced colour highlighting of the original text to identify significant events or 'possible pearls'. I took this idea from Smith (2011:7) who writes about gems as being 'the thing that stands out when you're reading a transcript, it's the extract that demands attention and prompts further analytic work'.

## **2.20 An autoethnographic approach utilising poetry/prose**

Operating on the level of image, the poem resounds in the mind (Furman, 2004:163).

Autoethnography seeks to address the complexities of the lived experience, both for the researcher and the researched. Muncey (2010:xi) describes these as ‘the muddled, idiosyncratic, florid eccentricities that make us unique as opposed to part of a population’, and goes on to explain that autoethnographic accounts should challenge dominant discourses. This sets them apart from autobiographical accounts.

Autoethnography is a research approach that privileges the individual. It is an artistically constructed piece of prose, poetry, music or piece of art work that attempts to portray an individual experience in a way that evokes the imagination of the reader, viewer or listener (Muncey, 2010:xi).

Utilising autoethnography evolved as an approach for me during the life of the research as part of the iterative process on which the premise of IPA is built. Autoethnography has enabled me to present my own lived experience as part of the research journey rather than bracketing my feelings. Muncey (2010:3) helped me to appreciate how this research is part of my lived experience and that I am both ‘researcher and the researched’. This approach appeals to me in part due to my practice of boundary spanning (please see appendix 6) which has been an inherent part of my social work career and now spills over into my research approach whereby I ‘reside comfortably within these edgelands and relish the interface between the different landscapes’ (Muncey, 2010:29).

As I focused on the data trying to make sense of the messages within, I found that my sense-making led me in part to conflate the student respondent's responses from lengthy verbatim scripts into more focused pieces of poetry and prose. In so doing I felt better able to consider the emotional connections inherent in their stories and to better develop my own emotional sensitivity (Carter et al, 2018). Initially, I did not appreciate this as an innovative approach or a potential means to increase the dispersal of my study. However, in light of further reading I am now aware that stakeholders may perceive this as being 'authentic, engaging, credible and memorable' and that the dissemination of research findings benefits from the inventive crossing of boundaries in order to better inform practice (Carter et al, 2018:166).

Rather than including the voice of the student participant merely through verbatim scripts, I have produced pieces of poetry and prose which aim to reflect the voices of the student participants either directly through I-poems, focusing on verbatim excerpts from their interviews or through my own poetic/prose responses to the event of data capture and subsequent analysis. Incorporating my own perspective ensures that my voice is also included as a response to the student participants and the activity of researching. This co-creation resonates with my affinity with the stories of the student respondents and aligns itself with this participative research strategy. Koelsch (2015:97) describes this use of poetry/prose as arts-based research which is 'multifaceted, rhizomatic and inconclusive'. My field notes have informed the content of the poems/prose along with engagement with the thematic and idiographic analysis of the interview scripts. This oscillation between my own experience and that of the student respondents aims to offer authenticity and credibility and to



'search into the heart of matters' (Furman, 2004: 162). Whether or not the writing also achieves the ability to be engaging and memorable is yet to be discovered (Carter et al, 2018) though I have to date received positive feedback through teaching as well as conference presentations in which I include poetry/prose.

## 2.21 Poetry in research

Since the late 1990s, poetry has been considered as a non-traditional way of presenting qualitative text-based data (Denzin, 1997) and an opportunity to develop postmodern research presentation (Koelsch, 2015). It promotes a deeper engagement with the participant's complex story rather than working with 'a single linear narrative' (Koelsch, 2015:2015:96). As a relational and affective medium, ideally poetry should encourage emotional engagement with the subject, in this case student respondents. Poetry is also subjective and evocative and lends itself to making emotional connections between people. This is the essence of what I hope to achieve. On a practical level, poetry enables compression to take place which in turn leads to greater accessibility of the data through succinctness and economy of words (Carter et al, 2018; Szto et al, 2005; Wall, 2006). There are a number of ways of utilising poetry in research in order to present 'an evocative way of communicating... research findings' (Sparkes, 2008: 658) and presenting the student respondents' data (Koelsch, 2015) through 'language characterized by compression [i.e. data reduction], image and metaphor' (Szto et al, 2005: 146). Compression promotes choice-making over which words to choose and how to present them in the space available. It enables me to 'explore the essence of the experience' (Furman, 2006: 565). I agree with Lahman et al (2011: 894) that what I produce may not be considered by some to be of a standard of that written by a poet. I also appreciate the view of Koelsch (2015:97) who suggests that research poems should still engage with literary form and that 'a good poem is a good poem'. However, I hope that my attempts could be thought of as 'good enough research poetry' and that there is recognition of how I am developing my ability to create poetry as a means of representing research. I am not at this stage interested in becoming an expert poet,

rather I have 'excavated' the data (Carter et al, 2018: 169) in order to present findings in a form of 'approximately poems' (Glesne, cited in Carter et al, 2018:169). Along with Leggo (2008: 170) I consider all people as poets, many of whom feel unable to engage in this form of writing due to peer pressure:

I am concerned that some researchers put poetry on a pedestal as an object for awe-inspiring reverence. I like to stress that poetry is earthy, rooted in everyday experience, connected integrally to the flow of blood in our bodies, expressed constantly in the rhythms of our speech and embodied movement.

There are many ways of engaging with poetry in research and I have chosen to do so through the creation of data poems along with research experience poems/poems from the field, thereby combining my autoethnographic stance with data analysis (Carter et al, 2018). The use of data poems in my writing, grounded in the data, provides an opportunity for the experiences and inner world of the student respondents to be brought out into the open and therefore to the outer world, in a clear and mediated way in order to connect with the reader (Carter et al, 2018; Gilligan, 2015). I have been influenced in part by the Listening Guide method initiated by Gilligan (1982); an influential feminist method of qualitative data analysis which lends itself to modification (Koelsch, 2015). In particular, I have been motivated by a consideration of the interplay of voices as a form of musical expression through harmony, dissonance and counterpoint. This method appeals to my own interpretation of data whereby the weaving of the voices of the student respondents in my mind has a fugue-like quality, each respondent having their own distinct voice but coming together to create a coherent, whole piece. Using this additional method of discovery enables me to deepen my analysis as 'tuning into the rhythms, harmonies, and disjunctures present in research interviews can be most illuminating' (Sorsoli and Tolman, 2008: 498). This also resonates with Schulman's

concept of tuning in (2012) which he identifies as an important element of any therapeutic relationship.

My use of poetic representations of the data as a mode of analysis can be demonstrated through two I-poems which have been included as a representative recapitulation of the idiographic data analysis section (see chapter 4). This becomes part of the interpretative phenomenological analysis in an overlapping and complimentary fashion, allowing me to explore my own thoughts and feelings in relation to the student's perspectives through further exploration (Gilligan, 2015). In order to stay 'true' to both interpretative phenomenological analysis and the concept of I-poems, I chose to create these for only two of the student respondents. Their voices resonate with the experiences of other participants and it is recommended that less is more in order to capture the essence of the research and 'sense of self' (Koelsch, 2015:98). The idea is that I-poems 'are created by a process that traces how participants represent themselves in interviews through attention to first person statements' (Carter et al, 2018:167). Each of the two identified transcripts were revisited and listened to again to separate the narrative from the sense of self (Koelsch, 2015). Selected passages were chosen which were 'especially loaded with emotional or sensuous thickness' (Wulf-Anderson, 2012:568). Statements including the use of 'I' were highlighted along with the associated verb and text. These were then listed as they appeared in the interview and the statements formed a poetic cadence which follows a logical narrative (Gilligan, 2015). This way of formulating and presenting data is especially appealing. Not only does it enable the slowing down of data analysis in order to ensure that the student participant's voice is truly heard; it encourages a different way of listening which broadens thinking and

subsequent analysis; and also the interplay is closely related to core social work concerns in that 'a voice of connectedness was aligned with an ethic of care and a voice that spoke of the self as separate was aligned with morality of justice and rights' (Gilligan, 2015: 72). If I were provided with the opportunity again, I would present my poems to the student respondents when in draft form in order for them to comment on the content and for co-creation to be further developed (Wulf-Anderson, 2012; Koelsch, 2015). This would in turn improve the dialogical quality of the research and help to address:

...a tension between maintaining one's own position whilst being open to other positions and a tension between creating a space for a plurality of voices and orchestrating the process, such that some kind of coherent structuring of voices is produced – a chorus rather than a cacophony (Phillips, 2009:9).

To maintain authenticity, the phrases used in the I-poems were maintained in the order they had been presented during the interview and with the exception of the omission of one word to promote the flow of the narrative, no changes were made. The complexity of editing the transcripts arose when determining the amount of text to include. Many I-poems are sparse and rely on minimal text, however some include more detail (Koelsch, 2015). Mine include whole sentences and this was a deliberate decision on my part in order to ensure that I did not lose the pace or cadence of speech or the intrinsic meaning therein. Similarly, the poems were given titles by taking verbatim quotes to promote co-creation and preservation of the student respondent's own voice, rather than my own interpretation (Carter et al, 2018). Perhaps too, as a researcher new to this way of working, there was a certain reticence on my part to make significant changes and shape the narrative to a greater degree. Part of me felt uncomfortable with the thought of taking too much

away and making it more of my own rather than a shared creation (Koelsch, 2015). I acknowledge that the action of choosing two transcripts immediately demonstrates my power as researcher and this use of purposive sampling for poetic effect may be considered as biased (Koelsch, 2015). However, by the stage at which this decision was made, I had a good grasp of the overall themes and meanings of the research and felt able to make an informed decision in this regard. Having incorporated verbatim text throughout the analysis, I feel confident that these I-poems elucidate the voices of the student respondents further and challenge the reader to consider the meaning whilst entering into an 'emotional universe' (Wulf-Anderson, 2012:576). I agree with Darmer (2006:555) that 'poetry comes with no prefabricated interpretations... but challenges the reader to make his own interpretation' and with Furman (2004) who suggests that poems can sensitize us to the lived experience of research respondents.

In addition to the I-poems, I also included poetry/prose as part of the idiographic data analysis. I found that doing so helped me to delve into the lived experience of the student respondents through engagement with imagery. This also enabled me to make sense of my own feelings and emotions both at the time of data gathering; when interpreting the verbatim scripts; and beyond. I acknowledge how:

Images conjured by the mind that are triggered by the written word may be attributable as much to the receiver as to the source. The images inspired by a poem engage the reader in a creative relationship that moves beyond passivity to co-creation (Furman, 2004:163).

It felt valuable to present my own lived experience of the interviews through autoethnographic poetry/prose in order to view and consider the socially constructed act of gathering data, from a different frame (Wall, 2006).

As well as encouraging a deeper relationship with the data, there has also been a therapeutic element to writing the poems. Chan (2003) suggests that the therapeutic aspect of writing poetry should be recognised and given greater credence in academia, particularly for graduate students. I agree with Chan (2003) and have found that poetry writing has promoted a greater understanding of self, and a certain level of stress relief. Attempting to make sense of the experience of interviewing through poetry/prose has enabled me to capture and document a moment in time in order to demonstrate the inherent power of the interaction. I felt a tangible sense of catharsis when each poem was written. I was led by my own thoughts and feelings in the production of the poetry/prose and did not have a predetermined plan for their construction. Each symbolises my engagement with the student respondents in an individualised and non-generalisable way and has a brief introduction in order to provide context and help set the scene (Furman, 2004). My reason for the inclusion of these pieces is to invite the reader to engage with the research through locating themselves in the poems and creating their own empathic understanding (Gallardo et al, 2009). 'The truth contained within the poem is ephemeral; it is created when the reader is moved by the words' (Koelsch, 2015:104).

Having written poems/prose as part of the research, I have been fortunate enough to have opportunity to present these at conferences and have received a positive

response. Engaging with these pieces of writing has transformed my presentation to that of a performance. Pelias (1999:ix, cited in Muncey, 2010:38) suggests that 'performance is a way of knowing... and such knowing resides in the ontological and is perhaps best expressed in the poetic'. This has enabled me to transform my delivery into a performance synthesising my past and present and as such is truly liberating. Denzin (2003:258) considers that 'performance ethnography is more than a tool of liberation. It is a way of being moral and political in the world... (it) is a moral discourse'. Developing my research to include a creative performative methodology has allowed me to present an accessible and unique insight into the lives of student respondents. Particularly when introducing this into my teaching, I have been aware of how the use of poetry/prose has enabled me to 'propose, envision, suggest, demonstrate, or model how things could be different' (Douglas and Carless, 2013: 59). I hope that the use of poetry/prose whether performed or in this text will encourage the IPA third hermeneutic as it engages with the feelings and imagination of the reader (Bryant, 2015). An attendee at a recent conference is now engaging with i-poems in her own research having been introduced to them by my presentation.

In conclusion, this research has enabled me to discover how best to consider my own history and the impact this has on what is a personal endeavour. Through engagement with IPA and the double hermeneutic (Smith et al, 2009), I have been able to develop my understanding of bracketing and how this can never be fully achieved. Instead, I have drawn on the creative aspect of my history to include an autoethnographic turn via poetry and prose as a means of appreciating my own position as researcher and to create the triple hermeneutic of IPA. This, together with



the use of a narrative device in the form of critical incidents, has led to rich reflective data and subsequent analysis in which the work of Hochschild and Lipsky has provided theoretical concepts to guide the way. The following chapter provides a detailed account of the patterns which emerged through the data and were captured as emergent themes.

### **2.22 Scrutiny Mutiny**

Wanting to learn from student respondents

Emotions and feelings to tend.

Responses have taught me, be open and honest,

lots of rules waiting to bend.

Writing in verse may seem diverse

but to me it's the obvious way

To make sense of my world, share with others who care

Making memories that I hope will stay

In the mind of the reader.

Now that I've freed her

I can't put her back in the bag.

Beth is out there!

Please don't doubt her

Integrity I cannot blag

(18.12.18)

## **Chapter 3 – Idiographic data analysis**

### **3.1 Introduction**

When completing the data analysis, initially I considered themes across the data set. Thereafter, I chose to study each narrative individually in order to present an idiographic context as the next analytical stage. It felt important for me to gain a view of the whole and then consider the particular rather than the other way around, which is different to how the method is presented in the seminal text regarding IPA (Smith et al, 2009). It is noted by Smith et al, (2009) that the IPA analytical process is not prescriptive and is therefore open to creativity, which encouraged me to work to my own preference. However, for the purpose of this thesis, idiographic accounts of the data analysis are presented foremost in order to introduce the individual student respondents' narratives in the first instance. This I hope makes best sense to the reader.

I have chosen to present the following two data chapters in what might be read as different and potentially challenging ways. The methods of data representation are intended to be deliberately comprehensive and clear while also presenting data in a somewhat formulaic manner. As a counterpoint, I introduce poetry and prose in the idiographic section to represent the data in a markedly different way. This technique of co-locating different strategies of data analysis is intended to demonstrate the competing perspectives with which I was making sense of and managing the data. Much research literature promotes the use of tables and prescriptive data sets, either qualitative or quantitative and as a new researcher my initial desire was to meet expectations in this regard. However, as I developed my thinking, I began to question how best to present the data. This quandary was part of the reason why I

introduced poetry and prose as a way of humanising the method of interpretative phenomenological analysis. This was a developmental aspect of my learning within the research, which I hope to capture within the thesis.

Contained by this thesis, the poems/prose are deliberately included concurrently in conjunction with other more traditional forms of data analysis in order to present a sense of disjuncture and tension of both content and process. So that 'academic text, poetic paragraphs, argument, and unexplained sensation are allowed to grate against each other' (Wulf-Anderson, 2012:577). This technique attempts to articulate tensions relating to the different voices represented; to stimulate knowledge creation through engagement with dichotomous information sources and to minimise power dynamics between different modes of research. It acts as a reminder that ultimately the research has a co-created aim and challenges the reader to consider different ways of understanding through the evoking of an emotional response (Koelsch, 2015).

Qualitative research encourages reflexivity and is interested in the lived experience of respondents in order to promote a greater, shared understanding of human experience (Carter et al, 2018). Whilst exposing my vulnerability to a degree through the presentation of emotionally-charged and subjective communication, I am aware that 'the poetic form is theoretically, methodologically and ethically grounded' (Wulf-Anderson, 2012:576). My growing awareness of the use of poetry and prose in research provides some comfort for me in validating my own experiences and a clear rationale for the inclusion of poetic representation as a method.

Doing so contributes new knowledge with regards the inclusion of researcher poetry and prose to elucidate the double and triple hermeneutic of interpretative phenomenological analysis.

### **3.2 Developing an idiographic analysis**

Having looked for patterns across cases, I then returned to the 'unique idiosyncratic instances' of the individual case studies (Smith et al, 2009: 101). As noted above, in keeping with the idiosyncratic nature of IPA which allows for freedom of expression when analysing the data, I chose to work from the macro to micro, so from patterns across cases to individual narrative accounts. The choice to analyse the data in this way was made in part by the number of narrative accounts. These eight accounts provided a wealth of data and my concern was to ensure congruence across themes. By focussing on the narratives more broadly, I was able to identify idiosyncratic themes in light of prior engagement with the student respondent cohort as a whole. This replicates the process of student learning whereby an appreciation of how others perceive social work helps to promote a better understanding of self (Henkel, 1995). Basing my consideration of idiosyncratic themes on previous macro knowing acknowledged that my initial learning had changed through the interview process itself. In my endeavour to consider each narrative on an individual basis, I revisited the audio recordings, transcripts and my field notes. These allowed me to focus on each individual account in order to maintain the idiographic element of IPA (Smith et al, 2009). I also wrote poetry and prose to re-engage with the interviews and to acknowledge my own feelings before and during undertaking the analysis. My research was a subjective experience and these pieces of poetry and prose represented a space in which I could identify and demonstrate my own thoughts and feelings throughout the research process.

### **3.3 Unique idiographic instances**

Having encouraged student respondents to consider particular episodes during their practice placements via reflective accounts, which they were able to reflect on during the interview process, I was keen to utilise this data as part of the research process. As suggested by Smith et al, (2009), in order to identify the idiographic themes of each interview, I identified super-ordinate themes based through contextualisation. Therefore, these themes related to temporal moments described by student respondents and located in their experiential learning. This encouraged a narrative approach to data gathering in which the important memories of key events were captured. Alongside this approach, I also identified themes through numeration by considering the frequency with which certain aspects of their accounts were referred to, therefore identifying patterns within each individual narrative.

I deliberately juxtaposed my reflections alongside the more prescriptive research method of gathering data in order to demonstrate my internal struggle in finding a means of promoting the voices of the student respondents. This deliberate clash of data analysis techniques may well be challenging to the reader and is meant to represent the challenge I discovered of trying to stay true to the concept of IPA while also making sense of the data from an autoethnographic viewpoint.

Making use of reflective accounts within the data gathering process and considering the idiographic aspect of IPA via a juxtaposition of my own autoethnographic stance alongside a more conventional mode of data analysis both contribute to new

knowledge in relation to the continued development of interpretative phenomenological analysis as a research methodology.

### **3.4 Idiographic themes:**

#### **3.4.1 Cathy**

My field notes capture that Cathy's narrative is very powerful from the outset. Her story is a brave and sometimes damning indictment of placement provision and support. Much is made of the importance of peer learning and it is worth noting that Cathy was a Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS) leader in stage two of the Social Work programme. Cathy describes herself as being almost an outsider and considers students as her peers rather than colleagues in agency teams.

My immediate response was one of sadness, guilt and a little anger at the systems that had made her feel so emotionally challenged. On further reflection I relate Cathy's narrative to the concept of identity scripts as in a social identity perspective (Turner et al, 2001). She seemed uncomfortable in adapting to the role expected of her without ongoing support from peers.



### Sharing Cathy's concerns

An unfamiliar town and a dusty, sun-lit railway station.

Here because Cathy's too busy to meet elsewhere and needs to return to work.

I feel that I am taking up her valuable time but she puts me at ease. No worries, this is her lunch break!

There is a sense of anticipation between us as we drive the short, busy route to a supermarket café. Her choice of venue and I immediately feel reticent and wish that I had planned more thoroughly.

The claustrophobic cafe is teeming with shoppers, most of them older, seemingly with all the time in the world; here with a very different purpose..... here to relax and chew over the price of fish.

The clatter and chatter made louder by acoustics caught on tape – a noisy relic for research posterity.

We sit with drinks and paperwork, research paraphernalia signalling our incongruous intent.

With her back to the melee, my fretful attempt to offer space for reflection amongst the lunchtime smells and noises.

No need to have worried. The words spill like over-filled coffee cups as though Cathy has been waiting forever to tell her story. A painful tale of shortfalls and lackings; of challenges beyond those expected, yet with hope for positive change.

Let down by systems and structures beyond control. I feel her pain but do not share my own.

Cathy's idiographic themes	Examples in transcript	Pieces of narrative
Helping others and also seeking help for self. Both are initiated to promote improvement and positive change	Cathy 8; 15; 57; 75; 683	'I was quite passionate about engendering change for the children, the things that they said were important to them'. (Cathy 75)
Advocacy as part of the social work role in order to promote social justice	Cathy 15; 84; 664 (as supervisor)	'...making sure the children's voices were heard, improving the situations for them and the support at home...' (Cathy 15)
Neoliberalism impacting on resources and affecting IP work	Cathy 31; 49; 400	'Well, we were really reliant on the prison procedures for safeguarding prisoners who were at risk of abuse or harming other people or self-harm and

		we could only follow the prison processes but they were really inadequate for lots of reasons. There wasn't enough prison staff, a lack of empathy amongst them...' (Cathy 400)
Lipsky's 'discretion' used	Cathy 96; 451; 599 (ethical satisficer)	'I think I'll just gradually build resilience against organisational things and learn how to practice in a way that I feel happy with in terms of accountability over time and I hope to feel confident enough that all the things I won't see so much as a problem...' (Cathy 599)
Lack of resources impacting on quality of support to students	Cathy 126; 200; 227; 393	'...my team had undergone a massive change and they were all very stressed and unhappy so I didn't want to feel a further burden to them because I knew that they were already stressed, so I didn't feel that there was that space for me. I did try and get a mentor, one specific person that I could go and talk to but unfortunately that didn't happen as she left.' (Cathy 227)
Importance of peer support in minimising power dynamics; supporting learning and promoting wellbeing (emotion work)	Cathy 139; 174; 257 (planting seeds); 296; 358; 460; 498; 619 (emotion work)	'Um, yeah, I've put why peer support works for me. Um, provides a critical friend to challenge my thought processes. Someone I can trust and be open and honest with. That comes back to the power thing of being equal, in the same stage of development so I don't feel like I'm either stupid or something's going to happen in line with accountability or anything like that.' (Cathy 460)
Peer support as a vehicle for managing 'intense practice events' (emotion work)	Cathy 332; 378; 520	'I would often go home and keep thinking about the things that had happened in the day because it was so shocking but having her (peer) to speak to in the evenings enabled me to

		make sense of it all and almost blank it from my mind until I went back into work and sort of move on to think about family life... So, I think I may well have burnt out without that support.' (Cathy 378)
The importance of trust between peers and in more general terms is an overarching, dominant theme	Cathy 580; 625; 712	The other thing I thought of where peer support would be useful is at training events...I felt like I shouldn't be in the room. But if I'd had a peer there I would have gained more out of the experience because they would be on the same level, be confused about the same things. You wouldn't feel like you were the only one.' (Cathy 712)

### 3.4.2 Andy

Never having met Andy before, this interview was a direct contrast to the previous one with Cathy. There was less fluidity though it still felt comfortable. The conversation took place in my office and due to our seating arrangements, I later realised that over my shoulder was a postcard on a pinboard pronouncing that ‘well-behaved women rarely make history!’ I wondered if Andy had noticed this and whether it had impacted on his perception of events. He made it clear from the outset that this was a learning event for him and he planned to engage in this interview in order to inform his own role as researcher on his Masters degree. He had read about peer learning and peer support and came well-prepared, if a little preoccupied with the difference between the two. This intellectualisation of the event meant that his own feelings were not always clearly articulated though he had clearly reflected and noted his position as a student mental health worker in an interdisciplinary context.

#### **Let them go**

Let them go, those things you filled your head with in readiness to meet me.  
Free your mind and talk instead of how it felt to be confused.  
Tell me more about emotions and how they influenced your thinking.  
It is clear you used the help you needed to get through troubled days.  
You can reflect and tell me how your peers played their part in teaching you the values and respect you now hold dear.  
Take strength from those around you to clarify your thinking.  
It is learning **and** support that you gained from valued peers.

Andy's idiographic themes	Examples in transcript	Pieces of narrative
Challenging and complex work which is emotionally charged.	Andy 9; 36	'So a lot of work around the practical needs but then also at the primary end work to do with the trauma they'd been through and the journeys... supporting them to overcome that. A lot of issues over separation from family'. (Andy 9)
Power of the social work role in interprofessional practice	Andy71; 83; 252	'So we had to... one gentleman who had mental health problems and problems with housing so we arranged a multi-agency meeting between the mental health team, housing and himself as well. So we were trying to get everyone on board to work with him. And that was successful but I think there's been occasions where it's been unsuccessful... (3.20) where professionals don't work together or organisations don't quite link up in the way they should. So that was frustrating and it was hard to deal with in terms of getting over that for the benefit of the service users'. (Andy 71)
Peer support mitigates power dynamics between learners; professionals and between learner and teacher	Andy 115; 129; 181; 223	'So we, can we explore a theory, can we explore an issue that had come up, so really actually kind of work together on it. Which is really helpful actually in terms of ..... My own self-confidence. If it was just me I don't think I'd have had the confidence to take the session just one to one but in a group it really works well'. (Andy 115)
Peer support as a vehicle for managing 'intense practice events' (emotion work) is a dominant theme.	Andy 223; 252	'We had two... well one difficult week but we had two deaths in my second placement. It was really interesting to see how the team pulled together then. If

		that wasn't there, if that team cohesiveness wasn't there it could have had a disastrous consequence. It was yeah a difficult week and everyone just looked after one another, and really helped each other and just got through that difficult stage. So that would mean for me I would look for it as a practitioner. I don't think I would kind of create it. It's not something you can create. I think it just develops. You just get to know people and they get to know you as a professional and how you work, how they work'. (Andy 223)
Supervision as a way of managing feelings and professional development	Andy 279; 309	'...she was very good at making sure afterwards that she made time for a supervision session to give me that space to reflect to go through it. (12.47) She gave me feedback as well which I thought was really useful. She could have gone away and said 'yeah, that's fine, off you go!' but she made sure she made time to go through it. Discuss it. Discuss the legal side as well as how it affected me as well'. (Andy 279)

Cathy and Andy present different viewpoints on why the system has failings. Cathy considers that neoliberalism and structural issues are the concern whereas Andy talks about the service user 'disengaging' with services and 'falling away' (32). Might it be that blaming someone else rather than the system as a whole provides a protective factor, so presenting the workplace as a less challenging environment?

### **3.4.3 Julie**

I knew Julie well in my role as academic tutor and lecturer and was careful to reassure her that I was undertaking this interview in my role as researcher. There were instances during the conversation when Julie was tearful and she noted later how the opportunity to talk freely about her placement activity had given her a sense of relief. Certainly this is how it felt to me. Julie expressed herself clearly and stated that she was comfortable with sharing her experiences with me. This supported my developing understanding of the importance of emotions in fieldwork and became a theme throughout the research (Letherby, 2014). It became obvious during this interview that the timing of the data gathering was ideal. The student respondents were looking retrospectively, albeit very recently, at their practice and had already spent some time reflecting. The sense of relief for the final year student respondents at having finished the programme was tangible as was their focus on next steps. At the end of the interview with Julie I asked if the interview had been helpful and thereafter added this question to the interview schedule. It was evident that the act of speaking freely about challenges faced was cathartic. This compares with the social work interview which often has a therapeutic outcome (Schulman, 2012).

In general, I felt privileged and grateful that the student respondents gave so freely of their time and were so open about their feelings and experiences. I felt a very powerful connection with those student respondents who I knew well. Even for those who I had met for the first time, the act of listening and recording information was very intense. I was spanning a boundary between my status as student and lecturer. I was able to acknowledge my student status in a very open, transparent way.

### The long road to recovery

We meet halfway, long distance research. How kind of you to take the time.  
 You look relaxed, refreshed and eager, ready to play this game of mine.  
 The coffee shop is not too busy, jazz playing softly through the air.  
 We sit across a table, frothy drinks to validate us here.  
 The tales you tell are full of sadness, speak of service users who  
 are caught in limbo, mental anguish, no-one else to turn to.  
 Of services failing, fraught, fragmented, caught in neoliberal hell.  
 Tears of injustice, indignation as you relay your stories well.  
 Discretion cannot soothe emotions, reflection though may play a part  
 in letting go, moving forward, seeing this ending as a new start.

Julie's idiographic themes	Examples in transcript	Pieces of narrative
Ill-prepared and unsupported	Julie 4; 25; 216; 574	'Okay so it was a statutory children's team, a Child in Need team, so it was working under Section 17 mainly. I spent the first (pause) I don't know... two or three weeks shadowing and learning, there was e-learning. like how to use the system and then sent out to do it. (Some incredulity in voice)'. (Julie 4)
Limited resources impacting on quality of student experience.  Subsequent lack of knowledge disempowering.  Significant weight of responsibility	Julie 32; 53; 70; 117; 148; 288; 450; 498	'And then you learn as you go along that there's actual prescribed sort of things that can be done with families but that need training in order to deliver them but I didn't even know that these things existed let alone the names of them. So to be able to ask a family worker how to do something and they would say 'do you mean this, this or this?' I didn't even know what those things are. So, yeah, they did give you support but I think as a student your lack of knowledge didn't help get the right support sometimes'. (Julie 70)



		<p>'And it's not like at the end of the day somebody's not going to get their fridge delivered on time, is it if it doesn't work? Those children could be left without a mother because her jumping off a cliff at some point has been a very high probability without that support around her...' (Julie 450)</p>
Isolation a concern when managing emotions	Julie 85	<p>'Ummm, I don't feel.... I don't feel we've had the same sort of peer support in third year as we've had in other years because we didn't see each other. I think the study groups were too big. I got nothing from study group this year. Ummm, so I didn't feel like I had that peer support that we were used to. But we were lucky, I was lucky in that my practice educator had three students. So she had group supervisions. So from that point of view I had peer support. Yeah'. (Julie 85)</p>
<p>Lack of support impacting on wellbeing is a dominant theme and conversely...</p> <p>Importance of peer support in promoting wellbeing</p>	Julie 96;125; 253	<p>'Okay, so I didn't really realise I needed it at the start. This is what I wrote about. So when you asked to write about maybe where you'd realised you'd missed peer support I think it was probably around January, February time and we hadn't been in Uni for a long time. I hadn't seen anybody for a long time and I was feeling really overwhelmed. Like I didn't want to get out of bed and in to placement in the mornings. Overwhelmed. And weekends I just wanted to shut myself away from the world. Overwhelmed'. (Julie 96)</p>
Power dynamics of supervision	Julie 148; 187; 201	<p>'So what's the first thing that's going to go? The actual support</p>

		<p>to a student who's nearly done. I understand that. But what I found really interesting is that the team manager would happily tell me that I'd turned a big corner in the last month and that things had all come together. And I was thinking that's a load of bullshit. Actually what's happened is that I've stopped caring and I've stopped asking and I've stopped demanding what I think I need, so you think I've got better but I haven't. I felt that I hadn't done anything differently in my last month, five weeks. Actually, I'd just decided to put my head down and just finish'. (Julie 187)</p>
<p>Team stress impacts negatively on student experience</p>	<p>Julie 169</p>	<p>'Ummm... well... that they.... I mean I obviously asked for supervision regularly, I didn't let it slide but that you do need supervision and that you need to use it. And also that... like frontline social work is what it is and it's like the team manager always says you know the child protection teams and the disability teams and the other children's teams could say 'sorry we're full, we can't take any more' but we can't ever say we can't take any more because we're the front door. So they were getting more and more and in hindsight I maybe didn't always realise it at the time but I was working in a team that was on the edge. And then Ofsted came and they went further up and my supervisor is now signed off. In fact in my last week she just went home with low mood and stress. And then my team manager was in tears so the senior manager oversaw the last week of Ofsted because</p>

		they couldn't sustain what was being asked of them'. (Julie 169)
Variability of IP working	Julie 347; 366; 417	'Umm, mental health workers didn't really seem to care. So they were just on their own agenda. That was most of them to be honest. Most of them like that. CAMHS and adults were like that. In hindsight. Particular conversations might be quite good but not as an overall profession. It didn't work. They were on their own agenda. I didn't particularly work with anybody else'. (Julie 366)

### 3.4.4 Anna

I knew Anna from my role as lecturer and developed an appreciation of her personal communication style. Anna's first language is not English and her speech is fast-paced and with a pronounced accent. I prepared for this by allowing additional time to transcribe the interview. Even so, despite having made notes to help with my memory of the interview, transcribing the material presented a challenge. This was particularly poignant as a critical theme running through Anna's account was one of discrimination based on her difference. My field notes reflect how Anna dealt with this oppression by demonstrating her capability over and above that expected of her. I felt her frustration along with her fatigue. It felt that she had been battling against inequality on a very personal level with little support apart from that offered in an interprofessional context. Her narrative was not the only one where the concept of groupthink was apparent. This takes place where practitioners in agencies rationalise and are uncritical of behaviour contrary to the value base of social work, thereby making it difficult for individuals to 'swim against the tide' (Postle, 2007: 255).

#### **Melt on the floor**

What you choose to tell me is painful to hear.  
Your commitment and passion is made very clear.  
Despite this, some others negate what you do,  
Dismiss your attempts and discriminate too.  
The hospital staff, interagency team  
Provide you with feedback, hold you in esteem.  
Yet social workers there to offer support  
Seem to forget all they've been taught  
about othering, oppression and just being kind.  
Groupthink under pressure is what springs to mind.  
You struggle against odds to push through the door  
all the time wanting to 'melt on the floor'.

Anna's idiographic themes	Examples in transcript	Pieces of narrative
Social work language/processes minimise emotional content	Anna 41; 29	Yeah, we don't see that, the review. We just did a package of care. I had a phone call from one client. The daughter rang me back saying her mum had a fall again. I had to say to her to contact the people who are doing her package of care at the moment and maybe they can arrange occupational therapy or somebody to review the assessment for her... But the patient doesn't come back to us. (Anna 41)
Interprofessional working promotes boundary spanning	Anna 68	So I attend a lot of different meetings with the family... and because they have a very medical model in the hospital I felt some clash with the team about the view... about capacity assessment and how the social model and the medical model... so at the end I had to talk about which model that they follow.....[indistinct]..... they are quite similar to us with the environmental model , just the ecological model like us but they still ask... they still do like person-centred and it's like... or the social approach but it's still like what the person can do or no can do and that is still very medical model. It's no made risking it's made safety risk. (Anna 68)
Advocacy as oppositional	Anna 87; 117; 127	It's just because if somebody has the use of a shopping trolley to walk inside the house for ten year, it is something you cannot

<p>Legislation promoting use of discretion</p>		<p>change because you're the professional. You can suggest, you can recommend but you not can impose because people have the right to decide what they want..... and because I know the legislation and I know what is there, what the client want and what they have a right, I can just say 'Sorry, she doesn't want that', and they have to accept that and they don't like (laughs). So I just carry on working with them and go on with the package. I can try in the support customer plan to recommend that she should be walking with the walker more than the shopping trolley – she's not allowed to use the shopping trolley because there is a high risk of falls... but I can't impose to the client not to use, because it's her choice. (Anna 87)</p>
<p>Student status impacting on relationship development</p> <p>Trust as a prerequisite for peer support</p>	<p>Anna 142; 171</p>	<p>In general I sense the team because they didn't know me, they don't know a student when they just come.... they just, everyone avoid you. No-one invite you to go anywhere, nobody..... so it was only one social worker who like took me under her wing and she showed me some of the stuff. But it took me a while for the others to accept me and I was pushing and also I tried to contact the main house to try to ask for other social worker to have by me. So it took me more than months to arrange meetings. I think this should not happen. (Anna 142)</p>
<p>Emotion work to claim space and promote a sense of agency is a dominant theme</p>	<p>Anna 161; 200; 254</p>	<p>I noticed I have to claim the space to be there. So the first three weeks I was there I just made cup of tea, I offered to help in everything. So, and I am</p>

<p>Working through adversity brings positive learning and raised self-esteem</p>		<p>very keen worker, so, 'I can do, I can do for, do you need help with that?' I had to gain that space because I'm not very shy I am proactive but if the student did not know what to do... they maybe sit there and maybe lost the placement. If at the end they start liking me and they start inviting me, then I am learning more. But it took me quite a while to gain at this pace. (Anna 161)</p>
<p>Emotional challenge of placement</p>	<p>Anna 234</p>	<p>But in general it was like.... I feel like... it was like battle all the time. It was tiring, very tiring. Like when I finished the placement it was like, 'Whoo (phew)' I melt. I melt on the floor because it was, I had to make an effort every day because in general the team only concentrate on my writing and my language because I was foreign.</p>

### **3.4.5 Richard**

Having taught Richard throughout his three years on the social work undergraduate programme, I was aware of his reflective stance and somewhat intense demeanour. The interview was clearly a vehicle for him to reflect on his practice placements and he took full opportunity to engage with the reflective piece in order to inform his thinking. It struck me how Richard presented a narrative in which he was clearly comfortable when working in an interprofessional context. He also considered the concept of peer support as especially valuable when having to deal with the emotional aspect of social work. He displayed a wonderful sense of optimism and enjoyment of learning through challenge. In so doing, he engendered a feeling of pride for me in my role as lecturer. The interview took place in a meeting room familiar to us both. I chose a seat and when Richard joined me he chose to sit opposite. This seating arrangement heightened the intensity of the interaction as we were sitting across a table and looking at one another throughout. For much of the interview we were joined by a noisy fly that buzzed around our heads. At first we both chose to ignore it but when it became clear that it was an interruption, we allowed a moment to note this.



### A Fly in the Ointment

Your story is absorbing, in part due to the sincerity with which you speak. You seem motivated by the desire to share learning in order to promote knowledge production... an act of altruism for which I am truly grateful.

The intensity of your memories stir the still air and fill me with wonder. You have come so far in a relatively short space of time.

Almost ready to take on the world of social work and make it your own. Then, deflecting from the purity of the occasion, an uninvited guest arrives. A large fly, buzzing around our heads and filling the space between the syllables. The incidental sound captured for posterity, encroaching on concentration both in the moment and on later inspection. Bringing a moment of levity to my transcribing task. Efforts to ignore the insect are futile. Finally, our acknowledgement of the fly helps to break the tension as your emotional journey is re-enacted.

Reflective responses planned carefully and with self-effacing scrutiny. The relentless fly is no match for our mutual sense of purpose. It finally admits defeat and retreats from whence it came.

I notice beads of concentration on your forehead, sunlight streaming across our faces. Sitting opposite but with thoughts side by side.

Richard's idiographic themes	Examples in transcript	Pieces of narrative
Interprofessional activity helpful as peer support ...but	Richard 15; 253	And the scenario that I've reflected on was around a case that I was working with from within the alcohol team and the peer support that I got while working with this particular situation and person, I got from a substance misuse specialist within that team as well (Richard 15).
Interprofessional activity a site of power issues	Richard 235; 263; 293	And that in itself was interesting from an interprofessional context. Because I expressed the concerns to the duty doctor who was very flippant and dismissive of my concerns, mainly I think because of my student status (Richard 235).

Peer support and supervisory support promoting reflection and decision-making	Richard 38; 58; 100	<p>So what I did was I spoke to my practice learning supervisor who then advised that I go speak to the team manager and the team manager advised me to get in touch with the courts to find out exactly what the nature of the offence was and what their process would be with him (Richard 38).</p> <p>And so quite fortunately I sat opposite a worker who'd worked with him previously and the support that I got from her was brilliant. I mean she asked me how I felt about the case and so I said, 'Well I'm surprised and shocked really that he's decided to do this and it kind of left me wondering what more could I have done and what more can I do to support him' (Richard 58).</p>
Importance of place in relation to where peer support is situated	Richard 315	
Peer support can help in the management of emotions	Richard 330	<p>I think it's really important, particularly in study groups. You know, there's been times when I've needed to use the study group for peer support and I've found that when I've had a particularly emotionally challenging week, I've taken stuff to study group and got support around that. And it's kind of stimulated other people in the group to talk about the emotional aspects of what they've been doing as well. So we've all kind of shared the emotional aspect of the work that we've been doing in our study groups and I hope supported each other through it. So I consider peer support to be crucial really to not only social work training but also to practice as a qualified practitioner (Richard 330).</p>

Building rapport through emotion work (and importance of endings Richard 142; 146)	Richard 84; 132; 142	<p>I wanted to make sure that I remained professional but also just acknowledged the feelings that I had from one human being to another. Because with this particular young man I felt like I'd built up a good rapport and was working with him in a person-centred way and in some ways I actually quite liked the person that I was working with, you know (Richard 84).</p> <p>So, yeah, I don't know what the outcome was. It would be interesting to find out I think to give me as a worker some sort of resolution to it (Richard 142).</p>
Importance of time and space to promote reflection (and the place of research in this R116; R371 – written reflection)	Richard 92; 116; 208	<p>And all of that I felt needed to be discussed and reflected on. I feel that the worker that I spoke to and the team manager in particular gave me time and space to do that which was brilliant, which is what was needed (Richard 92).</p>
The stressful nature of dealing with complex situations and dynamics.	Richard 109; 257	<p>Because with this case I remember having to be very clear with the young man's family that I was working primarily with him but also being mindful of the family dynamics as well. And there was a lot of stress and relationship stuff going on between the young man's dad and his mum and siblings who I hadn't met in the course of my work as well (Richard 109).</p>
Financial imperative impacting on service provision, impacting on service user, impacting on relationships	Richard 196	<p>And, you know, thinking about it now, that was the point where his mental health started deteriorating. It was at a place where it was stable and he was starting to make some positive</p>

		life choices and starting to take a bit more control for himself over his own life. But once that support was taken away, his mental health started deteriorating (Richard 208).
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### **3.4.6 Lauren**

As the only student respondent from stage two of the undergraduate programme, Lauren presented a somewhat different narrative. Her placement was in a voluntary agency where the demands of the role were very different due to her stage two student status. She clearly demonstrated an eagerness to learn and to make good use of the opportunities to do so on placement. She presented a disarming positivity which was a useful counter to the significant concerns raised by some other respondents. I know Lauren well in my previous role as study group tutor and was left with the sense that her engagement with this research was primarily for my benefit rather than hers. That she has given of her own time to support my learning left me with a feeling of being valued by her. I hope that our conversation helped her in some way too.

### How can we do better?

The room is one I have used before and I feel comfortable and confident. Lauren arrives with a disarming warmth that is her calling card. As ever, a scarf, bag and make-up that I associate with her age. She reminds me of my daughter, young, fashion-conscious and with a steely determination to achieve in a challenging profession where she wants to make a difference.

Lauren looks a little nervous and I try to banish her concerns with warm-up chatter.....phatic communication if you want the social work term!

Lauren is learning many technical terms and her narrative is peppered with 'social work speak'. It seems important to her that she is able to engage with this, to feel part of a profession that thrives on jargon. These words and phrases seem to represent a comfort blanket with which to keep her safe in the knowledge that learning is taking place and she is becoming a professional.

As Lauren speaks she makes hand gestures, particularly when searching for words to describe her thoughts and feelings. She talks about feeling 'fluffy' and 'overwhelmed' at first. Speaks of how peers help her to achieve a sense of belonging. Her story is one of hope tinged with frustration at services where relationship-building is no longer a priority..... too many people seeking support. How can we make things better when the resources are not available?

The time goes so quickly and then we are done. Lauren looks relieved that she has completed another test of her mettle and succeeded. It is clear that she has put herself out on my account.

I feel unable to thank her enough without sounding disingenuous and hope that somehow she will know how much her support means to me.

PS At Lauren's graduation ceremony I was able to thank her again and was pleased to be given this opportunity.

Lauren's idiographic themes	Examples in transcript	Pieces of narrative
Social work role and tasks defining student status	Lauren 7; L21	But it was doing assessments. Going in to the assessments blind as you would say. Didn't know what they were coming in for. It was on a first come first served basis. I was doing the initial gateway assessment which was literally gathering as much information as I can; trying to problem solve if it is too complex; referring on then



<p>However, interprofessional supervision still beneficial.</p>	<p>Lauren 95; 164</p>	<p>things and look at why this has happened but sometimes it would have been nice to have had a social work sort of perspective on it but that's an ideal world, so...(Lauren 53).</p>
<p>Interprofessional learning beneficial for both student and service users.</p> <p>Importance of space and place for interprofessional working.</p>	<p>Lauren 67;L265</p> <p>Lauren 76</p>	<p>There was just everyone from every different background. There was police. And everyone was quite friendly, everyone joined together, 'Oh this is what we did this way and this is so..'</p> <p>Yeah, there were lots of different skills and even if they weren't practicing at that time, it was all relevant a lot of the time (Lauren 67).</p>
<p>Value of peer support in role development and minimisation of anxiety, particularly when engaging in emotion work.</p> <p>Peer support also providing a sense of belonging and shared identity.</p>	<p>Lauren 118; 132; 220; 240; 280; 265</p> <p>Lauren 150</p>	<p>It sort of boosted your confidence, lowered your anxiety and made you feel like part of the team and that you were making a difference but that you were learning as well. So, it was great (Lauren 118).</p> <p>Umm, so I put on a general scale peer support is fantastic in our practice. I think if we didn't have it, it would be disastrous. I think we need it just to...sometimes you can just overthink something and someone just needs to say, 'No, this is it' and I think it's so good and just talking to people (Lauren 280).</p>
<p>Teaching methods and peer support promoting reflection</p>	<p>Lauren 177; 186; 265</p>	<p>Having the observations was great 'cos they came in and sometimes they'd say, 'Ooh you seem really confident', and I didn't feel confident at the time. (Indistinct) Obviously they had to pick apart everything and that</p>



		was good I found it really helpful, them saying 'Well you know, did you think about this or you use that' and I was thinking 'Oh, did I use that?' but obviously I was using it without knowing. So that was really good (Lauren 177)
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### **3.4.7 Heather**

I did not know Heather and was struck by her openness from the outset. On the day of the interview I learned that her husband was a student who I know well and I was at pains not to let this influence my thinking in any way. On further reflection, I wonder if the length of this interview which was by far the longest, was in part due to an over-reaction on my part. Perhaps I was overly-facilitative, if such a thing exists. I think it more likely though that Heather clearly used this time as a reflective event in which she continued to deal with the emotional disturbance caused by some of the more challenging practice experiences. It felt that she was still dealing with the trauma not only of the events she experienced but also of being treated almost as an interloper within the social work team. It became clear that she was making the most of this opportunity as a means of debriefing through continued reflection on challenging events. She had prepared thoroughly in order to consider instances in practice which were most poignant to her and I was pleased that she made best use of this opportunity to enable her to move forward into her chosen career.

### A pressured environment

We climb the stairs to our meeting room, drinks in hand, armed with memories, fresh and forceful.

I feel wrong-footed by the sudden revelation that your husband is a student of mine.

No reason why this should offer concerns but perhaps my role as researcher is destabilised for a moment.

The room is too hot for me and the comfy chairs are anything but. I perch on mine, notepad on knee and recorder poised expectantly on the low table.

You do not seem to notice my discomfort as you relax back into your chair and talk animatedly about the trials and tribulations of your time on placement.

I have difficulty keeping up. Pressure of speech and your rapid delivery takes some getting used to.

Gesticulations and colloquialisms fill the space with authenticity.

A tangible fear of compromising your values in the face of working practices.

Shocking revelations, delivered swiftly, impossible to justify. The push and pull of practice clearly depicted in real case scenarios.

Behaviours and practices, reprehensible and clearly not in keeping with the careful ethical stance which you have developed and hold dear.

Distressing and concerning for us both. Tears are barely kept at bay.

Necessity drives you towards an uncompromising future where professional status and financial reward give credence to the painful expectations of the role.

You are determined not to be worn down and I hope you succeed... a bright light in a gloomy place.

Heather's idiographic themes	Examples in transcript	Pieces of narrative
Student taking on complex, relational work which involves emotion work.	Heather 19; 239; 236; 582; 646	I had a caseload of about thirteen, fourteen and some of those... that would be a mix of Child in Need and Child Protection and a couple of Children in Care as well. And while my supervisor would have oversight of those, a lot of the work I would do independently until it got to a point that we really needed to involve... you know if it was escalating to Child Protection, for instance. So a lot of my work would be face to face with families and

<p>Emotion work not appreciated by colleagues (unless very extreme).</p>	<p>Heather 248; 542; 806</p>	<p>with the children and I'd be involved quite heavily in the report writing, the Child Protection conferences, organising strategy meetings, that sort of thing. So quite authentic to what a social worker role would be like rather than just on the side and just sort of observing and being involved on the peripherals. I felt like I got quite an authentic experience (Heather 19). 'You're too soft. You need to learn to toughen up...'(Heather 258)</p> <p>(So I suppose peer support is a bit more evident the more dramatic things are (laughs) (Heather 806).</p>
<p>Access to appropriate support a challenge.</p> <p>This in turn impacts on quality of work and suitability of endings with service users.</p>	<p>Heather 60; 71; 258; 354; 511</p>	<p>And everybody was immediately, not criticising me but on to me saying that I need answers about this, I need answers about this, make a decision in this, make a decision on that. And I'm thinking, 'I'm not even qualified yet'. And my supervisor hadn't even met the parents at this point either, so... and also I'm thinking, 'I finish in three days, how do I make sure this information's sort of...?' (Heather 71).</p>
<p>Decision-making linked to social justice.</p>	<p>Heather 57; 131</p>	<p>They deserved the chance to be assessed in the community together. So I really fought for that and I got them the foster care placement, um parent child placement to get them together and... but at the last minute something came out that I... basically at the strategy meeting I hadn't invited the police (Heather 57).</p>

<p>Decision-making creates significant pressure and bureaucracy.</p>	<p>Heather 87; 595; 641</p>	<p>And I suppose in some way it's tainted my experience a bit because while I look forward to going back and I've got a job there when I go back. I'm looking forward to it, I'm looking forward to getting stuck in and working with families again.....there's that air of....I know what sort of pressure's coming and how that can feel when all the decision making's left on you to do it (Heather 87)</p>
<p>Interprofessional working dependent on place, role (hierarchy), bureaucracy and relationship-building.</p>	<p>Heather 105; 120; 167</p>	<p>I think in some ways, you know what you find is that people end up in like silos and there's always a bit of a tension .... We live on the same floor and we're always arguing. So that was quite interesting (Heather 120).</p> <p>I think interpersonal working on most is quite helpful in working with different professionals but there are always those tensions with different agendas (Heather 167).</p>
<p>Peer support a vital resource in managing emotion work through reflection.</p> <p>This particularly important in view of paternalistic team approach.</p> <p>Also important in combatting isolation.</p> <p>Engagement in research also used as a reflective space to deal with emotion work.</p>	<p>Heather 225; 269; 283; 435</p> <p>Heather 227</p> <p>Heather 326; 393</p> <p>Heather 738; 775</p>	<p>The real support that I gained was... I had three friends on the MA course, we forged a bit of a friendship, we were feeling really close throughout and we've always had this sort of, like on Facebook but an email sort of thing, not public or anything...like a direct message sort of thing. And we've had this thread going on for ages where people will just sort of go on there and, 'Oh this has happened' and we offer support to each other like that (Heather 269).</p> <p>So thinking back to how I wrote it, like now I can still feel those emotions but I'm a bit more sort</p>

		of distanced from it (Heather 738)
Team holding a negative view of service users and how social work theory and values are subsequently undermined.	Heather 239; 302; 354	<p>So like people would sort of... you know you'd say something like, 'I'm worried about this child' and they'd go 'Oh yeah, the parents are like this aren't they? Oh yeah I know'. And it was just like a negative spiral which didn't really change anything. There was no suggestion of 'have you thought about doing it this way, or maybe we could look at it from this perspective' or something like that (Heather 302).</p> <p>So I was on placement and we were all sitting at the desks and one of the workers said, 'Oh my God, I can't believe this. I think this woman's pregnant again'. And then another colleague, my supervisor in fact, said 'Oh well, we can always hope for a miscarriage'. And then somebody else said, 'Yeah, that would be great'. And I just couldn't believe what I was hearing, you know. I was sort of sat there thinking... I don't know. It just made my stomach flip a bit. And equally, not only for the parent sort of being dehumanised within this whole process, I was thinking, 'You know you don't know me from anybody. I could have suffered five miscarriages and you're happy to talk about it as if it's this positive thing (Heather 354).</p>

### 3.4.8 Sharon

Having taught Sharon on only one occasion, she and I met in my office for the first time. I did not recognise her and so our encounter was fresh and new. She was extremely lively and clearly thrilled to be asked to be involved in the research. She had a significant interest in peer learning and support which is why she offered to take part and her motivation was a significant contributory factor to the conversation.

#### Research as an agent for change

With motivation clearly set, our time together feels well met.  
 You talk of peers with optimism and effervescent activism  
 spills into the conversation. Research as emancipation!  
 All bangles, smiles and easy chat. Eager to make a difference that  
 will help us both to make a change... no pressure! This should not feel strange.  
 Reminding me of why I'm here, both holding our profession dear.

Sharon's idiographic themes	Examples in transcript	Pieces of narrative
An appreciation of power dynamics and the impact on rights.	Sharon 23; 134; 338	So it's quite complex... daily life is interesting (laughs). We get to... yeah all sorts of people come in. My history is in youth work so working with adults, complex adults has been different, in terms of our kind of power imbalances... and their rights and things like that. So I've really taken a lot from there (Sharon 23).
Social work as a challenging activity.	Sharon 48; S3; S38	So I've only got a few weeks left for my placement now so I'm just trying to just soak it all up and yeah learn from it all really. But yeah, it's eye-opening, yeah definitely eye-opening, yeah

		absolutely. Yes, I don't know what else to say about that (laughs nervously) (Sharon 48).
Significant impacts of interprofessional working.	Sharon 59; 73; 87	So yeah, it's been a lot... the list is endless actually in terms of interagency (Sharon 87)
Space an important factor in relation to interprofessional working.	Sharon 119	... it works well outside but with inside the building, we call it the mothership, the centre in (agency) because that's where everyone's congregating and we've spread right out from there (Sharon 119).
Relationship-building important when developing interprofessional working practice.	Sharon 123	But you know being able to speak directly to that person you need to have that relationship rather than it just being a phone call or an email, you know? Just absolutely directly just going to that person, you know it just makes so much difference and it works really, really well (Sharon 123).
Social work as a political activity	Sharon 105; 134; 151; 283; 355	There's a real gap there, a real gap. So it's quite sad and I know that mental health services are getting cut even more so I'm not going to get my hopes up in thinking anything's going to change soon but I think maybe what could happen in the future is (agency) could maybe get better at sort of applying for money themselves, you know, to start employing mental health professionals. I think that's the only way. It's not going to come top down (laughs). Sad to say it but maybe privatisation is the answer in this... when there's a need to be met you've got to meet it so... Yeah, so that's been very interesting to see that (Sharon 105).



<p>Lipsky's discretion compromised by power dynamics.</p>	<p>Sharon 147; 274</p>	<p>Actually the other day I was talking to my manager, one of the managers about how all these interagency meetings are fantastic but really there need to be all managers going to these to actually make some change or do deals. Because actually we could all go there and say, 'Wouldn't that be great', or 'Wouldn't that be great', but can't make any of the decisions. So actually the decision-makers need to do much more of the interagency work so that the gaps can actually be met or changed. You know? (Sharon 147)</p>
<p>Peer supervision highly valued as a means of promoting wellbeing.</p>	<p>Sharon 174; 258; 331</p>	<p>And it's just totally feels much more... it's so much of a safer environment for me and for my fellow placementee, (laughs) that we can moan about the organisation if need be but also talk about the university side. And no-one else is in our position other than us, you know. We are doing very different roles within the organisation but, you know, the frustrations are still the same and the demands are still the same. So, yeah, it's been really good and I think it's been great for her development. She's not ever had any peer supervision experience before and I said to her I was going to take notes which I have done but I haven't done anything with them. So, (laughs) they're just sort of there you know, but definitely I think in terms of self-care, I think it's one of the most important parts of frontline work, most definitely. Yeah, that's how I see it anyway (Sharon 174).</p>

<p>The space and time of where peer support takes place is very important.</p>	<p>Sharon 218; 258</p>	<p>...personally I feel that peer supervision is an incredible way of promoting self-care of frontline staff when there is a structured process that enables positive action (Sharon 331).</p> <p>Yeah, so also being away from... because where we meet is sort of neutral, so we meet halfway. So we meet in a completely neutral place and again it's getting away from that environment to properly think about it and it's... we're not in hers, we're not in mine, we're not at the university (laughs), so it really is like a place where we both know the rules are just like, this is our time for us to be, just talk about what we want, to share ideas about uni stuff if we want, and just support (S218).</p>
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The following two i-poems are included as a representation of the idiographic narratives shared by student respondents. These clearly articulate the variation of experiences and clarify the intensity of the emotional engagement shared by student respondents during the process of data gathering. For further consideration of this poetic device, please see section 2.21.



### 3.5 Julie's I-poem - Overwhelmed

I was doing social work assessments initially.

I was thrown in but that was good.

I didn't even know what 'direct work' meant at the start [laughs].

I got nothing from study group this year. I hadn't seen anybody for a long time and I was feeling really overwhelmed.

I didn't want to get out of bed and in to placement in the mornings... overwhelmed.

I just wanted to shut myself away from the world... overwhelmed.

I realised that maybe I did need support.

I was just feeling really ... I don't know, out of my depth...I was getting no support.

I'd just decided to put my head down and just finish.

I just kept getting told that I didn't have confidence in what I was doing. It's because no-one's listening to what I'm doing, no-one's watching what I'm doing.

I still have nightmares that I've made wrong decisions. [laughs but wipes tears from eyes]

### **3.6 Richard's I-poem - Peer support is crucial really**

I was there as a student social worker.

I held a caseload.

I got a telephone call from his father .... his son had attacked him with a knife while under the influence of alcohol. As a result he'd been arrested and he was now in prison for that offence.

I spoke to my practice learning supervisor.

I sort of had the feeling that I could have done more to prevent him from misusing the alcohol in such a way.

I sat opposite a worker who'd worked with him previously and the support that I got from her was brilliant.

I wanted to make sure that I remained professional but also just acknowledge the feelings that I had from one human being to another.

I felt like I'd built up a good rapport.

I like to practice from a relationship-based perspective.

I thought it was just really unfair.

I expressed the concerns to the duty doctor who was very flippant and dismissive of my concerns, mainly I think because of my student status.

I was in a place of not knowing.

I came away from it feeling quite angry with the GP.

I spoke about this with my supervisor.

I wouldn't consider her to be a peer because of the power dynamics in the relationship.

I'm looking forward to the challenges of working with GPs.

I've had a particularly emotionally challenging week, I've taken stuff to study group and got support around that.

I consider peer support to be crucial really to, not only social work training but also to practice as a qualified practitioner.

## Chapter 4 - Looking for connections in the emergent themes

### 4.1 Introduction

Our personal worlds are complex and unique but share certain characteristics and this enables us to participate imaginatively in another person's world (Muncey, 2010:11).

The emergent themes were initially listed in chronological order and typed with an indicator of which interview they came from (student respondent pseudonym initial or name and line number). This enabled me to revisit the interview to ensure that the theme could be contextualised if required. As mentioned previously (2.19), some themes were also highlighted in green, underlined in green or given a 'PP' label (possible pearl) to highlight those that assumed prominence for me during the initial exploration. Smith (2011) referred to the use of pearls in order to develop the double hermeneutic, whereby I am making sense of the student respondents' narratives through the identification of brief extracts which illuminate sense-making. This concept aided my analysis and as I was tentative in my exploration of data, I referred to these brief excerpts as 'possible pearls'. These aided my subsequent collation of the themes.

The themes were cut individually from the paper list and then attached to flip chart paper. Broad headings based on an initial analysis of the interview content, identified to group the themes were:

Reflection/research

Supervision

Social work

Peer learning

Interprofessional practice

Student/practice placement

The majority of the themes fitted easily into these groupings though there were inevitable overlaps, for example supervision and peer learning or social work and practice placement. On these occasions I considered the themes in the context of their perceived importance within the interview in order to decide where best to situate them.

#### **4.2 Super-ordinate themes developed from patterns across narratives:**

Connections and patterns between the themes were identified via abstraction and subsumption in order to build super-ordinate themes. Abstraction involves clustering themes and developing a name for these which then becomes a super-ordinate theme. Subsumption is a similar process whereby the emergent theme is first identified and then related themes are brought together (Smith et al, 2009).

#### **4.2.1 Reflection/research**

There were 18 emergent themes to consider under this grouping. I first separated these where possible into reflection and research. The 'possible pearls' identified in this grouping were useful as they summarised much of the content. Under the heading of reflection, the 'possible pearl' related to a metaphor in which reflection was considered as a means of planting seeds for the student (Cathy 260). It was clear that students recognised the importance of reflection in student development (Lauren 265) and that reflection was a useful vehicle to develop peer learning (Andy 189).

Students also related the importance of reflection to the observation process and subsequent feedback. The observation process was seen as helpful in developing skills through reflection (Lauren 177) and the importance of time and space in order to reflect on the support given was noted (Richard 93). As well as formal positive feedback engendering confidence (Lauren 149), informal feedback was also considered a positive resource (Lauren 152) which provided a sense of belonging (Lauren 159).

Some themes crossed over between reflection and research and were related to the written account which the student respondents were invited to bring to the interview. Overall, reflection and the research were noted as being cathartic (Heather 637). The written account was helpful in informing the content of the interview (Richard 371) and for my own practice as a researcher I found that the reflective account was a useful way to bring the interview to a close. I used it as a vehicle to end the interview by asking whether the student respondent had found it helpful and how it



could be perceived as promoting the benefits of reflection for the student and myself (Richard 381).

In terms of the research grouping, it became clear that the research was seen as cathartic (Richard 15; 183) though there was also a comment that suggested how filtering information to bring to the interview process involved a significant amount of emotion work/labour (Julie 669). This is a 'possible pearl'. Research was seen as a powerful medium to promote an emotional connection with student status (Sharon 464). One student respondent considered how the research could be an agent of change (Cathy 214). It was also apparent that there was a theme of research being valued as a reflective space, (Heather 737); a means of continuing the reflective process beyond the experiential learning (Richard 116) and this reflective space aiding in the management of highly-charged emotions (Heather 776).

Through subsumption I identified the super-ordinate theme and related themes:

**Reflection and research as cathartic:**

Research requiring emotion work/labour

Research as a reflective space

Reflection as a learning activity (planting seeds)

Feedback as a requirement of reflection

### 4.2.2 Supervision

There were 29 emergent themes in relation to supervision with no 'possible pearls'. Initially I separated these into the role of supervision; how supervision is perceived as supportive; power dynamics in supervision and concerns about the efficacy of supervision.

Good supervision was held in high regard by all student respondents. The most laudable aim of supervision was to promote social justice (Lauren 170). It was also considered as an exploratory space (Andy 117) in which to develop professional confidence (Andy 279); and promote sense-making of challenging situations (Lauren 164; Andy 263). Supervisory support promoted decision-making (Richard 38) and errors of judgement in practice were minimised with supervisory support (Andy 292).

An important aspect of the supervisory role was to ensure that work was both manageable and suitable (Julie 23). It was also an important place to receive critical feedback. In one case a lack of this feedback was perceived to lead to learning opportunities not being maximised (Cathy 286).

Supervision was also perceived as a way of managing feelings and developing learning when achieved in a timely manner (Richard 267; Andy 279). Emotional labour was engaged in as part of supervision (Lauren 110).

The relational aspect of supervision was deemed to be significant. Supervision needed to take place in a trusting environment (Heather 442) with a supportive manager/supervisor (Heather 81). The support provided through supervision should be separate from practice teaching (Heather 485; 555). A supervisor was considered as a peer (Lauren 95) or alternatively supervision was experienced as being more impactful than peer support (Andy 307). The supervisory relationship was important in order to avoid isolation (Julie 584). Supervision could take place in an interprofessional context (Lauren 55) and in general was considered to be a supportive activity (Lauren 288). It was perceived as being most successful when there was a good 'fit' between supervisor and supervisee (Heather 533).

Power dynamics were also considered in this theme. Relationships within the supervisory model were seen as important in promoting a balance of power (Sharon 446). The power dynamics between supervisor and student were noted (Richard 320; Cathy 586) and it was apparent that supervision could be used, perhaps inadvertently, as a means of exerting power (Julie 163).

Lack of supervision was seen as a disempowering factor (Julie 160). This deficiency of engagement was impacted by a negative working environment (Heather 302) and supervision was also affected by resource constraints (Julie 148). So the power exerted by the agency was seen to impact on the efficacy of supervision.

Through abstraction, I identified the super-ordinate theme and related themes:

**Box 2 Supervision as a valuable relational activity to promote learning:**

Supporting professional development

Promoting engagement with feelings and a sharing of emotions

Relationship-building vital to minimise power differentials

Efficacy of supervision dependent on resources

### **4.2.3 Social work**

54 emergent themes were identified. Three of the themes were 'possible pearls': social work as an emotionally-charged activity (Julie 306); difficult decision-making around how to share limited resources (Julie 450) and social work phrases/language used to minimise emotional content (Anna 41).

I separated this whole list of themes into roles and responsibilities; social work and emotions; perceptions of difference and social work as a political activity.

To begin the section on roles and responsibilities, I first considered this more broadly and then looked at specifics. So, the word 'challenging' featured in the majority of interviews with reference to the social work role. Social work was described as a challenging activity (Sharon 50) and a challenging profession (Lauren 33; 48); with the role being considered as extremely challenging (Heather 692) as well as challenging but also a rewarding profession (Heather 580). It was also clear that this was a challenging climate for service provision (Sharon 34). Sometimes views were dichotomous. One student respondent considered how despite these challenges social work was also seen as a positive activity (Heather 344) while also promoting social work as having become a paternalistic and cynical activity in which feelings are negated (Heather 355).

The importance of role and purpose was noted (Richard 7) and one student respondent suggested that the role was one of 'helping' in order to promote

improvement for service users (Cathy 8). It was acknowledged that in order to do so, the maintenance of appropriate boundaries were an important aspect (Lauren 296) in what was considered to be a relational activity (Lauren 222). This was considered to be complex work requiring a range of skills and knowledge (Andy 37) in order to work alongside service users in crisis situations (Richard 22) and difficult circumstances (Julie 569). It was considered that the evolving social work role is becoming less-involved in relationship-building (Heather 604). However there was still an expectation that social workers would provide encouragement and professional advice (Lauren 204) as well as manage endings skilfully (Anna15).

The emotional content of the social work role was perceived as extremely challenging and traumatic (Heather 701). Social work was described as challenging work due to being an emotionally charged activity (Julie 306; Andy 9). Anna (41) used language pertinent to the social work profession in order to minimise the emotional content. This highlighted the professional language with which student respondents identified (Julie 4).

Professional status was seen as a motivator in choosing to study social work (Heather 609) and this supported the perception that there was a social work perspective which differed from that of other workers in the helping services (Lauren 21). There was also a perception of difference within the profession and a hierarchy within social work in relation to managing risk (Heather 165). Similarly, the assessment function as part of the role was seen to benefit not only the service user but to also provide prestige to the student (Lauren 7). Local authority social work was

considered as a more challenging environment than the third sector, particularly in relation to finding time for reflection (Sharon 241) and statutory social work was represented as busy and bureaucratic (Heather 615). The delineation of service provision was presented as suiting a managerialist imperative (Heather 11). This, along with finding it difficult to take time away from the role to refresh (Julie 506), was one of the factors leading to difficulties in the role leading to disenchantment with the profession (Julie 509).

Social work was considered to be a political activity (Sharon 112; 151), closely linked to advocacy, particularly in light of depleted resources (Julie 443). The advocacy role was related to the promotion of social justice (Cathy 16; 86) and to taking an oppositional stance when required (Anna 93). Social work and its relationship to social justice was clear (Cathy 59; 419; Julie 308).

Power was considered as a significant issue in social work (Sharon 394) with much power invested in the professional role (Anna 108) leading to issues of care versus control (Anna 88; 98). There was an appreciation that complex decision-making was required as part of the role (Richard 35) and that social workers had the power to make influential decisions about what support or care should be provided to service users and their families (Julie 554).

Interestingly, the bureaucratic imperative was more cause for concern than the emotional aspect of social work (Heather 592) and the process-driven, functional

aspects of the role were seen as a challenge (Julie 561; 606; Cathy 14; Anna 34).

This conflicted with the ethical stance of student social workers which was constantly under challenge (Heather 433). The importance of values and integrity congruent with social work was noted (Heather 293) and legislation was seen as a means of promoting social work values (Anna 80) and the use of discretion (Anna 125).

Through subsumption I identified the super-ordinate theme and related themes:

**Box 3 Social work as a challenging profession:**

Role and purpose defines the profession

Social work is emotionally challenging

Social work is subject to a bureaucratic imperative

Social work is a political activity requiring an ethical stance



#### **4.2.4 Peer learning**

As the student respondents were invited to participate in order to consider their views on peer learning, it was not surprising that this heading attracted a large number of emergent themes, some 85 in total, though there were several overlaps and duplications. Of these, 12 were 'possible pearls'; peer support promoted wellbeing (Sharon 331); promoted discretion as a means of minimising power dynamics and supported emotional wellbeing (Sharon 346). The efficacy of peer support depended on people, place and content (Andy 196); study groups were considered as important places for peer support particularly in terms of emotional support (Richard 329). Peer support helped to manage difficult feelings (Andy 223); as well as 'intense practice events' (Andy 256); it also promoted a collective identity (Andy 234) with peer on a journey of discovery together (Andy 231). It was perceived as reactionary (Sharon 262); used as a reflective space (Julie 134) and promoted honesty and appropriate challenge (Cathy 301) and could become validated as peer supervision ((Sharon 165).

The majority of student respondents spoke of peer support rather than peer learning or peer supervision. Those who discussed peer supervision noted that this was a more structured activity, often prearranged either by the agency or between students themselves. I have therefore used the term 'peer supervision' only when this is the language used by the student respondents. In order to consider themes, I made use of the 'possible pearls' to inform my thinking. I considered where and with whom peer supervision takes place and then looked at why and how it is considered as such a valid activity by student respondents.

In terms of who engages in peer support, it was considered to be important both as a student and practitioner (Richard 340), however in the main, the students were clear that it was a useful learning device for them. It was described as promoting a sense of collective identity (Cathy 397; Andy 234) with other students considered as peers (Cathy 313) and on a learning journey of discovery together (Andy 110; 231). The informality of peer learning was considered as important (Andy 169), though there was recognition that this learning opportunity was not the preferred means of engagement for all (Andy 207) and was not always readily available (Andy 214). It was also noted that peer support was perhaps less helpful than supervisory support (Andy 372). Heather (266) agreed that student status could impact on the efficacy of peer support as it relies to an extent on professional knowledge (Heather 858). Peer support can sometimes blur boundaries between professional versus personal and impact on friendships (Lauren 330). However working alongside others who share the same practice issues is considered to be useful (Andy 149).

The physical and emotional space where peer support is situated is considered to be vital and much of this also relates to the time given for this activity. Peer support is seen as a mutual space for managing concerns. Engagement with peer support is dependent on the time available ((Heather 825) and the space (Julie 85; Sharon 267; Richard 315; Sharon 218). Students have often used social media as a conduit for managing feelings (Heather 437) and this is helpful for students who rely on support over distance (Sharon 229). Peer support among students via social media is considered as a positive resource (Heather 269). On occasion peer support can also continue when in the home environment (Heather 560). Finding the time and place

can sometimes present a challenge (Julie 648; 654), as peer support is often reliant on the learning environment (Heather 212; 837).

In terms of educational provision, tutorials are a useful place in which to engage in peer support (Heather 284) and study groups are valued in promoting peer support (Lauren 132) and in promoting dialogical learning in a group context which is then transferable in practice (Lauren 135; 626). Peer support may also be used as a mechanism for breaking down barriers (Andy 127).

The reasons for why peer support is greatly valued (Lauren 280) are many; and place, position, role and function all play a part in its success (Andy 367). Peer support is seen as a reflective space (Heather 296; Sharon 211; Julie 134)) in which students are enabled to understand their own situation by providing another perspective and enabling the student to reach a resolution (Richard 60). One student felt that peer support needs structure in order to validate the reflective process (Sharon 271) while others placed value on the opportunistic element of peer support (Sharon 264) as beneficial as and when required (Richard 101) and so useful as a learning opportunity (Cathy 324). The immediacy and timing of peer support is seen as important in managing trauma through reflection (Heather 724). Peer support works well in conjunction with reflexivity (Andy 201).

Student peer support is often seen as a way of managing difficult feelings (Heather 397; Andy 223) and of sharing strong feelings in relation to practice issues (Heather

449). It is a mutual space for managing concerns (Cathy 162); provides an opportunity to manage 'intense practice events' (Cathy 336; Andy 256) and is therefore sometimes reactionary (Sharon 262). For all of these reasons, as a prerequisite, peer support needs to be based on trust (Cathy 591; Anna 176). Peer supervision is a means of promoting wellbeing (Sharon 188; 331) and value is placed on this support in developing confidence and managing anxiety (Lauren 116; Andy 119). It can also be used as a motivator for seeking support (Julie 117).

Peer support can be helpful in managing challenging environments (Andy 242) including those relating to service provision (Richard 202). Peer support is seen as a political activity related to Lipsky's discretion (Sharon 283), a way of confronting or even minimising power dynamics (Sharon 483; Cathy 145) and potential agent for change (Sharon 380; 425).

Peer support is not limited to students engaging with one another but can also be provided to students within an organisational team structure. Shadowing is recognised as a peer learning opportunity (Julie 217) and can also promote boundary spanning (Cathy 510). Team support is more likely when a traumatic event has taken place (Heather 806) and is less likely to flourish in agencies under pressure from funding cuts (Sharon 356). So peer supervision may be planned but not then carried out due to pace of work (Heather 221). Students considered peer supervision to be a valid activity (Sharon 165) as a safe space to discuss issues (Sharon 439) and to meet the proficiency capabilities for social work (Sharon 200).

However, it was noted by one that there is a lack of understanding about peer supervision (Sharon 498).

Educationally, peer support is used to share ideas (Andy 122) and to produce knowledge (Lauren 183). Having a relationship with a peer encourages learning (Andy 181; 204) and can provide opportunities for sharing and developing skills and knowledge (Andy 405). This encourages the maintenance or development of social work values (Andy 138) and can be useful when focusing on the specific nature of a placement (Andy 165) and can be measured in terms of efficacy (Andy 193). Working alongside other professionals promotes learning (Andy 374).

Through subsumption, I identified the super-ordinate theme and related themes:

**Box 4 Peer support as a meaningful activity:**

Efficacy depends on space (place and time)

Importance of trust

Conduit for mutual management of feelings and promotion of wellbeing

Reliant on learning environment

#### **4.2.5 Interprofessional practice**

This heading generated 41 emergent themes, two of which were 'possible pearls'.

These related to the bureaucratic imperative impacting on interprofessional practice (Heather 131) and the related importance of space (time and place) being available for the successful implementation of interprofessional working (Sharon 59; 119).

The theme presented clear binaries between the benefits of interprofessional practice (IP) and the constraints impacting on the ability for IP to take place. These constraints were often related to the power differentials as part of a managerialist imperative. In addition to concerns about this in a broad sense (Heather 131), it became clear that resource issues including budget constraints can affect IP work (Cathy 39; Richard 199). Political imperatives often lead to a lack of cohesion between professions (Cathy 50) and more markedly, even between departments within social services where it was noted that IP work can be challenging, as can liaising between adult and children's services (Heather 141). So fragmentation between services impacts negatively on IP working (Julie 366).

Adding to this political issue relating to resource constraints, student respondents acknowledge the impact of power dynamics both on an individual and structural level. The perceived roles of professionals can impact on credibility and influence power dynamics (Richard 228; 237) and these power dynamics influence the efficacy of IP work (Andy 83) and gender may also play a part in this (Richard 293).

It is acknowledged that IP working has challenges across a range of professions (Heather 207) and it can lead to frustration when IP does not appear to work effectively (Andy 79). Student respondents considered how to mitigate these concerns and looked to the importance of boundary spanning (Anna 68) as well as finding appropriate space (time and place) in order to develop IP relationships (Sharon 366).

Although Lipky's discretion could be compromised by the perceived power differentials in relation to IP working (Sharon 154), it could be used effectively in order to develop a boundary-spanning strategy (Cathy 95) as it was noted that there are professional boundary issues in IP work (Cathy 43). Different theories and values can be the cause of conflict when working together (Anna 71) and IP working often relies on the professional decision-making of others (Richard 43) which can unfortunately lead to othering in relation to professional roles (Anna 114).

A common theme was that of IP work being dependent on place and time (Julie 347). Identifying a suitable place in which to engage with IP work was considered as important (Heather 107;158; Richard 274). Time was valued in order to develop IP relationships (Cathy 81) though it was acknowledged that IP engagement depends on individuals to a degree (Richard 293). Providing space for IP to take place either in terms of time or place is helpful (Sharon 59; 119) and this often depends on having appropriate systems in place (Sharon 73) as IP works both within the agency as well as across organisation (Lauren 44). Without these, there is a lack of

opportunity for relationship-building to promote IP work (Julie 357) which is a vital aspect of good IP practice (Sharon 125).

The ultimate goal of IP work is to meet the needs of service users (Richard 278) and tenacity is a requirement of IP work (Julie 492). The social work role requires skills in IP working (Anna 8) as often the social worker takes a coordination role (Andy 70) or may be seen as the expert in an IP context (Richard 352). Students value informal networks in order to generate IP work (Heather 120) and peer supervision can help to develop positive strategies for interprofessional work (Sharon 432). Peer support can also be used as a means of devising coping strategies (Sharon 413) or as a means of managing emotion work/labour in this context (Sharon 405). Overall it appears that working together relies on communication skills, time and resources (Anna 59).

Through subsumption, I identified the super-ordinate theme and related themes:

**Box 5 Interprofessional practice is dependent on skills, time and resources:**

IP work promotes boundary spanning activity

Role definition and power dynamics should be acknowledged

Systems and resources influence the efficacy of IP work

IP practice is of benefit to service users and professionals

The next heading which I initially used to divide the themes was 'student/agency'.

Once I had collected the themes it became clear that there needed to be further



division of the heading in order for consideration of the themes to be manageable.

Whilst there is much crossover between the themes, it became clear that the practice learning opportunity depended much on the dynamics of the agency/organisation and resulting relationships. These dynamics influenced the student learning experience, which in turn impacted on their wellbeing and capacity for using discretion and emotion work.

So, in order to make better sense of this picture, I will first consider the placement agency and then go on to look at the student learning experience and their resulting wellbeing.

#### **4.2.6 Agency/practice learning environment**

This heading produced 56 themes with one 'possible pearl', this being how Lipsky's discretion was evident when managing a resource issue which had a direct impact on a service user (Julie 469).

Staying with the impact of service provision for service users, a competing perspective was noted by the same respondent in relation to how Lipsky's discretion could also be used to the possible detriment of service users (Julie 530). There was a commonality of response concerned about whether service provision adequately meets service user need (Sharon 135) as there appear to be gaps in service provision (Sharon 97). Whilst recognising the complexity of service provision based on need (Sharon 17), it was noted that lack of resources can lead to lack of appropriate support (Richard 210) which in turn impacts on the wellbeing of service users (Julie 440). The bureaucratic imperative seems to be contrary to the promotion of service user wellbeing (Anna 47) as does a lack of resources impacting on the quality of support provided to service users (Cathy 67). Whilst role and purpose is defined by legislation (Anna 27), there appears to be a 'taken-for-grantedness' around service provision (Sharon 21). So although it is acknowledged that choice is important for service users and their families (Richard 126) and there is a need for generic preventative services (Richard 123), service provision is sometimes deemed to be unsuitable or inadequate (Lauren 354). It is also important to build relationships with service users (Lauren 16) in order to identify if service provision is useful or invited (Richard 129).

Unfortunately, the resource issues identified above also impact on the student experience of placement (Cathy 270; 441; Julie 38; 54; Heather 511; Anna 138) in part relating to the kind of work on offer (Julie 32) and subsequently on individual student need (Cathy 129;237). Individual team members are recognised as valuable resources (Julie 405), however they are often working in teams with high stress levels. It is noted that team stress impacts negatively on the student experience (Cathy 229; 620; Julie 178) and this in turn affects student motivation (Julie 193). Students are aware of having to learn in a pressured environment (Anna 265).

Power differentials inherent in team dynamics also impacts on students (Heather 316; 325; Lauren 27; Anna 148). The team dynamics can make a difference in how a student is managed (Anna 173;192) and is important in determining appropriate support for the student (Lauren 316). Agencies are seen to hold a significant level of power (Julie 734) and can sometimes present a paternalistic approach to supporting students (Heather 233). In order to mitigate this, an acknowledgement of human rights is considered as important in managing power dynamics (Sharon 27). Power differences can impact on the ability to share and reflect with others (Julie 142) and this can relate to role definition creating a divide between colleagues (Julie 46) based on differences of status and cultural identity (Julie 49). On a more positive note, teams are able to modify roles in order to deal with crises (Cathy 452) On occasion, students feel like interlopers (Heather 381) and feel discriminated against based on their future plans (Julie 580) or because of other issues (Anna 241). Groupthink affects the level of support available (Heather 378) and personality traits are seen to impact on placement benefits (Lauren 89) including group activity (Lauren 140).

On the whole then, a fairly negative picture of the agencies in which the students have undertaken their practice. However, it is interesting to note that not all the students are represented within these themes. Andy's voice is not represented here because the focus of his interview was very much about peer learning rather than the work of the agency.

Through abstraction, I identified the super-ordinate theme and related themes:

**Box 6 Practice-based learning environments are facing challenges:**

Resource issues impact on service user engagement

Resource issues impact on student experience

Teams are stressed and this impacts on the learning environment

Power dynamics impact on the learning environment

#### **4.2.7 Student learning experience**

This heading produced 51 themes and introduces one 'possible pearl', that being student's changing perception of risk based on role definition, learning and experience (Heather 196). Students consider what has been helpful for them in terms of learning; they also consider their role and how this fits with the organisation's agenda. There is inevitable overlap with some of these themes and the previous heading of practice-based learning environments.

In terms of how students learn, much store is placed on the benefits of shadowing experienced practitioners (Julie 720;Anna 189;Heather 334) in order that students have appropriate role models (Lauren 186) and feel able to make progress (Julie 27). Tutorials are also used as a reaffirming space (Heather 475) and one where there can be transfer of knowledge from university to practice (Lauren 190) in order for education to inform change in practice (Heather 176).

The experiential learning opportunities are greatly valued (Richard 306) and whilst there can be staff/student power differentials (Cathy 714) there may also be a sense of shared learning (Cathy 641). It is important that students feel able to trust their supervisors or educators (Julie 676) as it is useful to be able to share practice issues and concerns (Julie 620). When this support is available, students find that feedback encourages active learning (Julie 714) and as the level of responsibility develops over time (Heather 41), students develop self-confidence as a learner (Lauren 304) and using professional skills encourages their developing confidence (Lauren 245). They are able to relate their practice experiences to previous learning (Julie 310) and

transfer their previous experiences and skills to new learning opportunities (Lauren 63). However, this transfer of knowledge depends on the system of engagement between university and placement, which is considered as wanting on occasion (Anna 153).

Unfortunately, there are mutual concerns raised with regards students being commodified by the placement agencies (Cathy 83; 135) and taking on social work responsibilities for which they felt ill-prepared, on occasion (Heather 32; Julie 9). There is a parallel here with the commodification of children in the education system, which was identified by one of the student respondents (Cathy 55). Many of the roles assumed by them come with significant responsibility (Julie 421) and involve the management of complex issues (Heather 74) with perceived lack of support to manage these (Heather 66). This can lead to cynicism with regards practice learning (Heather 287), and the sense that the perceived lack of knowledge impacts on performance (Julie 66). Training is not always related to the reality of the role (Heather 189) or is limited; and this impacts on the efficacy of 'learning by doing' which is seen as essential to the role (Julie 70). There is also a concern that reflection is necessary but not always promoted (Julie 257). So, to sum this up, organisational pressure impacts on the quality of the learning environment (Andy 55).

Taking on a professional persona is clearly an important issue for the students, particularly in how this then impacts on their work with service users. They note how they are expected to use professional judgement (Heather 24) and how this

sometimes leads to role confusion when supporting service users (Heather 262). This in turn could lead to self-blame for service user's issues (Richard 49) and a sense that the student's professional skills impact negatively on the work with service users (Lauren 260).

The learning environment is an unpredictable space (Heather 422) where there is a need to be proactive in order to succeed (Anna 231; 244). The role of the student determines use of space and this determines the level of sharing (Lauren 76; Andy 55). Difficult events can lead to learning development (Andy 311) and learning through being challenged is considered as a useful construct (Anna 254; Cathy 248). Much of what inspires students to continue their learning is related to a sense of injustice for service users (Richard 218) and that in promoting social justice it is acceptable to admit what we do not know or are unable to do (Richard 253). Both agencies and service users can facilitate new learning opportunities (Andy 18; Richard 136) and advocacy is an important aspect of the student social worker role (Andy 252).

Through abstraction, I identified the super-ordinate theme and related themes:

**Box 7 Experiential learning encourages professional development:**

Trusting relationships are required to promote shared learning

Agency constraints impact negatively on student learning

Developing a professional persona is challenging

Service user and carer engagement encourages active learning experiences

#### **4.2.8 Student wellbeing**

The final heading for consideration relates to the wellbeing of the student respondents and the emotional content of their role. 39 themes include the greatest number of 'possible pearls'. My interpretation of this phenomenon is that I was astounded throughout the interviews by the significant emotional content of the student respondents' accounts. I had not expected this deep level of engagement and wish to validate the importance given to this aspect of their learning experience. Within this section, as they are effectively unpaid for their time, I will refer to the unpaid emotional labour of student respondents rather than emotional labour. However, this is contentious to me as student respondents have made it clear that they have often taken on roles and responsibilities equal to, or even in excess of those of their paid colleagues within an agency context.

The 'possible pearls' relate to this challenging context. The student respondents speak about a lack of support (Julie 101) and stress of decision-making impacting on wellbeing (Julie 304) and how a sense of agency and ownership is required to cope, 'I had to claim the space to be there' (Anna 161). Relationships assume importance as they can inform feelings (Richard 88) and feelings are sometimes managed outside of work time, so impacting on time and space (Cathy 381). The significance of endings as part of emotion work is noted leading to me considering whether a relationship-based perspective fosters emotion work (Richard 153). The maintenance of emotion work is challenging when implementing policy (Anna 234) and surprisingly one student respondent suggests that age may be a factor in using emotion work (Julie 308).



The concerns raised by students with relation to their sense of wellbeing are around perceived levels of support and role definition, much as in previous sections.

Isolation is a concern (Julie 89) and lack of support can lead to self-blame for the student (Heather 388). Lack of resources impact not only on the individual but also on the team wellbeing (Julie 283; 291). The stress within teams impacts on wellbeing (Julie 181; 262) and this is compounded by dealing with stress in the service user relationship (Richard 112) and the maintenance of the student social worker role (Anna 131). The semantics of the interviews and the student respondent's presentation at times represented the emotionally-charged situations being described (Heather 675; Julie 305; Anna 234).

More positively, it is acknowledged that adversity promotes resilience (Cathy 684; Andy 246) and working through adversity can bring positive learning and raised self-esteem (Anna 211; 257). Also, Lipsky's use of discretion can promote resilience in dealing with organisational demands (Cathy 600).

Relationships are seen as pivotal in promoting wellbeing, whether with colleagues or service users and carers. Space (time) and place (face-to-face) are seen as prerequisites for relationship-building and maintenance of such (Cathy 165; 179; 187; Anna 36) and it is acknowledged that how these relationships develop is based in part on personality traits (Anna 179) and student status (Anna 144).

As part of managing relationships, student respondents note how endings should be managed effectively. The challenges of the work sometimes impact on the efficacy of endings (Richard 143) though ideally these should be considered thoughtfully and be for the benefit of the service user (Richard 174). However, endings are not always easy (Richard 162).

Unpaid emotional labour is a vital aspect of the student respondent's stories. The impact of the social work environment on the students in terms of feelings and behaviour makes this a prerequisite (Heather 362). They describe situations in which unpaid emotional labour is required (Anna 164; 225). Students often have to manage their own feelings (Richard 263) and intense emotions in time and place (Heather 248). Unpaid emotional labour can be used to build rapport (Richard 85) and to promote relationships (Heather 240). Unfortunately, unpaid emotional labour is sometimes considered in a negative light by colleagues (Heather 258), in part due to resources impacting on the team dynamic and use of unpaid emotional labour within the agency (Julie 59). This can lead to student respondents having to manage difficult feelings in isolation (Julie 267). One student respondent manages these difficulties by looking to the future in order to make sense of the present (Richard 281).

Through abstraction, I identified the super-ordinate theme and related themes:

**Box 8 Social work and emotion work are intrinsically linked:**

Social work is an emotionally-charged activity

Unpaid emotional labour is required to manage feelings and relationships

Positive relationships promote wellbeing

Wellbeing is negatively impacted on by perceived lack of support

The work of identifying and then collating these themes was a fascinating and physical endeavour in which I used pieces of flip paper covered with words and phrases typed, printed and then cut out by hand which were sorted individually. This method suited my working style as I am not fully versed in digital data gathering and prefer to use traditional methods. Filling the room with tangible artefacts played to my creativity and reminded me of how some performing artists use similar techniques akin to collage in order to create their poems or songs. This concept fascinated me as a child and so this task allowed me to locate the research with my history in an embodied and satisfying manner. As the task developed, the development of 'possible pearls' to help with the identification of themes assumed importance and added another dimension to the task.

### 4.3 Bringing together emergent and idiographic themes

Having analysed data in order to produce both emergent and idiographic themes, these were then conflated in order to inform further consideration. For example, I combined ‘practice-based learning environments are facing challenges’ with ‘experiential learning encourages professional development’ and ‘social work as a challenging profession’. Not surprisingly, the idiographic and emergent themes correlate, as the following table clarifies:

<b>Emergent themes</b>	<b>Idiographic themes</b>
Reflection and research as cathartic	Importance of trust
Supervision as a valuable relational activity promoting learning	Unpaid emotional labour not always acknowledged in an organisational context
Peer support as a meaningful activity	Wellbeing dependent on peer support as a vehicle to manage ‘intense practice events’ in absence of other support
Interprofessional practice dependent on skills, time and resources	Interprofessional practice beneficial
Social work is a challenging profession. Experiential practice learning reflects this and encourages professional development	Social work as a political activity
Social work and unpaid emotional labour are intrinsically linked and supported by use of discretion	Unpaid emotional labour and discretion promote a sense of agency and build rapport with service users

Whilst this table represents individual themes, both emergent and idiographic, I would like to suggest that it is important to note that there is much fluidity between themes and significant overlaps too. This analysis is an attempt to capture the main

superordinate themes, though of course there are many others influencing the development and refinement of these final choices.

I am conscious that the data collected is extensive and wide-ranging within the parameters addressed. As such, I feel it important to acknowledge that there is much data remaining waiting for further consideration and I plan to do so in the future. The student respondents have provided me with a rich vein of gems and pearls with which to continue studying their worldviews for which I am extremely grateful.

## Chapter 5 – Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

The way in which emotions are expressed are often tangled up in feelings, thoughts and actions, described and made real through stories (Theodosius, 2008:202)

The research on which this thesis reports is predominantly concerned with establishing how student respondents experience, express and manage the emotional content of their work in a relational and interprofessional context. It looks at whether or not peer or social support and/or supervisory support promotes positive emotional engagement with the feelings evoked in carrying out student social work tasks. The student respondents consider a range of different placement experiences ranging from a third-sector advice centre; a service supporting people who are homeless; to local authority child protection services; a hospital adult social care discharge team and statutory adult mental health teams. Therefore, their response covers social work interventions with a wide range of service users from children and families to older people. Having chosen to explore this from a generic perspective in terms of service user group, it is apparent that emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012) takes place regardless of who the student is supporting. Recent research by Winter et al (2018), as I have also found and outlined in this thesis, elucidates how social workers experience emotions when working with children and families. They suggest that there is little research or theory in this area of practice. I would concur and add that there is even less which takes a generic approach to how emotions are experienced in social work more broadly or which considers emotions from a student social worker perspective in order to develop educational theory. This is the premise of my research. In addition, an important research finding of mine is that when offering support to students, educators should pay closer attention to the

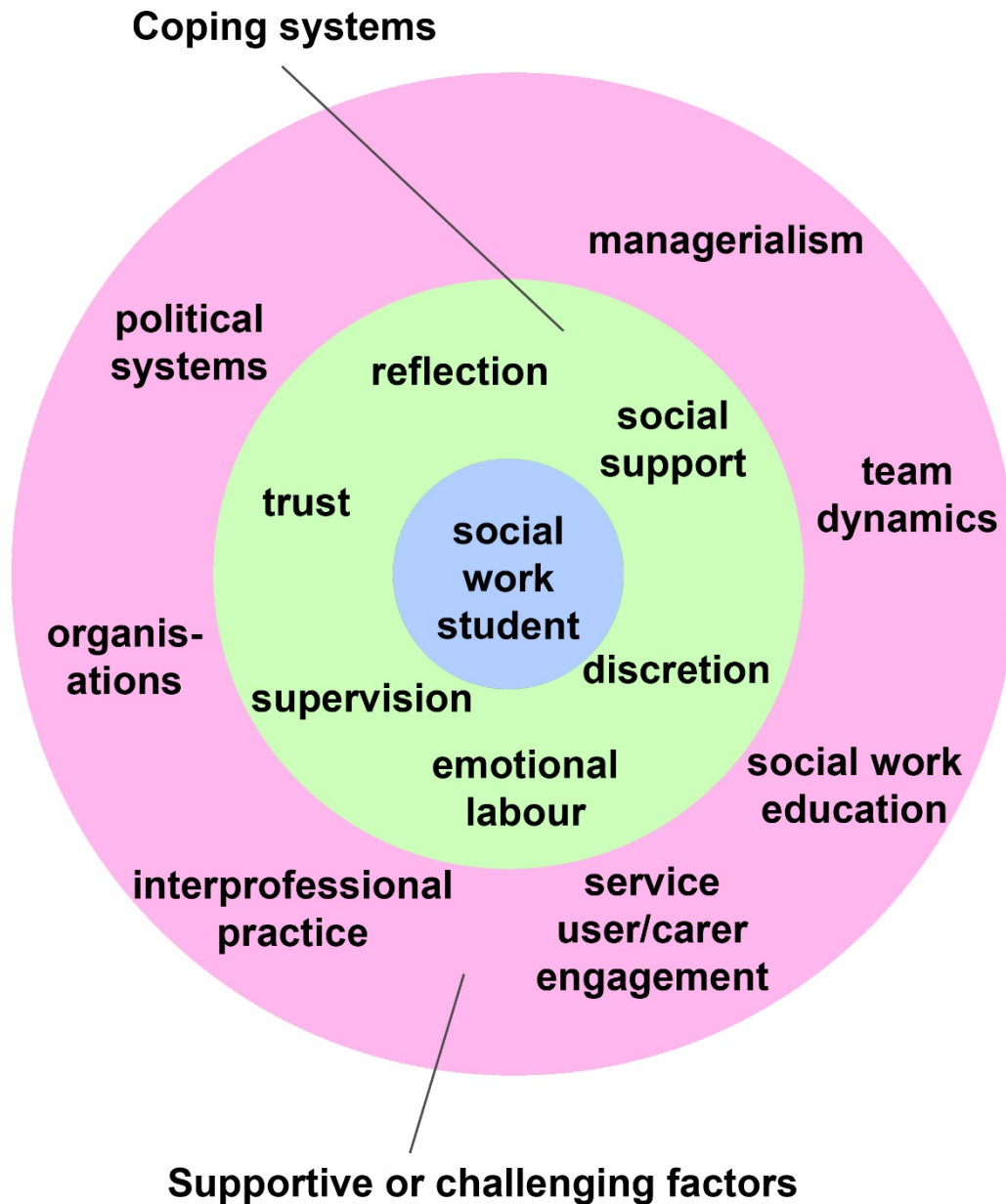
significant organisational dynamics influencing the emotions of students, rather than assuming that the greatest stressors come from making difficult decision and/or working alongside service users and carers. Students often become caught up in seeking a professional identity and within a managerialist context, this may lead to the devaluing of emotion (Rajan-Rankin, 2014). Therefore, to avoid students having to negotiate this dichotomous thinking, the consideration of emotions is implicit within the data collection, leading to a more open conversation through which emotional engagement is considered at the analysis stage.

## **5.2 The push and pull of practice learning**

As a precursor to the discussion of findings, the following diagram is offered to provide a visual representation of the consolidation of research themes and informs subsequent analysis. Entitled 'The push and pull of practice learning', a phrase taken directly from one of the student respondents, this visual device illuminates the interrelated coping systems and supportive or challenging factors identified through analysis of the student respondents' narratives. Utilising the diagram with the intention to inform and shape this discussion, I will first consider the element of 'supportive or challenging factors' before reflecting on the identified 'coping systems'. Whilst this visual device is used to shape the chapter, it is important to acknowledge that the elements within the device contain intermeshed factors. Consequently the discussion includes inevitable overlaps and connections. This diagrammatical device has the social work student at its nucleus, enabling the focus to remain steadfastly on the student respondents. Their voices, captured by means of data collection are represented throughout this chapter to further illuminate their lived experience.



## The push and pull of practice learning



### **5.3 Supportive or challenging factors – political systems, managerialism and social work education**

Of the seven factors identified within the 'supportive or challenging factors' field, let us first consider the intermeshed elements of political systems, managerialism and social work education by exploring support for students in practice placements within the neoliberal project.

Zuchowski (2016:411) considers how students in practice placements have to manage the consequences of neoliberalism which include:

the devaluing of social work skills and knowledge, a reduction in practitioner autonomy, the positioning of workers as experts, a focus on procedural solutions rather than structural analysis, and an overall loss of meaningful social work identity that is linked to emancipatory social change.

Crisp and Hosken (2016) note that students who are placed in agencies where these tensions exist are able to experience at first-hand what it is to manage these shortcomings where staff are stretched and supervision is not readily available. As such, this prepares them for their professional futures and can therefore be considered a useful point of learning. Overall, Crisp and Hosken (2016) suggest that social work education in general is not sufficiently engaged with the political dimension of social work. However, due to the impact of neoliberalism on social work practice, perhaps inadvertently, practice placements have a role in providing students with a wealth of learning in relation to the political context of the profession in a very tangible and unfettered manner. Certainly this was apparent in the student responses and would appear to be an unintended consequence of placement provision in significantly overstretched teams.

It is apparent that the increase in managerialism inherent in current systems of power has not escaped social work settings. Indeed, Winter et al (2018: 3) note how when working with children and their families, there are significant organisational constraints on social worker's time. These are due to high caseloads as well as changes to working conditions and available space leading to hot-desking or 'agile working'. In addition, social workers are expected to take on a dual function of managing and maintaining bureaucratic imperatives in an increasingly time-limited fashion, while simultaneously developing meaningful relationships with service users and their families and dealing with the emotional labour involved in this aspect of their work. These demanding features of the social work role extend beyond that of paid employee and for the student respondents, this clearly is an expectation of them also. The ideal of a protected caseload with regular supervisory and tutorial support is often denied to students, this being subsumed as with all other support strategies by a bureaucratic imperative.

The pressure on teams due to fiscal constraints appears to impact on the level of engagement of practitioners supporting practice placements. In particular, the lack of workload relief in order to take on additional responsibilities in relation to the support offered to students is a concern. Domakin, (2015), notes how the role of supervisor is often informal with little workload relief, support or training provided. There is also a concern that practice educators, and I would suggest supervisors in agencies too, are taken for granted by universities (Domakin, 2015). Social workers in teams often take on the additional role of supervisor as a labour of love and later regret doing so, finding themselves 'overwhelmed and unable to continue their role' (Plenty and

Gower, 2013:49). In addition, practice educators are often supporting students who are engaging with ever more complex and demanding work, in part due to the higher thresholds imposed on agencies (Finch, 2015). So it is of importance that practice educators are able to address the emotional needs of the students along with their own (Grant et al, 2015; Rajan-Rankin, 2014).

As well as providing regular supervision, in-house practice educators also act as gatekeepers (Finch, 2015), engaging in assessment processes with students which inevitably impacts on their relationship in terms of power dynamics. Often, placement supervisors take part in observations of students' practice as part of their assessment process, or this may instead be carried out by external practice educators. There are many variations leading to complexity and a significant lack of consistency across and even within practice learning environments (Zuchowski, 2016). Suffice to say, however this takes place, it is clear that the supervisory relationship is a significant aspect of student learning whilst being imbued with significant power dynamics which may or may not be of value to student professional development (Domakin, 2015; Zuchowski, 2016). The linking of supervision with assessment begs the question as to whether the pastoral, emotional element of supervision may on occasion be reduced or even overlooked in some instances in response to neoliberal tendencies to measure and evidence within both educational and social work organisations.

Heather explains how having a supervisor who is also a practice educator may lead to role confusion on occasion:

I think I've been a bit of an advocate all the way through about [not] again having the same supervisor as practice teacher. My first placement I had different ones and I found that really helpful. I got a really good mark on my placement and I put a lot of that down to having that reflective space with different workers. So... it's very hard for people to be objective when they work within it (Heather, 493).

The point she raises about being objective when working within the agency is an interesting one. Perhaps the use of external practice educators helps to promote subjectivity not only in assessment terms but also with regards the organisational dynamics which clearly impact on students and their use of emotional labour.

In relation to the role of supervisors, there is evidence from my data to support the assertion by Cleak and Smith (2012: 256) that students are generally 'more satisfied across all aspects of their placements where there is a strong onsite social work presence'. This enables them to make use of supervision in order to develop their competence and social work identity and to receive appropriate learning opportunities (Zuchowski, 2016).

Lauren's placement was with an organisation with no social worker presence and she relates how this impeded her learning to a degree, even though the supervision she received was helpful:

And sometimes I felt there were situations I might have liked to pick out and pick at a bit and there wasn't a social worker there to say, 'Ooh, this could have been this', but it was still...the supervision was great. She did whatever she could really and she spent as much time as I needed to pick at things and look at why this has happened but sometimes it would have been nice to have had a social work sort of perspective on it but that's an ideal world, so... (Lauren, 53).

Confusion over role definition or engaging with support from those not necessarily familiar with the agency dynamics may impact to a degree on the effectiveness of support which is external to the agency. External practice educators in Zuchowski's (2016:417) study highlighted 'the significance of knowing the placement milieu including the agency environment, atmosphere and culture'.

However, in some instances having professional learning support from those not involved in the organisational culture can be of benefit, particularly when undertaking practice observations, as acknowledged by Julie:

The first two practice observations, particularly the middle practice observation, they were one of the best things of the whole year because of the amount of feedback I got on things. You know, when somebody says to you, 'You know, at this stage did you think about... ?' She asked me if I'd thought about it and I said, 'No... didn't even cross my mind (Julie, 714).

Practice educators are frequently placed in the unenviable position of having to choose between workload demands and the needs of their assigned students and cannot be blamed for having to make difficult choices, which on occasion leave students feeling unsupported. Alongside these difficulties, they are also required to take part in challenging decisions with regards student progression. Research suggests that this particular aspect of their role makes for 'an unpleasant emotional experience' (Finch, 2015: 2125). So they too are having to engage in emotional labour as part of their supervisory and assessment role. Anna describes some of the tension between her and the supervisor in her placement and how this clearly led to frustration for her as a learner:

So the main concentration for them it was just to improve my English more than to teach me what I was doing. So I feel like to learn I had to just push, push, push, push. I used some of my supervision time with question about what I do next and they say now you do this and I did that and I went back again and I did that. 'What is next? What is next?' But I still feel like they didn't give you all of the information. They give you like part of the information (Anna, 242).

As a tutor, I have been aware of times when visits to practice placements have enabled me to identify emotional labour shared amongst the whole team, particularly when there are tensions arising from negative events or practices. Niven et al (2013:109) note how emotions can be consistent within 'whole units' of employees and how these can be detected by observers. Perhaps then, educators should continue to develop open relationships with agency representatives where we feel able to discuss these challenging dynamics in order to ensure that they do not have too detrimental an impact on the student social worker on placement with the agency. There should be no disgrace in acknowledging that the tensions inherent in social work practice will at times inevitably impact negatively on the emotional stability of a team. Nor should we feel that students cannot be part of this emotional challenge, as long as they have appropriate support and their learning is not negatively affected.

#### **5.4 Supportive or challenging factors – organisational and team dynamics, interprofessional practice and service user/carer engagement**

Further identified 'supportive or challenging factors' are the impact on social work students of organisational norms and team dynamics within both a social work and interprofessional context, as well as service user and carer engagement.

In order to ensure that employees and/or students display appropriate emotions when working with service users and carers, organisations use control mechanisms in the form of agency norms (Hochschild, 2012; Groth et al, 2013: 200). Pugh et al (2013:200) suggest that emotional labour responds to organisational norms and that 'emotional display rules represent the point at which organizational objectives, policies, and practices interface with individual emotion management'. As such, along with Hochschild (2012) they raise concerns that emotional labour demonstrates the commodification of emotions and can therefore impact negatively on wellbeing while creating identity and authenticity dilemmas. Mumby and Putnam (1992: 472) go so far as to suggest that emotional labour responds to managerial interests while controlling the heart and as such 'alienates and fragments the individual'.

Niven et al (2013) consider how emotional labour engages with emotion regulation employed to achieve the goals of an organisation. For this to occur, emotional labour develops from a dyadic process between worker and service user to one in which third parties are also involved either directly or indirectly. So, they suggest that Hochschild's (2012) concept of emotional labour should be developed to include not only interpersonal emotion management when working with service users and carers but also interpersonal relationships within teams and emotional self-regulation. Cote



et al (2013: 80) describe emotion regulation as 'all the efforts to increase, maintain, or decrease one or more components of an emotion'. They consider how the regulation of emotions in an organisational context has an impact on performance and stress levels. This in turn influences the interpersonal relationships within teams.

There has been little research into this organisational aspect of emotional management and my research adds to knowledge in this regard.

Organisational norms play an important part in how emotions are regulated. As an example of how this presents for student respondents, Cathy spoke about her placement in a prison and how she did not feel comfortable with the organisational norms:

Mental health was a massive, massive challenge. I would be concerned for someone's mental health and I would make a referral to the prison mental health teams and because their thresholds were so high, they would only literally work with people that had psychosis but anyone under that, that had significant mental health problems wouldn't get any support whatsoever and that was really difficult.....It got to one point in the end where they were telling me to stop making a referral because there was nothing they could do about it which was frustrating because it was my job to raise the needs and get the best way to meet it. So it fell on me to take on roles of other people like the safeguarding and mental health which was predominantly down to other people, to try and improve myself and I felt really out of my depth at some points (Cathy, 431).

My research develops the work of Niven et al (2013: 107), who explain how shared norms around how to elicit or express emotions exist within organisations.

Engagement with these can impact on the level of stress experienced when regulating emotion on an individual basis. If these shared emotional labour norms are threatened through 'norm violation', the response is driven by the need to perpetuate emotion regulation and the team members provide a collective response

to mitigate this potential sense of disequilibrium. Heather provides an example of this in relation to her placement in a local authority children's services team:

So she would still continue this relationship with me and she might ring me every couple of days or I'd speak to her and she would want to know how the baby was... very basic information and I'd tell her. She might get quite upset on the phone and sometimes she'd get really angry and swear at me and things and another time she'd be very tearful, and that... but regardless of what happened, I felt it was the right thing to do, to listen to her and sort of let that happen. And I would challenge it if she was really sort of swearing at me or calling me names. I would say, 'I don't think that's right, you know...' but I would listen and not hang up the phone on her. And all my colleagues, whenever I put down the phone, they'd be like, 'You're too soft. You need to learn to toughen up...' and say things like, 'She's walking all over you. You're not her social worker, you're the child's social worker'. I was always being challenged when actually, and I'd give good back, I'd say, 'Well actually I feel that we need to be here for her as well, she's very vulnerable and I'm worried about her' and that sort of thing... but I would almost be laughed at, like naive you know, like not quite a social worker yet (Heather 244).

Clearly, the impact of a collective attempt to regulate the feelings of this student is unhelpful and potentially ostracising.

This example also demonstrates the active role that a service user has in the emotional labour experienced by the student, as endorsed by Exley and Letherby (2001). Niven et al (2013: 108) contend that any such interaction should be considered as a 'two-way transaction'. The emotional regulation of both is influenced by the desired outcome of each of the participants. I consider that this resonates with the concept of co-production in which service user and professional are equally involved in determining shared goals (Fisher et al, 2018). This also raises the importance of authenticity (Groth et al, 2013), a key element of social work relationships with service users (Howe, 2014) in which genuineness, transparency and maintaining a sense of 'self' are manifest and made real through emotional

labour when 'deep acting' (Hochschild, 2012:136). This in turn promotes a sense of self by minimising emotional dissonance (Hochschild, 2012:90).

The engagement with emotion work also remains a little-considered though important aspect of service user's interactions (Exley and Letherby, 2001). The relational aspect of social work leads to obvious parallels between the emotional engagement of student respondents within a working environment and the lived experiences of those service users with whom they engage. These service users undertake emotion work in order to manage their own feelings as well as those around them within their private lives (Exley and Letherby, 2001). It is clear that student respondents also engage in emotion work within the private sphere in order to mitigate the pressures they are under as students meeting academic requirements alongside living busy lives.

Hochschild's (2012) consideration of emotional labour is a significant contribution to organizational emotional theory. She makes clear the impact organisations have on how employees demonstrate emotion in their engagement with service users and the real labour which this demands. This emotional labour is often closely monitored by organisations to ensure efficacy. However, neither Hochschild (2012) nor other writers dealing with emotions in organisations afford the same level of consideration to the emotional engagement required between employees and even less so with regards the emotional engagement of students with established workers in a challenging and potentially hostile learning environment.

As a researcher, I strive to move away from the often-presented sanitized and quantifiable consideration of working life and instead acknowledge the passions and emotions involved in the relational aspect of this engagement. Waldron (2007) describes how probation officers in a study by Waldron and Krone (1991) were able to manage the psychological challenges and emotional stress whilst working with violent criminals, having developed psychological defences against this. However, the periods of negative emotion in their working lives were more closely aligned to their relationships with supervisors and co-workers. These findings certainly resonate with the experiences of the majority of student respondents in my research. It is also fair to say that the emotional messiness of relational engagement in the workplace is something which I can fully appreciate and relate to on a personal and professional level. For example, I am able to recall intense emotional events between myself and colleagues which impacted significantly on my engagement in the workplace, as I imagine can the majority of people in employment.

Within the research, Julie in particular found that the relationship she developed with the team manager who was also her supervisor presented more emotional challenges than positive learning. The effect of this not only impacted on their relationship but eventually permeated the team dynamic. This meant that Julie felt very alone and unsupported.

It was the other stuff that got me. And the way the team was managed which is hard to say most of the time because the team manager, she was really good, I like her a lot, but I don't like her management style. No. Being told that you're asking too many questions and being told that people don't really want to bother taking you out shadowing because they know I don't want to be a social worker so why should they bother... (laughs) (Julie 574).

Waldron (2007: 68) suggests that the interdependent connections in the workplace ensure that an initial relational event will cause 'emotional buzzing'. News of the emotional event will ripple through the networks and the consequences and emotion they produce can potentially be long-lasting, far beyond the initial emotion work. This residual emotion work was clearly demonstrated in Julie's account as with others. The students had to choose how best to respond on an emotional level while negotiating how their colleagues responded to the emotional events over a period of time.

Similarly, Heather found that the team groupthink often challenged her own social work values when considering the rights of service users and carers. Hochschild (2012:119) locates this organisational mode of operation in the concept of 'feeling rules' whereby the organisation prescribes how employees should feel and act. Winter et al (2018: 2) note how 'organisational norms' significantly impact both service users and social workers. In this example in particular which has been referred to previously, Heather felt unsupported, as her supervisor was involved in one of the emotionally significant incidents and so became unavailable in Heather's view, in order for her to deconstruct the learning from this event. Heather's response to the written reflective account began with this incident:

So I was on placement and we were all sitting at the desks and one of the workers said, 'Oh my God, I can't believe this. I think this woman's pregnant again'. And then another colleague, my supervisor in fact, said 'Oh well, we can always hope for a miscarriage'. And then somebody else said, 'Yeah, that would be great'. And I just couldn't believe what I was hearing, you know. I was sort of sat there thinking... I don't know. It just made my stomach flip a bit. And equally, not only for the parent sort of being dehumanised within this whole process, I was thinking, 'You know you don't know me from anybody. I could have suffered five miscarriages and you're happy to talk about it as if it's this positive thing (Heather 354)

This emotionally challenging aspect of being in an organisation in the role of a student alongside frontline workers, or the 'emotional proletariat' (Macdonald and Sirianni, 1996 cited in Fineman, 2007: 4) is significant. Hochschild (2012: 111) writes about how organizational norms create 'surface' or 'deep' acting when with service users. This 'emotion work' is an outward display of feelings which can be dropped when with colleagues and away from the public. However, it is important to note that for some student respondents this appears to not be the case and emotion work continues throughout the working day with no reprieve. Hochschild (2012) suggests that engaging in emotional labour can be stressful and potentially lead to identity confusion. How much more then may this be the case for students who feel unable to relax with team members in order to manage this behavioural practice. 'Emotion work helps keep the organization organized: when emotion management fails, so can the organization' (Fineman, 2007:5), Given that the ability to engage in emotion management is of such value, the lack of acknowledgement of how this impacts on students and employees alike is concerning, particularly when one of the failures of emotional management in the workplace is stress and burnout (Hochschild, 2012).

Heather's reflection is a clear example of compassion fatigue, which along with vicarious trauma and burnout are often experienced phenomena by social workers, leading to oppressive attitudes and lack of empathy towards service users and carers (Collins, 2008; Grant et al, 2015; Kim et al, 2011). Stress and burnout are well-researched areas of interprofessional practice in the helping professions (Lloyd et al, 2002; Fenton, 2015). Twenty years ago, Meyerson (1998: 103) wrote that 'in the fast paced, resource-constrained, "high-tech" environment of contemporary life,

feelings of stress and burnout have achieved the prominence of social epidemic'. It would appear that little has changed. Stress can be defined as 'the emotional and physiological reactions to stressors' and this may lead to burnout, a syndrome comprising of a reduced sense of accomplishment, emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, all of which are extremely unhelpful when assuming a role as learner (Lloyd et al, 2002: 256).

It is clear that student respondents not only engage with emotional labour on an individual basis but also engage in the workplace as a 'collaborative emotional performance'. The completion of tasks, particularly in interprofessional settings requires a level of 'interpersonal emotional savvy' (Waldron, 2007: 80) and it is for educators to consider how best to promote this ability whilst offering appropriate support. I have further explored ideas relating to interprofessional working in appendix 5.

As previously noted, Anna acknowledged how the competing values within an interprofessional context was a challenge, not just for students but for team members:

Sometimes I feel like, I see my colleagues, it's like a constant battle, a constant battle in the hospital because it's what they say and what they say and they usually not agree... so the stress that the social worker has with the caseload plus the stress with the interprofessional relationship (Anna, 127).

Her placement with a hospital social work team provided useful learning around competing perspectives and values and the impact of legislation and social policy.

The challenges of discharge planning became clear when patients were expected to return home before they felt ready to do so, or had been assessed by social workers as ready to leave (Lloyd et al, 2002). It could be that the power dynamics in this situation had a significant impact on the opportunity to develop good interprofessional working. Relationship-building in an interprofessional context was considered by Sharon to be much improved depending on the communication strategy employed:

...you know being able to speak directly to that person you need to have that relationship rather than it just being a phone call or an email, you know? Just absolutely directly just going to that person, you know it just makes so much difference and it works really, really well (Sharon, 123).

The importance of place and role in developing interprofessional relationships was replicated within the data. Salmela (2009: 135) suggests that:

A sincere emotion can be either spontaneous or managed; the main thing is that it is a real emotion, not an empty expression.

When the feeling rules of an organisation match those prescribed by a professional entity and those of the practitioner, then the compassionate emotions manifested demonstrate an empathic concern for the wellbeing of the recipient. This has been noted by Ondahl and O'Donnell (1999) when considering the nursing profession and is also true of student social work respondents in my research. This resonates with Salmela's (2009: 141) assertion that 'authenticity becomes a matter of reaching coherence, however unique, among one's values, commitments and emotions'. Authenticity of emotions then is a value-based response which is closely related to professional codes of practice alongside individual's identity constructs. The complexity of bringing these together is reflected in both the narratives from the



student respondents and my own autoethnographic engagement with the research. Salmela (2009: 142) suggests that these inherent complexities lead to authenticity being a 'regulative ideal rather than a readily attainable state'.

## 5.5 Coping systems – reflection, supervision and trusting relationships

The six 'coping systems' identified in the diagram are very much interconnected and somewhat challenging to disaggregate. That said, I will first illustrate how reflection and supervision underpin trusting relationships. This will lead to a consideration of social support and I will conclude this chapter by locating discretion and emotional labour as theoretical concepts.

### **Fxxx (x7) = EL + change**

Hot tears burn my cheeks

Lonely trips to lonelier people.

A team divided, devoid of care

Hardened by society's stare.

He says it once then over and over

Each time louder than the last.

Paper-thin walls share his ire

My head spins with righteous fire of

Indignation. Stop! No!

Childlike, bullying supervisor.

I'm old enough to be your mother.

Won't let you do this to another.

My practice teacher listens calmly,

Makes the changes – active agent.

For now at least I have been spared.

A problem halved is one that's shared.

As a student social worker, I was fortunate in being provided with a practice educator whose empathic working style enabled me to develop a trusting relationship and to share my emotions at a particularly challenging time. The poem above represents my expressed emotions during a past event, which has become more tangible through engagement with this research. Bryant (2015: 24) notes how Heidegger's thoughts on poetry are that it 'beckons what feels impossible to say, to name, and in so doing brings the presence of what was previously uncalled into nearness'. Certainly, many years after the event, this poem has enabled me to relocate my lived experience and emotions. This in turn has promoted my ability to empathise with the student respondents and their embodied experiences.

The title of this poem is in the form of a mathematical equation as a metaphor for the interprofessional and medicalised world in which I found myself. The one hundred day placement took place during 2006/7 and was with a community mental health team where the medical and social models of disability were often polarized and where there was clearly 'binary thinking inherent in physical/mental, health/social distinctions' (Karban, 2017: 889). This unhelpful dynamic led to significant challenges for the few social workers in the team and an even greater challenge for me, a student social worker, often treated as an interloper in this medically-dominated world. The initial part of the equation, Fxxx (x7) refers to the expletive used repeatedly by my supervisor when commenting on my inability to access the computerised recording system due to my student social worker status. This was through no fault of my own but was rather an example of the dissonance between health and social care, in this instance demonstrated through the lack of a suitable IT interface. The second half of the equation, EL + change makes reference to

emotional labour leading to change. Having felt humiliated by my supervisor's thinly-veiled public display of anger, I maintained a composed and measured persona until I was provided with the space and permission to reveal my emotional distress.

The quality of the supervisory relationship within a practice context is noteworthy. This symbiotic relationship has a significant bearing on the student experience, particularly when the work presents substantial challenges (Beddoe et al, 2014; Snowball, 2016). It is perceived by students as not only impacting on their learning but also influencing the fairness and effectiveness of the assessment of their practice (Brodie and Williams, 2013; Lefevre, 2005). As well as developing an effective working relationship, supervisors are also required to engage in conceptual learning activities including self-analysis and linking theory to practice. Supervisors are often considered by students as the best resource from which to learn how to 'bridge the gap' between practice and academic learning (Brodie and Williams, 2013: 519). Finding the time and space for reflection on placement learning is a key component of the supervisory experience. Supervisors are tasked with providing constructive, non-judgemental feedback in order for students to develop their practice skills in a safe and supportive environment. Supervisors are also models of good practice and should provide an exemplar of what it is to be a competent practitioner (Brodie and Williams, 2013; Davys and Beddoe, 2009). Whilst a trusting, collegiate environment is the preferred means of providing supportive supervision, clearly this is not always the case, to the detriment of student learning.

Effective use of supervision relies on the ability to reflect on and make sense of our own professional self. In order to do so it is vital to acknowledge that 'emotions and their regulation lie at the heart of much social work' (Howe, 2014: 128).

Theodosius (2008: 208) considers how the ability to engage with emotional labour depends on an individual's emotional capacity. This in turn is intrinsically linked to our personal identity which develops through reflexive processes, and encourages a conscious awareness of such. 'Emotional labour therefore, not only draws on an individual's sense of self: it is dependent on it'.

As previously noted, Anna faced intense emotional events during her placement. She found it extremely difficult to feel accepted by the social work team and spoke repeatedly about this. It appeared that she was treated differently due to her first language not being English. This overt discrimination was emotionally draining for her, though conversely it also fuelled her determination:

But in general it was like.... I feel like... it was like battle all the time. It was tiring, very tiring. Like when I finished the placement it was like, 'Whoo (phew)' I melt. I melt on the floor because it was, I had to make an effort every day because in general the team only concentrate on my writing and my language because I was foreign. So the main thing from them it was 'Okay, pronounce properly, you need to pronounce properly, you need to write properly'. So the main concentration for them it was just to improve my English more than to teach me what I was doing (Anna 234).

Having been moved by her account, the poem I wrote in relation to this (p133) highlights the metaphor of melting as well as the discrimination faced by Anna throughout her final placement. Krone and Morgan (2007) reflect on emotion metaphors in organizations and note how a container metaphor is often utilised in

order to promote emotion as a powerful force in need of control in some way. Thus, Anna is suggesting perhaps that her body is the container and the emotional impact of her experience is so powerful that ultimately her very 'self' exudes through this corporeal vessel and melts on the floor. In presenting this metaphor she is implying her need to control or contain her emotions in order to manage the challenging social structure in which she finds herself. This is concerning as containment or suppression of emotions in this way can have a detrimental impact leading to burnout and estrangement (Hochschild, 2012) as well as the suppression of concerns or complaint (Waldron and Krone, 1991) which if voiced, may benefit the development of student provision. Throughout her story, Anna clearly demonstrates authenticity of self in emotion, this being:

the capacity of the individual to identify, acknowledge and understand their emotions. It is about their ability to reflexively manage them; it is about their understanding of the emotions of others; and it is about having a maturity of self that realises the impact they have on others and others have on them. This understanding of self, conceptualised here as personal identity, is what the individual draws on when they carry out emotional labour (Theodosius, 2008: 215).

This research has found that in order to support both the student social worker and the wider organisational context, the regulation of emotions is often best managed through supervision. This provides an opportunity to develop an appreciation of emotional regulation in an organisational context and to acknowledge the impact of such as a social process occurring between people as much as within the individual. To date there is limited research on this aspect of emotion regulation, though it is clearly an inherent part of emotional labour (Cote et al, 2013; Hochschild, 2012).

As previously noted, Richard proves able to suppress difficult emotions when dealing with an interprofessional relationship. He does this in the certain knowledge that his next step will be to seek empathetic supervisory support in order to manage the emotional content of this engagement:

I expressed the concerns to the duty doctor who was very flippant and dismissive of my concerns, mainly I think because of my student status... And I came away from it feeling quite angry with the GP around... because he didn't really understand the role, I thought he really didn't understand the role that an alcohol worker and a student social worker had in this case. And I spoke about this with my supervisor and she said, 'Well in my experience that's a common thread with GPs in my experience. They don't understand the role of an alcohol worker. And that stimulated some reading that I did around it, and certain academics are saying, well it will be a really good thing if social workers could be placed within GP surgeries to do their work and fulfil their role and just be in the same place, work in the same place as GPs (Richard 236).

Not only does Richard access a suitable conduit for the management of his emotions, he is also able to turn this potentially negative experience into a useful learning opportunity. It is my belief that this research has enabled student respondents to connect with their feelings and has supported me in identifying and validating my own feelings, which in turn strengthens the data analysis.

## 5.6 Coping systems – social support

As per Waldron's (2007) suggestion, whenever possible, the student respondents made use of peer support as an antidote when emotionally challenged in an organization. This was clearly a means of forming resistance to abuses of power and injustice as well as coping with overly-bureaucratic agency expectations. It was also personally and professionally fulfilling (Meyerson, 1998). Sharon provides an example of this:

...I remember I was quite struggling at the time emotionally with just the workload, the kind of frustrations in how youth work at this time has become. You know they were cutting everywhere, you know what I mean. And I was feeling very angry. And I think having a peer supervision with people who were in that business who do share the same worries, it was emotional support I think and like coping strategies. You know like, 'Okay but look at this. Maybe we can do it like this. Have you thought about this?' You know just getting ideas... just learning how to live with it. Or being supported to be able to live with these uncertainties and frustrations... (Sharon 406).

Peer support from colleagues, particularly for 'low-power employees' offers solidarity and emotional support in the workplace and encourages workers to continue in their roles (Waldron, 2007: 69). If this is the case, how much more important then must this be for students who do not even have the status of employee? The complexity of workplace dynamics with a range of formal and informal rules and expectations can present a real challenge to the emotional integrity of students on placement. It is clear that emotional manipulation plays a part in asserting relational power in many of the agencies in which social work practice learning takes place. It appears that students, along with employees, are sometimes loath to counter this emotional manipulation for fear of being considered defensive and so the frustration remains and is not addressed (Waldron, 2007).



Suppressing and/or concealing perceived negative emotions such as anger, fear or hurt in order to maintain the status quo within a supervisee/supervisor relationship and to avoid conflict due to fear of the consequences, is for student respondents sometimes the preferred way of managing an intense emotional experience. This is an often used tactic in any workplace to gain social acceptance, which unfortunately does not bode well as a means of developing positive long-term relational effects (Waldron, 2007; Meyerson, 2007) or, I suggest in developing a sense of professional self.

Should we expect students to have to rely on peers in order to gain 'profound emotional relief'? (Waldron, 2007: 74). Niven et al (2013) consider how within a workplace, an emotional labour interaction is often shared as a means of dealing with the experience by discussing feelings and reactions. The majority of students are not placed in an agency with a fellow learner and so this social sharing of emotions can sometimes be difficult to achieve if the student does not feel confident as a member within the team. For the majority of students, they have instead to rely on formal timetabled opportunities to meet with peers or make use of their own informal networks of support. So one could claim that students are placed at a disadvantage in this regard both due to their status as learners and as new members of pre-existing teams. On a more positive front, those students who actively engage in shadowing as part of their placement learning are often able to partake in 'goal contagion' (Niven et al, 2013:111); a phenomenon whereby people learn how to manage their emotions by seeing how others do so. This concept clarifies the importance of shadowing as a means of learning not just about the 'nuts and bolts' of the role but also how to use emotional labour effectively. Certainly, a lack of

shadowing opportunities appeared to have a detrimental impact on Julie's perception of her ability to learn over the course of the placement:

But I think where it missed was I never then got the ongoing shadowing to progress. So I knew what I knew from seeing the first few and obviously my practice would have progressed presumably from just doing it but I didn't learn any new ways of doing things, 'cos I didn't get to see anybody else do it and I didn't get to see.... (Julie, 25)

Ultimately, Julie chose to engage with peers as a means of support. It would be useful to consider how emotional management across a group or whole cohort of students affects the whole unit and whether there is appropriate support available to manage this level of emotional labour. Niven et al (2013) suggest that further research is required when considering the networks in which emotional labour processes are distributed and I concur. The research on which this thesis reports makes a contribution to this aspect of emotional labour.

Peer support and emotional management is of particular interest with the development of social media as a source of information sharing. Several of the student respondents noted how making use of this resource was a valuable way of gaining support from others. This was not arbitrary but rather involved a process of selection. So they were able to engage in emotion work away from the placement and to share thoughts and feelings with trusted peers:

...so I went home and I went on my social media group and was, 'Oh, you won't believe what happened today... (Heather, 493).

Ruch (2007: 662) considers how social support can encourage emotional containment, where individuals are able 'to manage their feelings and to integrate

thinking and feeling'. Such groups can offer a space in which to process events, particularly those which present a challenge. This resonates with the study groups in which the student respondents engage and where they are encouraged to bring ethical dilemmas and challenging experiences for sharing and subsequent discussion. Without exception, the student respondents were in favour of the concept of peer support, particularly when managing intense emotional events. This could occur either within the study group system or in some instances, which were unfortunately less often, within the practice learning environment.

As reported earlier, Andy was on placement in a mental health team and clearly articulates the value of peer support provided within the team:

We had two... well one difficult week but we had two deaths in my second placement. It was really interesting to see how the team pulled together then. If that wasn't there, if that team cohesiveness wasn't there it could have had a disastrous consequence. It was yeah a difficult week and everyone just looked after one another, and really helped each other and just got through that difficult stage (Andy, 223).

Andy associates peer support with developing a cohesive team dynamic and considers it very much as a relational activity which comes into play when the group faces challenging circumstances. There is a sense of collegiality and learning together. This was also visible when engaging with study groups as Richard clarifies:

You know, there's been times when I've needed to use the study group for peer support and I've found that when I've had a particularly emotionally challenging week, I've taken stuff to study group and got support around that. And it's kind of stimulated other people in the group to talk about the emotional aspects of what they've been doing as well. So we've all kind of shared the emotional aspect of the work that we've been doing in our study groups and I hope supported each other through it (Richard, 330).

Richard's suggestion that sharing emotional aspects of the role encourages others to do the same is a useful one. This implies that it is a skill which can be learnt, rather than something innate and that peer support is a viable mechanism for developing a sense of how to share emotional challenges with others. Liu and Carless, (2006: 280) explore how peer feedback 'enables students to take an active role in the management of their own learning'. Whilst this is predominantly concerned with academic learning, the premise is clearly also the case in a practice learning capacity.

Cathy considered peer support as a vehicle to support the experience of learning:

It supports me to learn through listening to other student's perspectives, dilemmas, thought processes and challenges. I learn things from the way that they do things (Cathy, 496).

This in turn leads onto the usefulness of peer support in promoting wellbeing. Sharon is clear in this regard:

... personally I feel that peer supervision is an incredible way of promoting self-care of frontline staff when there is a structured process that enables positive action (Sharon, 331).

Having experienced the positive aspect of peer support in previous employment, Sharon initiated peer supervision from the outset between herself and a fellow student which she felt was successful in promoting wellbeing. Julie, on the other hand, discovered later in her practice learning experience that peer support could alleviate workplace stress (Davis and Cockayne, 2005) and was of significant value in light of the perceived lack of support within the agency:

We had a group supervision where we were asked to bring a reflection written out, you know, follow this specific format. And I was working on another case where I was getting no support, literally on one day I had no support and what I was told to do I completely disagreed with and then got told off for not doing anything. And I was just like.... And that was the basis of my reflection. I realised that actually bringing that up with peers and being able to talk it through and actually looking at it from a distance and hearing other people's take on it was really good. It made me realise where I had done well, or where I could have done things differently... (Julie, 125).

It is evident then that peer support promotes emotional management as well as skills development in a broader sense. It is also a helpful way to reflect on the power dynamics in a relationship, whether with other professionals or service users. For any of this to be effective, trust within a peer group system is important, as Cathy describes:

I mean my team weren't very welcoming when I was there because they were all stressed. One didn't want to work with me and it felt like I was in the way. I needed some help in those initial stages but as the placement went on I found my place within the team and I realised who I could trust to speak to about things. And they had time for me and would want to talk to me. And then by the end there were a few people I felt able to talk to. So it's in the initial stages I think when it's really important when you don't know what sense to make of things (Cathy, 625).

Cathy's suggestion that peer support within an organisational context would be more useful if initiated at the beginning of student engagement has been reiterated by other student respondents. Unfortunately, as with Cathy's example, it is often at the beginning of the practice placement that students find it most difficult to access peer support within the agency team. In these instances, the reason given is excessive workloads of social workers leading to lack of engagement.

Staempfli and Fairtlough (2018: 10) note that a sense of trust is valued by students and that this along with respect and acceptance leads to the creation of a 'safe space' when providing support to one another. It would appear that this is also true of peer relationships within an agency context. Anna, was similarly concerned about trust issues and the impact these have on relationship-building:

They [team members] had to know you first or you had to gain their trust first. And if you can't gain their trust what happen to the people who can't gain that trust because of their personality? They don't get the support, see? (Anna, 176).

Markedly different was Lauren's experience of peer support. This could potentially be due to the agency setting which was not a statutory service but rather a third sector advice service:

Peer support in my placement was great on a general basis. The staff were well-trained. They really gave encouragement if I came in and thought, 'Oh I haven't done that right' or 'did I do that right'. And if I needed feedback or I needed to be told that I needed to do that better or something, it was always in a positive way (Lauren, 148).

This level of support could potentially replace or lie in parallel with the need for supervision, particularly when there are concerns as to whether the type of supervision available provides adequate emotional support for the student or practitioner (Davis and Cockayne, 2005).

Within a practice context peer support is clearly a valid and valued means of developing learning and skills, particularly when emotional challenges and intense practice events need attention within a supportive and reflective environment.

Student respondents have different experiences and perceptions of where to find this

social support. Some consider colleagues within agencies as peers whereas others are more comfortable when engaging with students through planned or ad hoc arrangements.

## 5.7 Coping systems - discretion and emotional labour as theoretical concepts

People smile because they have to, not because they want to (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987:23)

Before offering a consolidation of how student respondents engage in emotional labour, it is worth acknowledging that they also deal with their feelings as students within their private lives, often when reflecting on their placement learning. Emotion work enables the regulation and management of one's own emotions as well as those of others (Exley and Letherby, 2001). Hochschild differentiates between emotion work and emotional labour:

...emotional labor [means] the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value... The synonymous terms emotional work or emotional management... refer to these same acts done in a private context where they have use value (1983:7, original emphasis).

I suggest that as students are not paid for their time on placement but rather are expected to pay for their education, the exchange value normally associated with emotional labour could be contested.

Indeed, it would appear that student respondents provide a significant amount of *unpaid* emotional labour. This proposal is an adjunct to Hochschild's (2012) work which has not been investigated before and is part of my contribution to knowledge. The majority of placements offer very similar opportunities to students as to paid members of staff and so there is a perception that they are treated much the same as employees in many respects, despite the fact that they should be considered as supernumerary in their role as learners. The literature in this regard tends to focus



predominantly on emotional labour (Frith and Kitzinger, 1998) possibly due to the neoliberal tenet underpinning much of the world of work. However, there are also many examples of where emotional labour and emotion work has become conflated and interchangeable (James, 1992; Williams, 2013). To remain true to Hochschild's original theoretical concept, I feel it important to differentiate between emotional labour and emotion work when possible, though much of the literature does not do so. Indeed, the student respondents themselves make clear definitions between their emotional engagement on placement (emotional labour) and then emotion work, which takes place in a private reflective space where they are able to consider their practice and its emotional impact. This is often a shared reflective space where they are able to 'do work' on their own emotions in light of peer learning in order to regulate and manage feelings (Frith and Kitzinger, 1998). Heather provided an example of how emotion work enabled her to make sense of the challenges faced during the placement:

My day finished at about eight o'clock that night and I got home and I was like, 'how do you come down from that?' It was such a traumatic day and my supervisor and I had sort of talked a bit about it but hadn't really digested it. Because she was...

Beth: Well you were both still in the moment weren't you?

Yeah exactly. And so I got home and ended up talking about it with my partner... going over it and saying how I found it really upsetting and blah, blah, blah (Heather, 718).

Whilst perhaps a little concerning in relation to the potential blurring of boundaries between home and work in terms of managing wellbeing, this was clearly a useful source of support for Heather. Emotion work was enacted between her and her partner in order to reflect on and deal with feelings within the private sphere.

The concept of emotional labour is explored by Hochschild (1983: 147) thus:

[There are] many jobs that call for emotional labor. Jobs of this type have three characteristics in common. First, they require face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public. Second, they require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person – gratitude or fear, for example. Third, they allow the employer, through training and supervision, to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees.

These characteristics are clearly apparent in social work agency settings where students engage in practice placements in order to achieve the required skills as per the requirements of our professional body (BASW, 2018).

The first characteristic noted by Hochschild (2012), that of face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public, is a necessary requirement for social workers and students alike, regardless of the nature of the service provision. Lauren's placement was with an advice service, which relied predominantly on voice-to-voice contact via phone contact. However, in order to meet the complex needs of recipients of the service, discretion would be used (Lipsky, 2010) and organisational policies around limiting face-to-face engagement circumvented in order to develop a relationship. In so doing, the agency engaged with service users in person in addition to providing a service via telephone. Lauren noted how this could lead to dependency and therefore may not be the most helpful way of supporting the service user's needs. She sought support from peers informally and through supervision in order to develop this aspect of her practice. These informal and formal mechanisms of support enabled her to consider the delicate balance between relationship-based practice and technical-rational constraints (Ingram, 2015).

I built a relationship with one man and that is because he is known to the service and he started to trust me and he kept coming back and coming back.

But that wasn't really the way it was meant to go. It shouldn't have been like that. But because he needed so much help and [advice agency] were his support bubble, they kept him as that. So that was the only one. And that relationship, he got dependent on me. And he was an ongoing case, he would always be ongoing. So me leaving probably wasn't good for him but it was just the way it had to be really (Lauren, 253).

Lauren's pragmatism enabled her to validate this experience and she made no further mention of the placement ending.

In relation to social work, Hochschild's second characteristic considers how an emotional state is produced in a service user by a worker, or student social worker in the case of this research. Lauren's explanation above of the man who developed a dependency on her is a useful example of this. It is possible that part of his reason for returning to the service may have been due firstly to a feeling that someone cared about his wellbeing and secondly from a sense of gratitude. How student social workers manage to develop and maintain useful relationships with service users depends to a significant degree on the supervisory support they receive which enables them to receive advice and support with regards to developing the relationship; and their ability to reflect on the learning experience (Ingram, 2015), as Lauren testifies:

I wrote a lot of reflections on that particular service user, 'cos there was such a dependency on a service he needed and it was about making sure he kept that relationship between, you know, 'We are the support staff here, you are the service user. We are here to help you but we can't depend on each other and you can't', so....yeah and I had supervision over it and they were great with that (Lauren, 264).

The third characteristic as defined by Hochschild (2012) allows the employer, through training and supervision, to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees and is of particular interest when considering the role of the employer in relation to students who are on placement. The employer's degree of control is somewhat different in relation to a student rather than an employee. A student has a network of support extending beyond that of employees, in the form of academic tutors, practice educators and peers. For this reason as well as that of efficiency, not all agencies offer the same level of training and supervision to students as to employees. Rather, there is an expectation that external educators and tutors will take up these functions. These variations in provision of support could perhaps in part either free up the social work student from organisational emotional control or potentially make it more difficult to engage with emotional activities alongside colleagues.

Andy presented a critical reflection of an incident when he felt well-supported by the agency supervisor in managing his emotions when working interprofessionally:

I was supporting a refugee. He was being looked for by the police so they turned up one day at the office unannounced and asked to speak to his careworker. So this was the first time I had had to deal with the police in that situation, sort of as this kind of semi-professional, call it what you will. So it was an interesting twist and learning curve for me. But my supervisor supported me in that and she was really good in being a quite kind of calming influence because when the police come you automatically think 'Oh, are my notes up to date? What has that person done? Am I going to be in trouble? Where is this going to go to?' But she [supervisor] was very calm. You know, she got the notes out. They were written notes, they weren't electronic. So she said 'you can't touch them, you can't take them away'. But she read through them and they seemed to be as accurate as they needed to be and she showed me that before we went in there so actually that calmed me a bit. That support was really helpful in terms of settling me (Andy, 252).

This supervisor evidently supported Andy in both acknowledging the good work he had done in writing appropriate notes but also in managing his emotions when dealing with the police. This support enabled him to remain calm in the face of concern about both the refugee with whom he had developed a relationship and himself as a student or 'semi-professional'.

At the other end of the spectrum, Cathy who was a student in a Children in Care Team found that there was a lack of emotionality and emotional support during her supervision:

I think it comes down to the fact that everyone is so busy. My supervisor... supervision, no matter how much I requested it would be to discuss cases in depth... A lot of supervision was about going through the case list and discussing what I was doing and what I was going to do next and that was it... and it seemed more about accountability, making sure I was practising safely rather than whether I could do a better job than I was. So I didn't get any support from my supervisor to learn and she didn't say anything critical either (Cathy 265).

As mentioned earlier in chapter one, there is a host of international social work literature suggesting that supervision should be more relational but that often it becomes prescriptive and driven by managerialism (Ruch, 2005; Vassos et al, 2018). Howe (2014) makes a clear link between the bureaucratisation of organisations and the task-orientated focus of much supervision in order to fit into a hierarchical structure in which the need for discretion is potentially eliminated. Fortunately, the student respondent Cathy, relied to a significant degree on the support of peers as mitigation for what she considered as lacking in her experience of supervision. In addition Cathy also explored how building resilience against or in spite of organisational factors is important.

I think I'll just gradually build resilience against organisational things and learn how to practice in a way that I feel happy with in terms of accountability over time and I hope to feel confident enough that all the things I won't see so much as a problem... (Cathy, 598)

Cathy found that using discretion (Lipsky, 2010) afforded her an opportunity to highlight the needs of those with mental health issues in the prison system, though perhaps to the detriment of her own emotional wellbeing and potentially increasing risk to those she was seeking to support:

So it fell on me to take on roles of other people like the safeguarding and mental health which was predominantly down to other people, to try and improve myself and I felt really out of my depth at some points (Cathy, 447).

Sharon used the support of peers to initiate discretion when making demands on the agency:

I think you can get support in being able to challenge your management in the right way because they will know what they're like and how it works also (Sharon, 274).

Attempts to engage with discretion appear to be potentially less likely for students who are perhaps concerned not to take too many perceived risks within their roles.

So, Lipsky's theory relating to the use of discretion (2010) supports the means of dealing with hierarchical constraints as does the concept of becoming an 'ethical satisficer' (Bowles et al, 2006: 43) in which:

The ethical satisficer reduces the complexities of the practice environment to a realistically manageable level by choosing those alternatives that meet his or her basic expectations and aspirations. The decisions they make or the resolutions they come to in the event of conflict are not necessarily ideal, but they ought to be the best in the circumstances and they ought to be ones the

worker can, in good conscience, live with. The alternative is for the worker to burn themselves out in their fight against colleagues, their employing organisation and others as they constantly search for their utopian vision of ethical perfection.

Emotional labour is notably concerned with managing one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others (Winter et al, 2018). This may be achieved through a variety of means including the use of discretion (Lipsky, 2010) and becoming an ethical satisficer (Bowles et al, 2006).

## 5.8 Overall findings

For social workers, the capacity to feel their full range of feelings and to have their feelings honoured by others was personally and professionally fulfilling, even if exhausting. Social workers are in the business of caring for human beings; to legitimate their capacity to feel, to feel for others, and to create communities to support their feelings is to give them the capacity to do their work (Meyerson, 2007: 172).

To conclude, whilst the nature of social work is often considered to be ambiguous, it is underpinned by a psychosocial ideology in which value is placed on social and emotional expertise alongside technical knowledge (Meyerson, 2007). It is often thought that the vagaries of social work are prompted by the tensions inherent in developing relationships with service users and carers (Hansen and Natland (2017). However, it appears crucial that we acknowledge the emotional challenges of working alongside colleagues in an organisational context. Intense emotional events and experiences within the workplace which generally define and redefine working relationships between colleagues are an inherent if little researched phenomena (Waldron, 2007; Winter et al, 2018) which this research seeks to address. These meaningful work processes are described by Waldron (2007: 65) as 'the construction and destruction of human relationships' and he suggests that these should be given greater credence.

Waldron (2007: 67) notes how 'relationship violations can be humiliatingly public' and very much instigated by the powerful on the weak. He describes this as 'emotional tyranny' and certainly, in all incidences reported by student respondents, there was a perception that this negative emotional engagement was at least in part influenced by a perceived power dynamic. It would appear that employees and students alike



are at their most intensely emotional when values and moral codes are seen to be violated (Waldron, 2007). Given that social work purports to be a value-based profession, it is of particular concern that organisational culture can, on occasion, create such an oppressive learning environment for students. Waldron, (2007:66) suggests that '...it is the nature of work relationships, not the nature of the task itself, that creates the highest potential for intense emotional experience, including emotional abuse'. When the power difference is most apparent, as will inevitably be the case for students, then the emotional reaction seems more significant. Winter et al (2018: 1) exhort us to consider the 'implications of these pervasive and powerful processes' and how social workers have to filter and manage these across organisational contexts as well as their personal and professional personas.

Although practice learning is intended to consider the 'synergies and disjunctions of the experience' (Zuchowski, 2016: 423), it is clear from the fairly minimal research in this area along with the findings I have put forward within this study, that the supervisory support provided does not always meet the expectation of 'facilitating positive pedagogical cultures'. (Zuchowski, 2016: 422). This would appear to be in part due to role confusion; poor financial remuneration impacting on level of engagement; and lack of opportunity due to the high demands of those expected to provide supervision, often as an adjunct to their own extensive workload.

The research data which has led to the identified themes makes clear the necessity for social work educators to acknowledge the significant impact of organisational and managerialist imperatives in order to best support student social workers. This also

applies to other professions and the benefits of interprofessional working appear to be influenced by these dynamics. Legislation and policy plays a part in this too, in that the role and purpose of students and workers has an impact on the efficacy of working across professional boundaries.

Even when students receive appropriate support, it seems that the organisational challenges posed can present an emotional barrier to learning as well as a barrier to emotional learning. In my experience, this in turn impacts on the role of educators who become 'support enforcers' rather than 'supporters of learning'. What I mean by this is that their time is occupied with ensuring that prescribed minimum levels of support are offered, while not always focusing this on the individual learning needs of students.

Peer support mitigates against inherent power dynamics and instead provides a collegial dialogical forum in which to discuss failings alongside successes without fear of retribution. It is highly valued as a means of promoting wellbeing through a shared identity and sense of belonging. However when agencies do not function effectively and peer support is unavailable, this can create a sense of isolation and a detrimental impact on student wellbeing, which in turn has implications for effective practice learning.

Meyerson (2007) notes how engaging with feelings and emotions and sharing these rather than suppressing them, can itself lead to transformative learning for all concerned. Empathy is a key social work skill and encouraging social work students

to respect and attend to their own and others' emotions and feelings actively encourages learning in this regard. Doing so fosters a practical appreciation of the difference between a sympathetic passive understanding (Trevithick, 2012) and an empathic response which actively seeks to reflect the experience, behaviours and feelings of oneself and the other (Egan, 2014; Howe, 2014).

Emotional labour in an organisational context would appear to present some challenge to the process of student learning in this regard. Fenton (2015: 1416) describes the stress experienced when values and practice are not in synchronicity as 'disjuncture'. She suggests that managerialism, high workloads and subsequent procedural supervision promote a value-poor ethical climate. This disjuncture along with the associated guilt, described by Fenton (2015: 1417) as 'ontological guilt' leads to 'ethical stress'. In my view, this has the potential to impact on the student's use of discretion (Lipsky, 2010) and thereby minimises the healthy ontological anxiety which is a consequence of discretion and enables us to live with uncertainty.

From the perspective of an educator, I question whether there is adequate preparation for both students and educators in relation to emotional engagement. As Waldron acknowledges (2007), becoming attuned to our emotional responses in the workplace may help with the development of ethical relationships in a broader sense. Whilst the emotional experiences of students on placements are uniquely contextual and dependent on a range of factors, one common denominator is the importance of developing working relationships and the perceived power dynamic which plays a part in this. How can we better prepare students for the emotional impact of the

workplace whilst actively encouraging them to make good use of a range of support?

How can we better prepare educators to invite the expression of intense emotions in order to support the professional development of students? Waldron (2007: 79)

sums up these concerns when he suggests:

We must do more as researchers, leaders and co-workers to attend to the emotional needs of ourselves and others if the humanity of the workplace is to be reclaimed.

Similarly, Meyerson (2007) exhorts us to honour emotions by attending to and engaging with the feelings of others. As a relational activity, this should surely be an expectation of those involved in social work education, from students to educators and researchers particularly as 'these kind of connections validate individuals, foster learning and create community' (Meyerson, 2007: 174).

To sum up, a range of factors can be identified as either supportive or challenging and are not mutually exclusive. Engaging with unpaid emotional labour when supporting people who use services, appears not to be the greatest stressor for student respondents. Rather, managing emotions whilst negotiating behaviours and systems within an organisational context prove to be significant challenging factors. Student respondents illuminate how managerialism often leads to high caseloads and procedural solutions. This in turn casts workers in organisations as experts, which on occasion leads to issues of power for student respondents in terms of developing professional identities as learners. Organisations where practice learning takes place are often underpinned by a financial imperative and subsequent restrictive practice has the propensity to lead to an oppressive learning environment in which emotions are devalued. In addition, there are occasions where team

dynamics foster environments where intense emotional events are neither acknowledged nor well-managed. Consequently vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue proliferate leading to burnout as a potential outcome.

In a more positive vein, student respondents raise awareness of coping mechanisms including unpaid emotional labour and discretion. These are often established through reflection via trusting relationships utilising supervisory and social support networks. In addition, supportive social structures prove crucial in providing a trusting space in which to process intense emotional events. This promotes emotional containment and enhances effective relationship-based engagement with highly valued interprofessional practice learning opportunities.

## **Chapter 6 - Managing paid and unpaid emotional labour within a neoliberal institution – places of escape**

### **6.1 The practice of student placement learning**

Being a student social worker can involve a tumultuous process of being outside one's comfort zone, being confronted with distressing subjects, challenging one's personal values and negotiating personal and professional boundaries (Rajan-Rankin, 2014: 2429).

One of the ways that the research contained within this thesis contributes to knowledge is by adding data to the argument and underlining the concerns by Rajan-Rankin (2014) around being a student social worker, particularly in relation to learning through practice placement activity. In addition, I have contributed to knowledge by considering issues relating to the political, cultural and social contexts in which the emotions of student social workers are constructed and managed. There is currently limited research in this area of practice (Rajan-Rankin, 2014).

Whilst considerable efforts are made by educators and organisations to provide students with appropriate learning in placement settings, emergent learning from my research suggests that there are occasions where students are party to oppressive practice. Crisp and Hosken (2016) do not agree with this assertion as such but their work has found that there are occasions when students are party to oppressive practice. They propose that a fundamental rethink of how to best provide practice learning is due. They suggest that students could instead engage in action research projects initiated from within the academy. Whether doing so would ameliorate the level of emotional labour displayed is something to perhaps consider. Certainly, in my research a range of organisational mores and foibles impacted significantly on the emotional labour experienced by student respondents. I suggest that if students

had more control over the organisational context, this would be a positive step forward. Offering increased control could also encourage the development of social learning as a valid strategy to enhance the empathy between students working together as well as between students and service users and carers (Staempfli and Fairtlough, 2018). A whole-systems focus relating to wide-ranging support rather than a narrow focus on traditional supervision methods, my research here suggests would be a very practical and useful way forward, particularly in this resource-limited learning environment (Wilkins 2017). Providing students with organisational control may also encourage them to make better use of discretion (Lipsky, 2010) in order to develop socially aware relationships with service users and carers.

Organisations employing social workers and offering practice placement to social work students have a duty to consider the wellbeing of their staff and students and to acknowledge the importance of emotions as part of a demanding professional role. Inadequate support is likely to lead to stress and demotivation which can in turn impact on the quality of the service provided to service users and carers. The onus to manage emotions in order to promote wellbeing should not be placed solely on the shoulders of the individual but instead could be negotiated within a cultural and structural context (Grant et al, 2015). Meyerson (1998: 112) suggests that we should develop a discourse in which emotions are legitimised within the experiential realm and thereby valued rather than controlled. This would serve to challenge the dichotomous thinking between emotionality and rationality and enable social workers to 'help people feel, rather than help them control, get through, and contain their feelings'.

Authenticity, it is plausible to suppose, is a feature of one's identity as a person – of one's sense of the kind of life worth living (Helm, 2009: 11)

From a social constructionist viewpoint, Hochschild (2012) considers that in social life, in both the workplace and beyond, our emotions are influenced by feeling rules and social and cultural norms. As my research has revealed, it is clear how these feeling rules, when in unfavourable organisational contexts, can impact negatively on the authenticity of emotional management (Pugliesi, 1999; Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Sloan, 2007; Salmela, 2009). When reflecting on placement activity, the student respondents have certainly alluded to the working practice of organisations and have problematised these cultural norms. I consider it valid then to study not so much whether or how emotions are managed but more importantly *who* is managing our emotions and to what end? I plan that future research will pick up and develop this important point and potentially offer an educational model which engages with emotions in organisations.

Salmela (2009: 137) asks us to take into account 'the origin and the purpose' of these rules. It would appear that when the feeling rules of an organisation conflict with the values inherent in social work, or any other 'helping' profession for that matter, this may lead to emotional dissonance, thereby leading to a mismatch between the emotions required by the organisation and those which are genuinely felt. My research suggests that this is particularly problematic for students who are by nature of their status, still moulding their professional identity and who therefore rely to a greater extent than qualified practitioners, on values-based mentoring and support in order to do so. Students may feel at more risk if not achieving organisational goals than their qualified colleagues, as the stakes are high for them



with regards successful completion of their studies. My research contributes to new knowledge in this regard and will, I hope, encourage educators to better consider the support structures in place for students on practice placements.

Bringing together the sociological frameworks of Hochschild and Lipsky to support analysis of the student respondents' experiences, my research contributes to new knowledge by affirming this theoretical compatibility when considering the impact of organisational mores on behaviour and subsequent development of student learning.

## 6.2 Places of escape

A person's disposition to learn about the unknown requires confidence, and confidence emerges from solid social bonds in the learning relationship (Rowntree, 2005: 97).

Bolton (2005) acknowledges how employees create spaces where they are able to escape from feeling rules imposed by organisations. These spaces are often shared with others and promote ontological security as well as opportunities for resistance, development of community and identity development (Salmela, 2009). My research aligns with this concept which I have named 'places of escape', and I propose that the research reported here adds an original contribution to knowledge in this area by finding that these 'places of escape' are often negotiated through supervision, peer engagement/social support *in conjunction* with the use of discretion (Lipsky, 2010), in order to challenge norms and thereby feeling rules. Mutual interconnections are able to promote and encourage the sharing and development of skills and knowledge based on strengths rather than focusing on vulnerabilities (Beasley and Jaworski, 2005). These 'places of escape' are vital for professionals and/or students in order to manage the emotional stress of working in organisations offering limited autonomy and social support, whilst perhaps juggling unreasonable workloads and expectations of success (Pugliesi, 1999; Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Salmela, 2009; Ravalier, 2018).

Students of any profession are not only developing authenticity as practitioners through an understanding of their own identities in relation to professional values and norms, they are doing so through engagement with feeling rules within an organisational context which may not always lend itself to authenticity (Hochschild,

2012; Salmela, 2009). Neoliberalism, as meted through the erosion of public services including health and social care, presents a significant challenge to the value-based service ideal, which along with expertise and authority (Salmela, 2009), defines the concept of professionalism in the 'helping' professions. Hochschild's (2012) concerns with regards to the internalisation of work-related emotion management and subsequent bleeding of this into areas of employees' private lives, clearly relates equally as much to students providing unpaid emotional labour, particularly when students are in some instances treated almost as additional members of (unpaid) staff rather than as supernumerary.

This then is a troubling aspect of the learning process of which educators should be reminded and/or made aware of in order to ensure that 'places of escape' are negotiated and time given in order to mitigate these concerns. Both students and practitioners require support in an environment where permission and space affords them opportunities to attend to feelings. This support presents a collective means of acknowledging authenticity and thus demonstrates and models a sense of caring and compassion (Frost et al, 2007).

My concept of the unpaid nature of emotional labour provided by students is a newly identified one, adding to existing knowledge in this area of practice. To date, literature concerning Hochschild's (2012) concept alludes to either emotional labour or emotion work and sometimes even conflates or confuses the two. The concept of unpaid emotional labour develops this theoretical and conceptual consideration for student social workers.

Given that social work is experiencing a crisis of demand, particularly in children's service provision (Hood et al, 2019), students are more likely to be treated as unpaid members of the workforce, providing unpaid emotional labour. Therefore, it is for us as educators to ensure that this perceived status is acknowledged and challenged as much as possible, to ensure that students are supported as learners. I also propose that this concept may apply widely to students of other disciplines, particularly those in the helping professions. Greater acknowledgement of students' unpaid status may encourage greater scrutiny of the demands placed on them to manage their emotions in environments where they should be adequately supported to do so safely. I plan in future to expand this concept to interprofessional practice in the helping professions in order to promote boundary spanning via research to inform the development of an emotional practice curriculum in health and social care.

Minimal research within the academy has been presented to date in relation to the impact of managing practice placement for academic tutors (Finch, 2015) despite their role being 'pivotal' and 'underestimated' (Degenhardt, 2003:65) . I myself have found this role to be a challenging one in which emotional labour has played a part both when working alongside students as well as social workers within organisations. A study by Finch (2015) explores the emotional impact for tutors of supporting students who are failing in placement. Overall, there is a small though growing body of evidence to suggest that social work should engage with a more evidence-informed 'emotional curriculum', as presently 'social work education tends to prioritise the cognitive (knowing and thinking) domain over the affective (emotional) domain' (Grant et al, 2015: 2352). This need for change along with the paucity of writing in this regard suggests to me that a plan to develop research in this area of

academic practice could prove useful to the development of knowledge in order to inform practice developments. It is important to note that:

'Only the dominant and the dormant have relative freedom from emotional constraints in organizational life' (Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989: 55, cited in Mann, 2010: 365).

### **6.3 The development of new knowledge through research**

Stories about oneself are episodic, tiny fragments taken from the continuous flow, over laid with emotion and half buried in stages of consciousness making reality an indefinable concept, (Romanyshyn,1982:10)

Muncey (2010:1) describes how writing research involves having to 'jump through hoops to please the triumvirate of the academy, the publishing world and yourself'. As my research has developed, my own assumptions in relation to research methodologies have been challenged. The iterative process of research has led me from action research to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA); and from concern about bracketing to an appreciation of the autoethnographic approach where 'the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns' (Spry, 2001:711). Acknowledging and embracing this iterative process of learning has provided me with a hitherto unobtainable freedom which has in turn allowed my creativity to flourish.

The opportunity to engage in a reflexive process has enabled me to perceive who I am in this context and to communicate through engagement with the language of poetry and prose. This in turn has deepened my appreciation of both my personal and professional persona, thereby allowing me to see my 'self' as a process rather than a structure. So I am constantly in the process of 'becoming' and engaging in Foucault's (1988) concept of technologies of the self, whereby I reflect on my internalised thoughts and behaviours in order to make sense of the world.

Throughout this research I have come to appreciate how the student respondents' stories and mine have become 'enmeshed together in a complex process of mutual definition and construction' (Muncey, 2010:15). My poetry/prose is an effort to capture transitory moments when a connection has been made and a smouldering memory has been sparked through the power of collaborative dialogue. Douglas and Carless (2013) consider how performative research offers opportunities to gain insights into both social issues and human experience. I regard how the opportunity to perform my poetry/prose within teaching as well as part of conference presentations has enabled me to share both my experiences and those of student respondents in a way that has led me to feel authentic. Doing so has enabled a dynamic and enriching connection with my past, present and future. The performative aspect of my research has facilitated the triple hermeneutic of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in a new and creative way which has added to methodological knowledge.

My hope is that the process of undertaking this research, culminating in the viva discussion will afford the opportunity for social reflexivity and collaborative dialogue as a means of determining the value of what is presented here (Muncey, 2010). Combining a performative aspect with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is of particular interest to me and has proven to be, it turns out, a little considered development in research methodology and is therefore a place where this work offers a further original contribution to knowledge. Through being determined to use my doctoral study as more than the mere completion of a thesis but ensuring that it has been an opportunity to develop my scholarly activity more

widely, I have sought to achieve a 'transformation of self' (Bryant, 2005: 22). To this end, I have participated in a number of conferences in order to become more familiar with the academy. I welcomed the opportunity to perform some of the poetry/prose from this research as an original contribution to knowledge at the first Phenomenology of Health and Relationships: Creativity and Affect Conference, 2019, during which creative methods within interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) were heralded as a fresh and welcome methodological development. Subsequently I have received a request for further information from a researcher who has included i-poems in her own work as a response to my performative presentation. I have also incorporated poetry/prose from this research into social work teaching and have received a positive response from students. In the future, I intend to further develop this, in part through encouraging students to engage with this method of reflection if they find it helpful to do so. I plan to achieve this in an interprofessional context, through the mutuality of creating reflective spaces for student learning. Further exploration of poetry/prose with students could also, I believe, enable the sharing and co-production of this reflective method with service users and carers within the academy.



#### **6.4 Reflexivity and empathy**

The reflective practitioner only begins to unpack their questions in the days that follow, (Douglas and Carless, 2013: 54).

Reflexivity enables us to see the world from another's position and to empathise. This in turn provides an opportunity for us to consider and be open to a different worldview to that of our own and is therefore transformative. Muncey (2010) suggests that the ability to empathise becomes more accessible when we use our imaginations in order to perceive the lived experience of others. This resonates with my use of poetry/prose in order to develop an empathic appreciation of the student respondent's worlds. Reflection also depends on memory and my poetry/prose becomes a tangible reminder for me of my experience as a researcher. Lynn and Payne (1997:55, cited in Muncey, 2010:105) describe memory as 'not a complete static and accurate record of the past. Rather, it is a dynamic medium of experience – shaped by expectancies, needs and beliefs, imbued with emotion, and enriched by the inherently human capacity for narrative creation'.

Bryant and Jaworski (2005:15) refer to the method of using a poem as a means of connecting with memories and unearthing emotions as 'life writing'. They propose that memories are a means of stimulating innate emotions and that in turn emotions are 'intertwined and moulded into the processes of learning, teaching, academic writing, knowledge production, and discovery'. For me, engagement with memories, and thereby with emotions, has been a constantly iterative process throughout the research and when writing this thesis. For example, when considering Lipsky's theory of discretion (2010) and the concept of being an ethical satisficer (Bowles et al, 2006), I can relate to these concepts, as both were helpful to me during my own

development as a student social worker. I recall how having to modify my values and lower my expectations in order to protect my emotional wellbeing was an important lesson, which has stood me in good stead throughout my career. Similarly, using discretion in order to manipulate and cross boundaries within overly bureaucratised systems has proven an essential aspect of my own practice over many years both in social work and the academy.

## 6.5 Emotional landscapes

Emotional landscapes  
They puzzle me  
Then the riddle gets solved  
And you push me up to this

State of emergency  
How beautiful to be  
State of emergency  
Is where I want to be  
(Bjork, 1997)

As the student respondents' narratives did not lead to the interrogation of gender to any significant degree, I chose not to include this aspect of emotional life in the research. However, from my own history I feel bound to reflect on the role of gender as it relates to both emotionality and my position as a social work academic. My role as programme lead is testament to Bryant and Jaworski's (2015) acknowledgment that women in academia are likely to be providing the care work demanded within the university structures, such as taking on teaching and administrative tasks, rather than roles promoting the development of research careers. Engaging in this doctoral training is then an expression of wanting to challenge this norm whilst making visible the emotional labour to which I too am subject. Whilst the academy privileges rationality over emotion (Bryant and Jaworski, 2005), I consider writing this thesis as an embodied experience which has enabled me to reconnect to my history through engaging emotionally with the narratives of student respondents. I agree with Livholts and Bryant (2013) that emotions in research enable both transformation and agency.

Through my research and the writing of this thesis, I have found myself reflecting on the intersectionality of gender and class in my life as an academic. I am aware that a

part of my drive for completing this doctoral programme is underpinned by the emotion of honour. Having been the first woman in my family to attend university, my place in the academy as a doctoral student in which I 'occupy a contradictory class location' (Bryant, 2005: 31), is one in which I still struggle to feel comfortable on occasion. Despite being a lecturer for over 10 years, I continue to have feelings that reflect 'emotional politics of anxiety and doubt' as an interloper in an environment where the middle class functions 'with a sense of entitlement to social space and economic rewards' (Skeggs, 1997: 132). Autoethnography offers the potential to explore the experiences of women in academia and encourages a challenge to current notions of identity, either in the academy or beyond (Anderson et al, 2019, forthcoming). My plan is that this research will act as a catalyst for my ongoing development as an active female researcher from a working class background who locates the world through this particular lens.

## 6.6 An emotional landscape of supervision

It turns out that developing your sense of who and what you are as an academic, intellectual and supervisor is part of the survival strategy ...recovering joy and maintaining practices of creative freedom through writing as being at the heart of self-preservation in the face of constant pressure to do things faster and better (Jaworski and Bryant, 2005: 126).

I compare my position as researcher and supervisee to that of student respondents who undertake supervision of their developing professional practice. We both occupy what Ward (2015: 109) describes as 'liminal spaces', whereby our status is ill-defined and nebulous, neither what it was before nor what we hope it to be in the future. This precarious state would appear to be one in which emotions play a significant part in the management of uncertainty while pursuing a state of emergence(y).

Jaworski and Bryant (2005) are clear that emotional labour is an essential element of developing an academic identity and this has certainly been my experience. Both my supervisors are women and between us we have worked to make the best of the academy, which conceives of research as a defined and measured product (Lynch, 2010), rather than an embodied shared experience. Despite inevitable time constraints, through emotional reciprocity we have recognised the transformative aspect of the doctoral process as a means to encourage my developing academic identity (Jaworski and Bryant, 2005). As feminist researchers, we recognise the significance of our own personal histories and the importance of their inclusion in writing (Letherby, 2014) and I have been actively encouraged to develop this aspect of my emerging research identity. Green (2005) considers the supervisor/supervisee relationship as one in which the supervisee is both watching and watched. I have

been grateful for the opportunity to make use of supervision in order to watch and learn as a novice researcher, whilst always being actively encouraged to produce my own knowledge in the light of learning. Much of my experience of supervision has been that of a co-constructed, dialogical process, whereby 'through ongoing encounters each subject recognizes the other, allowing the possibility of identifying with the other and the possibility of being shaped by the other' (Bryant and Jaworski, 2005: 12). Engaging in this process has informed my own development as a supervisor, encouraging me to improve the experience for both students and myself.

## **6.7 For Julie and Gayle**

Quiet, unassuming

still waters run deep.

Testing conversations

that gradually seep into my psyche.

Just what I need to challenge my thinking,

help me feel freed from the chattels of grind,

daily grinding me further,

but not taking purchase. Too strong research fervour

engages me, changes me, leading me on.

Building resilience and making me stronger

the longer I keep up this drive.

Feeling good as my research identity thrives and develops,

envelopes, gains credence, makes ready.

Constructed, considered and holding me steady for next steps...

I wonder just what they might be?

Now for silence and stillness, to allow me to see.

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## **Appendix 1 – Collected poems and prose**

### **Heated discussion - March 2019**

Non-conciliatory contempt seeping and oozing  
between us. No kindness.

Not of our choosing  
this loggerhead meeting.

Defeating, repeating, unable to listen.

Too much history, no mystery  
that we're not completing  
and joining together in mutual regard.

Animosity unerring and hard to endure.

Built over time and making me sure  
that our failure to manage  
is certain to damage our work here  
as colleagues, disjointed and fractured.

Conversations and kindness are just manufactured.

Punitive places where we're disconnected.

Sadly not just us who'll now be affected.



### **Transformative research I-poem**

**I realised** that how students engage in practice learning is an important and under-represented aspect of research in professional programmes. It also became increasingly clear that my own history as a social work student and social work lecturer had a part to play in how this research developed.

**I discovered** interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) from an occupational therapist and realised that there was a way of capturing the voices of student respondents which also enabled me to develop my own thoughts and feelings. The generosity of the student respondents was a trigger to my deeper engagement with not just what they had to say but how this impacted me as a researcher.

**I found** autoethnography and how this can be incorporated into my work in a variety of ways from both a sociological and educational perspective.

**I relied** on my supervisors to lend their views and offer valuable insights into the research process.

**I wrote** poems and prose to help make sense of the world in which I was immersed. This enabled me to open up and begin to explore a new part of my identity. A part previously curtailed and kept under wraps but which I am now embracing as a means to share my worldview while maintaining emotional resilience. Suffice to say, **this research has been transformative.**

## Scrutiny Mutiny

Wanting to learn from student respondents

Emotions and feelings to tend.

Responses have taught me, be open and honest,

lots of rules waiting to bend.

Writing in verse may seem diverse

but to me it's the obvious way

To make sense of my world, share with others who care

Making memories that I hope will stay

In the mind of the reader.

Now that I've freed her

I can't put her back in the bag.

Beth is out there!

Please don't doubt her

Integrity I cannot blag

(completed 18.12.18)

### Sharing Cathy's concerns

An unfamiliar town and a dusty, sun-lit railway station.

Here because Cathy's too busy to meet elsewhere and needs to return to work.

I feel that I am taking up her valuable time but she puts me at ease. No worries, this is her lunch break!

There is a sense of anticipation between us as we drive the short, busy route to a supermarket café. Her choice of venue and I immediately feel reticent and wish that I had planned more thoroughly.

The claustrophobic cafe is teeming with shoppers, most of them older, seemingly with all the time in the world; here with a very different purpose..... here to relax and chew over the price of fish.

The clatter and chatter made louder by acoustics caught on tape – a noisy relic for research posterity.

We sit with drinks and paperwork, research paraphernalia signalling our incongruous intent.

With her back to the melee, my fretful attempt to offer space for reflection amongst the lunchtime smells and noises.

No need to have worried. The words spill like over-filled coffee cups as though Cathy has been waiting forever to tell her story. A painful tale of shortfalls and lackings; of challenges beyond those expected, yet with hope for positive change.

Let down by systems and structures beyond control. I feel her pain but do not share my own.

### Let them go

Let them go, those things you filled your head with in readiness to meet me.

Free your mind and talk instead of how it felt to be confused.

Tell me more about emotions and how they influenced your thinking.

It is clear you used the help you needed to get through troubled days.

You can reflect and tell me how your peers played their part in teaching you the values and respect you now hold dear.

Take strength from those around you to clarify your thinking.

It is learning **and** support that you gained from valued peers.

### **The long road to recovery**

We meet halfway, long distance research. How kind of you to take the time.  
You look relaxed, refreshed and eager, ready to play this game of mine.  
The coffee shop is not too busy, jazz playing softly through the air.  
We sit across a table, frothy drinks to validate us here.  
The tales you tell are full of sadness, speak of service users who  
are caught in limbo, mental anguish, no-one else to turn to.  
Of services failing, fraught, fragmented, caught in neoliberal hell.  
Tears of injustice, indignation as you relay your stories well.  
Discretion cannot soothe emotions, reflection though may play a part  
in letting go, moving forward, seeing this ending as a new start.

### **Melt on the floor**

What you choose to tell me is painful to hear.  
Your commitment and passion is made very clear.  
Despite this, some others negate what you do,  
Dismiss your attempts and discriminate too.  
The hospital staff, interagency team  
Provide you with feedback, hold you in esteem.  
Yet social workers there to offer support  
Seem to forget all they've been taught  
about othering, oppression and just being kind.  
Groupthink under pressure is what springs to mind.  
You struggle against odds to push through the door  
all the time wanting to 'melt on the floor'.

### **A Fly in the Ointment**

Your story is absorbing, in part due to the sincerity with which you speak. You seem motivated by the desire to share learning in order to promote knowledge production... an act of altruism for which I am truly grateful. The intensity of your memories stir the still air and fill me with wonder. You have come so far in a relatively short space of time. Almost ready to take on the world of social work and make it your own. Then, deflecting from the purity of the occasion, an uninvited guest arrives. A large fly, buzzing around our heads and filling the space between the syllables. The incidental sound captured for posterity, encroaching on concentration both in the moment and on later inspection. Bringing a moment of levity to my transcribing task. Efforts to ignore the insect are futile. Finally, our acknowledgement of the fly helps to break the tension as your emotional journey is re-enacted. Reflective responses planned carefully and with self-effacing scrutiny. The relentless fly is no match for our mutual sense of purpose. It finally admits defeat and retreats from whence it came. I notice beads of concentration on your forehead, sunlight streaming across our faces. Sitting opposite but with thoughts side by side.

### How can we do better?

The room is one I have used before and I feel comfortable and confident.

Lauren arrives with a disarming warmth that is her calling card. As ever, a scarf, bag and make-up that I associate with her age. She reminds me of my daughter, young, fashion-conscious and with a steely determination to achieve in a challenging profession where she wants to make a difference.

Lauren looks a little nervous and I try to banish her concerns with warm-up chatter.....phatic communication if you want the social work term!

Lauren is learning many technical terms and her narrative is peppered with 'social work speak'. It seems important to her that she is able to engage with this, to feel part of a profession that thrives on jargon. These words and phrases seem to represent a comfort blanket with which to keep her safe in the knowledge that learning is taking place and she is becoming a professional.

As Lauren speaks she makes hand gestures, particularly when searching for words to describe her thoughts and feelings. She talks about feeling 'fluffy' and 'overwhelmed' at first. Speaks of how peers help her to achieve a sense of belonging. Her story is one of hope tinged with frustration at services where relationship-building is no longer a priority..... too many people seeking support. How can we make things better when the resources are not available?

The time goes so quickly and then we are done. Lauren looks relieved that she has completed another test of her mettle and succeeded. It is clear that she has put herself out on my account.

I feel unable to thank her enough without sounding disingenuous and hope that somehow she will know how much her support means to me.

PS At Lauren's graduation ceremony I was able to thank her again and was pleased to be given this opportunity.

### **A pressured environment**

We climb the stairs to our meeting room, drinks in hand, armed with memories, fresh and forceful.

I feel wrong-footed by the sudden revelation that your husband is a student of mine. No reason why this should offer concerns but perhaps my role as researcher is destabilised for a moment.

The room is too hot for me and the comfy chairs are anything but. I perch on mine, notepad on knee and recorder poised expectantly on the low table.

You do not seem to notice my discomfort as you relax back into your chair and talk animatedly about the trials and tribulations of your time on placement.

I have difficulty keeping up. Pressure of speech and your rapid delivery takes some getting used to.

Gesticulations and colloquialisms fill the space with authenticity.

A tangible fear of compromising your values in the face of working practices.

Shocking revelations, delivered swiftly, impossible to justify. The push and pull of practice clearly depicted in real case scenarios.

Behaviours and practices, reprehensible and clearly not in keeping with the careful ethical stance which you have developed and hold dear.

Distressing and concerning for us both. Tears are barely kept at bay.

Necessity drives you towards an uncompromising future where professional status and financial reward give credence to the painful expectations of the role.

You are determined not to be worn down and I hope you succeed... a bright light in a gloomy place.

### **Research as an agent for change**

With motivation clearly set, our time together feels well met.

You talk of peers with optimism and effervescent activism spills into the conversation. Research as emancipation!

All bangles, smiles and easy chat. Eager to make a difference that will help us both to make a change... no pressure! This should not feel strange.

Reminding me of why I'm here, both holding our profession dear.

### Julie's I-poem - Overwhelmed

I was doing social work assessments initially.

I was thrown in but that was good.

I didn't even know what 'direct work' meant at the start [laughs].

I got nothing from study group this year. I hadn't seen anybody for a long time and I was feeling really overwhelmed.

I didn't want to get out of bed and in to placement in the mornings... overwhelmed.

I just wanted to shut myself away from the world... overwhelmed.

I realised that maybe I did need support.

I was just feeling really ... I don't know, out of my depth...I was getting no support.

I'd just decided to put my head down and just finish.

I just kept getting told that I didn't have confidence in what I was doing. It's because no-one's listening to what I'm doing, no-one's watching what I'm doing.

I still have nightmares that I've made wrong decisions. [laughs but wipes tears from eyes]



### **Richard's I-poem - Peer support is crucial really**

I was there as a student social worker.

I held a caseload.

I got a telephone call from his father .... his son had attacked him with a knife while under the influence of alcohol. As a result he'd been arrested and he was now in prison for that offence.

I spoke to my practice learning supervisor.

I sort of had the feeling that I could have done more to prevent him from misusing the alcohol in such a way.

I sat opposite a worker who'd worked with him previously and the support that I got from her was brilliant.

I wanted to make sure that I remained professional but also just acknowledge the feelings that I had from one human being to another.

I felt like I'd built up a good rapport.

I like to practice from a relationship-based perspective.

I thought it was just really unfair.

I expressed the concerns to the duty doctor who was very flippant and dismissive of my concerns, mainly I think because of my student status.

I was in a place of not knowing.

I came away from it feeling quite angry with the GP.

I spoke about this with my supervisor.

I wouldn't consider her to be a peer because of the power dynamics in the relationship.

I'm looking forward to the challenges of working with GPs.

I've had a particularly emotionally challenging week, I've taken stuff to study group and got support around that.

I consider peer support to be crucial really, to not only social work training but also to practice as a qualified practitioner.

**Fxxx (x7) = EL + change**

Hot tears burn my cheeks

Lonely trips to lonelier people.

A team divided, devoid of care

Hardened by society's stare.

He says it once then over and over

Each time louder than the last.

Paper-thin walls share his ire

My head spins with righteous fire of

Indignation. Stop! No!

Childlike, bullying supervisor.

I'm old enough to be your mother.

Won't let you do this to another.

My practice teacher listens calmly,

Makes the changes – active agent.

For now at least I have been spared.

A problem halved is one that's shared.

## **For Julie and Gayle**

Quiet, unassuming

Still waters run deep.

Testing conversations

That gradually seep into my psyche.

Just what I need to challenge my thinking,

Help me feel freed from the chattels of grind,

Daily grinding me further,

But not taking purchase. Too strong research fervour

Engages me, changes me, leading me on.

Building resilience and making me stronger

The longer I keep up this drive.

Feeling good as my research identity thrives and develops,

Envelopes, gains credence, makes ready.

Constructed, considered and holding me steady for next steps...

I wonder just what they might be?

Now for silence and stillness, to allow me to see.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Street-level bureaucracy and the commodification of care**

In recent years, significant changes in adult social care provision can be directly related to 'the express train of personalisation, which is rapidly building a head of steam and powerful momentum'. One of the most persuasive aspects of the Personalisation agenda is its original conceptualisation and initialisation by the disabled people's movement and subsequent promotion of policy developed from the lived experiences of people using services (Henwood, 2008). A comparison will be made between the current agenda and the preceding National Health Service and Community Care Act (1990). Within the confines of this essay I will focus predominantly on the impact of the agenda on the lives of older people in receipt of social care support.

Ball and Bowe's framework (1992) is used to consider competing discourses in policy intentions; actual policy and policy-in-use, enabling an exploration of the unintended consequences. Aspects of Lipsky's (2010) social theory framework is considered and critiqued to better appreciate the dilemmas faced by social workers and how these may impact on the lived experiences of older citizens in receipt of care services.

### **Intended Policy**

As a precursor, it is helpful to acknowledge the population size of those affected by the Personalisation agenda. In 2011-12, social care services were provided to 1.5 million adults amounting to a spend of £17billion. This does not take into account people paying entirely for their own care, often referred to as self-funders, who make up to 45% of registered care home places or include some 270,000 people living independently in the community (The NHS Information Centre, 2012). Of this population, the number of adults in receipt of personal budgets rose by 38% from the previous year to 432,349 in 2011-12, representing 52.8% of those eligible to do so (Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, ADASS, 2012).

The concept of independent living from which the Personalisation agenda evolves has developed mainly due to pressure on successive governments from citizens, particularly the disabled community. As such, the underlying principle of the agenda is clearly linked to a social justice and rights discourse. The agenda should promote the ability for social workers to develop the creative aspect of their role by promoting a rights based philosophy alongside the social model of disability. This in turn promotes the empowerment and self-determination of service users and carers (Ellis, 2007; Spandler and Vick, 2005; Stainton, 2002).

The philosophical stance incorporating independent living has assumed centrality within the theoretical base of social work (Fernandez et al, 2007). Whilst social work values including anti-discriminatory practice, social inclusion and empowerment are promoted (Barnes et al, 2007), a person-centred perspective is also represented in the theoretical matrix for the agenda, embracing as it does principles of empowerment, inclusion, choice and independence (Rogers, 1967; Dowling et al, 2006). The model clearly fits with the strengths perspective, relying on hope linked to achievement and careful goal-setting, through the development of plans fitting with the confidence and aspirations of the service user (Healy, 2005). When supporting the needs of people experiencing poor mental health the model also endorses the recovery model and acknowledges the importance of acceptance and hope (Repper and Perkins, 2006; Duggleby and others, 2009; Wolverson and others, 2010).

Throughout the span of adult social care the discourse has developed from people

being labelled as welfare recipients to consumers (Means, 2012), hence the current construct of service user. This reflects the developing understanding of the need to work collaboratively with service users and carers to best meet their needs (Baldwin, 2000). It also promotes the discourse of marketization which permeates the agenda of successive governments in relation to health and social care (Ferguson, 2007; Glasby, 2011).

New Labour considered that an improvement in standards could best be met by tight regulation of local authorities, a premise of the modernisation agenda of which the Personalisation agenda is the mainstay. Policy language used was concerned with commissioning and partnerships as opposed to the Conservative's markets and purchasing (Baldock et al, 2003). The discourse is constantly morphing to suit the political ideology of the time. Burr (1995) suggests that language plays a key part in the social construct of people's experience and has significant consequences. Recently, the dominant discourse has moved somewhat from the initial concept of independence, choice and control (Department of Health, 1996), to a promotion of the potentially transformative impact of the strategy as well as the responsibility of service users (Department of Health, 2010a). This fits with the Coalition's potentially pejorative relationship with welfare recipients in a more general sense.

### **Actual Policy**

The Personalisation agenda is 'a key mechanism in achieving the Government's aim of increasing independence, choice and control for service users and their carers' (Department of Health, 2009). This agenda is underpinned by an extensive range of government legislation, policy and practice guidance as well as research which elucidates the lived experience of service users and their families.

Initiated by the Conservative government in 1995, the concept of personalisation has

developed in subsequent years and now receives all party support. As a response to lobbying by the disabled people's movement, legislation and policy began with the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act, (1996) which was extended to parents of children with disabilities and older people in 2000. Subsequent legislation and policy has developed apace to include the Health and Social Care Act (2008), making it possible for a "suitable person" to receive and manage a direct payment on behalf of a person lacking capacity, as defined in the Mental Capacity Act (2005); and the Health Act (2009) which allows for the piloting of personal health budgets.

Prior to this legislation, it was unlawful for local authorities to provide cash payments to recipients of adult social care in lieu of social care provision. As a result, many people were given little or no choice over what support they received (Glasby and Littlechild, 2009).

Following early engagement with direct payments one of the most significant policy initiatives was the concordat, *Putting People First* (HM Government, 2007). This was developed as a response to two nationwide public consultations leading to the white papers, *Independence, Wellbeing and Choice* (2005) and *Your Health, Your Care, Your Say*, (2006), the latter being one of the largest research based consultations in the country. Both found that service users and carers promoted further development of the Personalisation agenda. The Personalisation agenda as proposed by *Putting People First* (HM Government, 2007) has four central tenets; access to universal services, information, advice and advocacy; prevention and early intervention; choice and control; and social capital (TASC Programme, 2010). This concordat was a

collaborative strategy between central and local government, professional and regulatory organisations, the NHS and social care aiming to promote the shared aims and values of independence, well-being and dignity, key aspects of the agenda. The current coalition government has continued to review this initiative and considers that the aim is 'to enable people to have greater control over their care and support so they can enjoy maximum independence and responsibility for their own lives' (Department of Health, 2010a). The aim is that in the near future 'personal budgets, preferably as direct payments, are provided to all eligible people' (Department of Health, 2010b: 15) and targets have been set to this effect, contested by social care directors (Brindle, 2012).

The concept of choice in social care is not a new one, however. In 1990 the National Health Service and Community Care Act was enacted following Thatcher's request for a review of community care due to, among other things, an acknowledgement of failings in responding to service user needs (Means, 2012). This can be compared with the Personalisation agenda, introduced as a response to disability rights activists who were unhappy with social care provision (Glasby and Littlechild, 2009).

A commission by the Conservative government enabled Sir Roy Griffiths 'to review the way in which public funds are used to support community care policy and to advise... on the options for action that would improve the use of these funds as a contribution to more effective community care' (Griffiths Report 1988: 3).

The subsequent Act pioneered the concept of quasi-markets in which service



providers were sourced predominantly from the private and voluntary sectors in order to promote a mixed economy of care. The intention was to ensure better quality of provision through competition. The concept of choice was also introduced in that recipients of social care should ideally be allowed to have a say about which services best suited their needs (Baldock et al, 2003; Means, 2012). Importantly, the subsequent shift in role from social worker to care manager created less opportunity for discretion by professionals, (Lymbery, 1998; Postle, 2001).

Griffiths acknowledged the finite resources available to adult social care and proposed that eligibility to services be determined through an assessment process undertaken by social services staff (Means, 2012). The eligibility criteria, whilst modified, still exists though it has become increasingly challenging for citizens to meet the Fair Access to Care criteria (2003). Anecdotally, at least one local authority was required to revisit its proposed guidance following a government directive that none of the wording of the criteria was to be modified. This dictate was initiated to reduce the 'postcode lottery' regarding social care and was also an example of New Labour's ethos of centralisation. However, local authorities now manipulate the criteria by raising the threshold for eligibility to services (Samuel, 2012).

In comparison, recent retrenchment of public services has perpetuated and developed the need for private and voluntary organisations to provide services as well as carry out assessments of need. Originally, direct payments legislation made it unlawful to use the money to purchase local authority services, so promoting the

voluntary and independent sector. Many recipients of direct payments originally chose to employ their own staff though this is now less often the case (Carmichael and Brown, 2002).

Another of Griffith's recommendations was that local authorities should be afforded the opportunity to set priorities, monitor performance and assess local needs. This was an unintended consequence of the review and one which the Conservative government chose to avoid in favour of the development of quasi-markets (Baldock et al, 2003). Parallels can be made between this decision to minimise recommendations and the coalition government's response to the Dilnot Commission on Funding of Care and Support which was overshadowed by Lansley's Health and Social Care Act (2012). The coalition government appears to have revisited Griffith's recommendations in this regard in a more positive light by suggesting that local authorities 'promote wellbeing' by retaining a commissioning responsibility (Department of Health, 2010a: 34)

Having been over sixty years in the making, adult social care policy is unwieldy and notoriously difficult to interpret. For this reason, the Law Commission has recently been required to consolidate rather than reform this in order to provide a framework for future legislation. The Commission was tasked with simplifying adult social care law by creating one law in place of many. The reviewers found that the legislation and policy was 'piecemeal', 'exceptionally torturous', 'labyrinthine' and 'the worst drafted subordinate legislation ever encountered' (Lowe, 2011). The review was

stopped short at the behest of the government in order to introduce the Health and Social Care Bill, now the Health and Social Care Act (2012). The speed with which the government initiated this Act reflects their desire to avoid being noncommittal in their first term, an issue which the previous Labour were accused of. However, this led to contentious and speedy reforms which did not engage with those citizens most likely to be affected (Timmins, 2012). Consolidation of adult social care legislation will be effected by the Care and Support Bill, to be introduced later this year (Local Government Association, 2013).

### **Policy in use**

In order to consider some of the unintended consequences of the Personalisation agenda, aspects of a case study are employed (appendix). Lipsky's theory relating to street-level bureaucracy is considered and critiqued in relation to the role of social workers' discretion and subsequent influence on the lived experience of service users and carers (2010).

Lipsky (2010) suggests that in order to make sense of public policy which is the core of the welfare state, social workers use discretion. This then enables the profession to work with uncertainty and to respond to individuals and communities in a way not necessarily sanctioned by neoliberal policy. He also justifies how need follows resources and so there will never be adequate resources available. This resonates with the ongoing resource issues in adult social care as does his consideration of the idealism with which practitioners initially engage. This idealism has been monopolised in some overtly-bureaucratic councils, where dissenting long-qualified social workers who do not consider organisational demands to be legitimate, have withheld cooperation by leaving (Lipsky, 2010). They have been replaced by early career professionals who do not have a benchmark by which to measure personalisation policy development and subsequent service provision (Samuel,

2012).

An issue impacting on the current climate in adult social care is the demographic relating to the significant increase of older people in society. Unlike previous cohorts, many of these citizens embrace consumerism and are more likely to make greater demands of a personalised service to mitigate health issues (Means, 2012).

Personalisation represents a political response to this demographic shift in population age and embraces globalisation and related consumerist ideals. 'The globalisation and commodification of communications give power to those who want to demonise' (Standing, 2011:146) and one group who face this challenge are those perceived as abusing the use of direct payments. In order to mitigate this concern, bureaucratic processes and a paternalistic approach have been continued from previous adult social care policy and further developed (Glasby, 2011).

Foucault (1988) considers that our actions are reactions to the power structures in which we operate. In the case study, a bureaucratic, individualist approach could lead to the social worker failing to acknowledge the positive aspects of enabling Hilda to develop a relationship with Brian, while providing financial support to the family system (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The libertarian paternalism agenda makes conditionality a part of social policy (Standing, 2011). So, Hilda may be given a direct payment if she meets the eligibility criteria; has capacity or can identify a 'suitable person' to manage it on her behalf (Health and Social Care Act, 2008); and is not deemed to be at risk of considerable harm. Decisions made by the social worker concerning public sanctions and benefits could impact significantly on Hilda's lifestyle and so should be open to public scrutiny as a result (Lipsky, 2010). Paternalism engages with the paradigm of new public management characterised by such mechanisms as key performance indicators and other targeting measures (Cooke and Muir, 2012). The use of eligibility criteria enables social workers to ascertain the status of service users, to label them and to determine whether they are worthy of support. Lipsky (2010) suggests that worker's behaviour is generally compatible and

compliant with performance measures though this is not necessarily in the best interests of service users. An over-reliance on monitoring can affect the ability of social workers to develop coping mechanisms not sanctioned by managers, such as making additional visits in order to respond to individual circumstances. Lipsky (2010)

pays little attention to the role of managers, however in the current climate they have an increasingly powerful role, whilst having to managing their own 'ever-extending web of surveillance' (Gilbert and Powell, 2010:16).

Since the inception of direct payments, it has proven difficult for older people to access these, due in part to a patriarchal system which is inherently ageist but also from a perceived lack of enthusiasm from this particular group of citizens (Lloyd, 2010). People in receipt of social care are all too often subjected to a deviant, deficient categorization which in turn leads to over-enthusiastic auditing and public distrust of how money is spent (Standing, 2011). Whilst it is clear that regulation and safeguarding should be proportionate to risk, issues relating to risk and safeguarding are complex and require skills in problem-solving and creativity as well as an acknowledgement of competing perspectives and the partnership working which this involves. The ability to work in this way is sometimes stifled by the modifications which have been made to the job in order to meet policy demands (Glasby, 2011).

The ever-increasing regulation relating to the Personalisation agenda directly challenges Lipsky's assertion that 'the policy making roles of street-level bureaucrats are built upon two interrelated facets of their position: relatively high degrees of discretion and relative autonomy from organizational authority' (2010:13). The Personalisation agenda has acted as a catalyst for significant change in this regard, preceded by changes in the professional status of social workers as part of the care management process (Lymbery, 1998; Postle, 2001). Social workers enjoy less autonomy and discretion, particularly in relation to how money is spent in this era of austerity (Samuel, 2012). As goals become more clearly defined through performance measures and managers exert more control, so street-level workers

have less opportunity for discretion, though this is still achievable (Evans and Harris, 2004).

Lipsky (2010) is clear that discretion is necessary due to the complexity of the role along with traits of compassion and flexibility. He posits that a reason for maintaining discretion is the regard which it promotes both in the skills of the professional and legitimization of the welfare state. Changes to the status of social workers in adult social care and that of the welfare state may therefore offer further justification for the reduction of discretion employed by social workers (Sarbanoglu, 2012).

The increasing vulnerability of many of those engaging with adult social care due to the tightening of eligibility criteria has led to the risk of abuse increasing demonstrably (Newton and Browne, 2008). An unintended consequence of the higher thresholds and perceived lack of discretion has been a decrease in social workers but subsequent increase in the number of people subjected to abuse or neglect (McGregor, 2012). This is the case despite the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework which includes one of six measures to consider how safe and secure people feel when using services, described as '...being free from fear of abuse, falling or other physical harm'. Indeed, provisional figures suggest an increase in adult protection cases of 13 per cent in 2011-12 while increasing caseloads has been met by cuts in posts from an average of 112 to 93 per local authority (The NHS Information Centre, 2012: 20). Unfortunately, those perceived to lack capacity to engage with this research were not included, despite there being a clear correlation between abuse and limited capacity (Ash, 2013). This lack of engagement symbolises the institutional ageism which permeates service provision

Modernist critical social work approaches have sought to understand the dynamics of power and how best to empower those service users who are in positions of powerlessness. However, power is often related to the dominant view and the discourse of independent living originally rested with people with physical disabilities

as opposed to older people (Fook, 2002; Glasby and Littlechild). Manthorpe (2008) notes how financial exploitation is a particular risk for older people, not adequately responded to in current policy. Empowerment is a contested notion as power is not simply exercised in one grouping but may be experienced across a range of memberships. Not everyone experiences empowerment in the same way and some may not find it to be a helpful experience. Empowering one group may impact negatively on another (Lymbery, 2010). It is also difficult to see where empowerment and self-help meet and to ensure that there is clarity of role and purpose (Adams, 1996). Empowerment can best be considered in terms of a social justice perspective in that certain groups are oppressed and the political context in relation to ideology is of importance (Ward and Mullender, 1991). Successive governments have promoted empowerment in order to develop the Personalisation agenda. However in so doing this has perpetuated oppression in some instances, partly due to a lack of structural analysis (Fook, 2002).

In terms of social control, the majority of service users have little alternative other than accepting support, deferring to norms, thus utilitarian compliance. This poses the question of whether we are indeed providing control to the service user in the way originally intended by policy. Lipsky, (2010) asserts that 'the poorer the person, the more he or she is likely to be the nonvoluntary client of not one but several street-level-bureaucracies'. This is likely to be the case for Hilda and family. The amount of involvement that they have experienced with bureaucracies in the past may affect potential feelings of dependency and powerlessness. Due to the involuntary nature of the contact, if Hilda and family choose not to engage, then it may be perceived as their fault (Lipsky, 2010).

A critique of the modernist notion of empowerment as a commodity is that it presents an oppositional stance in that if a social worker empowers a service user then they themselves become disempowered to a degree (Adams, 1996). This could be so when considering the Personalisation agenda, whereby social workers feel unable to

develop a sense of agency. However, it is also clear that professionals still have ultimate control. Another issue is that assumptions are made and the label ascribed of service users being powerless, from those who hold power. Ultimately this negates the wider issues of structural disadvantage and has the potential to impact negatively on personal agency and identity. Social workers should be critical of promoting cultural orthodoxy and sameness and avoid promoting a discourse which may not relate with the experience of the service user or carer in order to avoid 'complicity with oppression' (Fook, 2002: 51). Derek will need to be aware of worker bias and how Hilda's circumstances may impact on his decision making. He may conceptualise Hilda and family to divide them into more or less worthy. Any deliberate resistance to limiting discretion by providing an appropriate response may impact on his time, with a consequent potential detrimental impact for other service users. Discretion involves using creativity and professional skills to find spaces between principles and rules (Brandon, 2005). A reliance on reflective practice may ameliorate some of these complex issues and ethical dilemmas (Lipsky, 2010).

In relation to the case study, increased bureaucratic systems, not an original intention of the Personalisation agenda, could lead to Derek having limited time to develop a relationship based on trust with Hilda and family in which systemic issues can be explored and power dynamics considered in relation to an appropriate discourse (Payne, 2005; Samuel, 2012). Therefore, an unintended consequence of how current policy has evolved may be dissent and role confusion experienced by all parties due to 'complicated systems and increased paperwork and depersonalised relationships with clients' (Sarbanoglu, 2012: 31). The neoliberal discourse on which the agenda has been developed depends on sanctions to promote conformity of majority norms and is underpinned with utilitarianism. The more unequal these norms appear the more likely it is that this agenda will be met with anger and challenge. Policy makers are ultimately responsible for the significant tensions faced by those in disadvantaged circumstances. The way in which direct payments are more readily available for certain groups over others promoting individuality over



collectivity, supports the view that neo-liberalism is essentially a neo-Darwinist concept (Standing, 2011).

The Personalisation agenda, whilst promoting independence, choice and control for service users, has created significant challenges for social workers in respect of role definition (Samuel, 2012). The dissonance between care and control has always been an issue but this has been made more significant when considering how best to support vulnerable people, while encouraging autonomy. As a cost, social workers experience stress and role confusion, often leading to dissatisfaction for both professional and service users. Derek may manage dissonance between self-determination and protection by wearing a metaphorical 'cognitive mask' to narrow his vision and perception of how older people are 'seen' in a social, political and cultural context (Ash, 2013: 112), thereby developing policy in order to manage an ethical dilemma (Lipsky, 2010). In practice this may impact on the quality of their relationship and Hilda's ability to make decisions and exercise choice, shaped by cultural, social and personal factors (Ash, 2013; O'Leary et al, 2013).

One way of managing stress in social work is to engage in critically reflective practice (Payne, 2005). Lipsky, (2010) asserts that professionals are autonomous and do not rely on feedback from service users or supervision from supervisors. However, this assumption is antithetical to social work ethics in which a reliance on both feedback and regular supervision is essential to promoting reflective practice (Fook, 2012).

Lipsky considers that social workers make work more manageable in order to minimise stress and do so by limiting demand, modifying the concept of their role and modifying the concept of the service user. In the case of the Personalisation agenda this has been orchestrated by both social workers and bureaucratic imperatives, for example through the mediating behaviour between policy demands and practice realities. The Personalisation agenda very clearly promotes service

users as autonomous individuals with choices to make. Many social workers, however, have found the political and ethical tension between social control and self-determination challenging, using discretion to promote a risk averse discourse which disables service users (Glasby, 2011; O'Leary et al, 2013). The agenda clearly limits demand in a range of ways, predominantly by relying on bureaucratic systems to minimise contact with service users. Never the original intention of the agenda, this has gradually evolved due to the techno-rationalist bureaucracies in which social work takes place. This in turn, impacts on the concept of the job from one of developing relationships with service users in order to promote suitable outcomes to having minimal contact and relying on other parties to engage with individuals on the department's behalf. This has led to significant dissatisfaction among the workforce and anecdotal evidence suggests that many social workers have left adult social care as a result (Samuel, 2012; Sarbanoglu, 2012). Ellis, (2011) notes how managerialism and professionalism impacts on decision making and discretion.

## **Recommendations**

To better support the social work role in relation to the Personalisation agenda, a number of strategies could be usefully employed. Student social workers should be taught about the importance of 'contextual competence', the ability to appreciate the different contexts and practice strategically within the cultural climate, currently that of a managerialist culture (Fook, 2002:146). This enables social workers to reframe oppositional and dichotomous thinking to a position where discretion can be used to develop and maintain relationships with service users through a creative, narrative approach, whilst acknowledging the bureaucratic rationalist imperative. This acknowledges the vital ontological importance of interpersonal relationships and how these are a 'precondition of effective social work practice' (O'Leary et al, 2013). This,

in turn encourages the development of a 'relational state' where 'the workforce would generate value and mobilise others, not just deliver preset outcomes... citizens themselves would have power and responsibility, through their relationships with others, not just on their own' (Cooke and Muir, 2012:15).

It would be helpful to promote more opportunity for discretion, a 'series of gradations of freedom' (Evans and Harris, 2004: 871), in order to deal with the dilemma of consumerism and citizenship and promote better working conditions for social workers. Whilst it appears that discretion is no longer a routine aspect of practice in adult social care, 'to the extent that tasks remain complex and human intervention is considered necessary for effective service, discretion will remain characteristic of many public service jobs' (Lipsky, 2010: 15).

Developing a more relational state rather than a 'delivery state' would encourage greater accountability through the introduction of qualitative feedback measures from the public to help minimise the inherent power dynamic and develop appropriate future targets for social care (Fook, 2002). Strategies which involve working with service users to identify the best use of resources would ensure that bureaucracy could be minimised and accountability for public spending shared, whilst positive aspects of bureaucracy, such as consumer satisfaction and effectiveness could be maintained (Cooke and Muir, 2012:15).

A relational state acknowledges the importance of process over outcome, so moving

away from an instrumentalist methodology to one in which empathy, communication and collaboration are key skills (Cooke and Muir, 2012). This would then help to give credence to social work values and principles, as per the professions' code of conduct (HCPC, 2008), thereby promoting reflexivity in practice (Fook, 2012). This has been the preferred option for many professionals since the early days of the agenda: 'From a social worker's point of view, I think you are going down the road of empowerment and enabling...promoting independence, all of those things. It's being done *with* people rather than *to* people. That's how I like to work' (Moran, 2007).

Some issues remain a challenge due to the current context of adult social care.

Globalisation promotes the commodification of all aspects of life including disability and the family, with little or no ability to resist. In so doing, the collectivity which may have acted as a protective barrier has been quashed (Standing, 2010). The Personalisation agenda represents one example of how Cameron's 'big society' is contradictory in nature and has only developed in an episodic manner in relation to public services (Muir and Cook, 2012). This is due in part to a lack of skill base acknowledged by social workers in respect of community development, which needs to be addressed (Sarbanoglu, 2012).

One of the most challenging aspects for the social worker which can be related to adult social care provision since the NHS and Community Care Act (1990), is how to manage the dichotomy between resource limitations and efficiency with the promotion of user-led practice (Lipsky, 2010). Despite being instigated by the disabled people's movement, the Personalisation agenda does not adequately promote the participation of service users in assessment processes, let alone policy

development (Sarbanoglu, 2012). This is a significant issue which needs to be better considered if we are to co-produce policy suited to the needs of those using services.

McCallum (2013) , head of child and adult protection in Devon has recently suggested that in order to facilitate change, 'It's about crafting our structure... and a culture where building relationships with families and other professionals is just as important as other social work duties'.

Word count 5,064

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## **EDD611 Policy and Professional Practice**

### **Case study**

Hilda is 84 years old and lives near her daughter, Ann and son-in-law, Brian. She lives in an ex-council house on an estate in a socially disadvantaged area of a city in the South West of England. She has diabetes which is managed with medication and has recently developed the onset of Alzheimer's disease. This has impacted on her relationship with family members as she has lapses of memory which causes her to become confused and anxious.

Ann works full time and Brian has recently been made redundant from his job as a car mechanic. He finds it difficult to deal with Hilda since the onset of her dementia and is often verbally abusive towards her, according to Hilda's GP who has made a recent referral to social services on Hilda's behalf. The GP is clear that Hilda has the capacity to make decisions, having carried out an assessment under the provision of the Mental Capacity Act, (2005).

Until recently, Hilda attended a day service for older people where she had a number of friends and felt comfortable and safe. However, Ann and Brian have suggested to her that she should stop going due to her forgetfulness and changes in behaviour and should instead request direct payments in order to employ Brian to care for Hilda and take her out on occasion. They have contacted social services with this request on Hilda's behalf.

Derek, social worker has been asked to carry out an assessment and to determine Hilda's needs in relation to the appropriate eligibility criteria. He is aware that the council have a target related to encouraging older people to receive direct payments. He is also aware that the assessment process should be completed in a relatively short timescale in order to meet agency demands.

## **Appendix 3**

### **A consideration of how social work students engage with supervision, utilising Communities of Practice as a heuristic framework.**

#### **Abstract**

According to the Social Work Reform Board (2011), 'supervision should challenge practitioners to reflect critically on their cases and should foster an inquisitive approach to social work'. Student social workers engage with a range of practice placements in order to develop their professional practice, of which supervision is a part. This paper engages with sociocultural theory, recognising learning as a social phenomenon and focuses on Wenger's (1998) communities of practice as a framework to consider the transformative effect of learning and subsequent identity development. In preparation for supervision, students are encouraged to engage in groups and to develop informal networks when learning about process and critical reflection (Ruch, 2002). Despite issues relating to managerialism, social work is a dynamic profession and supervision remains a key aspect of learning in social work settings in order to deal with the complexity of multidisciplinary practice. How these various methods support identity development and constant becoming will be considered.

In this paper sociocultural theory is used as a framework to consider how student social workers engage with supervision as part of their social work education. Wenger's theory of Communities of Practice is used as a heuristic device in order to analyse the issues prevalent as part of student engagement in practice learning. Social work education on the BA (Hons) Social Work Programme at Plymouth University is based on the epistemological principle that knowing and learning are intrinsically linked and that learning is a process in which active participation in practice plays a significant part (Bernstein, 1972). This principle supports the notion that as a professional, reflective practice and education is promoted via active and collective engagement with citizens and communities (Henkel, 1995). As such, an important aspect of practice for professional social workers lies in the ability to use individual and group supervision effectively, be this scheduled or impromptu, in order to maximise learning opportunities. This promotes 'safe' practice for both practitioners and service users by enabling students to develop their identities through engagement with the local and global context of social work. What may constitute 'safe' practice and issues relating to risk will be considered later. According to Munro (2011: 11-12) supervision '...provides the space for critical reflection, [and] is essential for reducing the risk of errors in professionals' reasoning'. Supervision should be used to support professional development by enabling engagement with theory, research, intuition and critical reflection in order to present reasoned arguments for intervention. However, there are inherent tensions in that it can often be used as a vehicle for accountability and efficiency as part of the bureaucratic process (Lishman, 2002).

Preparing students for social work practice should involve opportunities to develop learning about how to make effective use of supervision, partly by negotiating in groups. On the Programme, study groups and peer-assisted learning groups are implemented to support this learning. These could be considered as opportunities for students to experience peripheral participation alongside their engagement in practice settings (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Negotiating in groups should enable students to consider how to manage anxiety and negotiate appropriate boundaries in a safe and supported environment. This is in part because the inherent tensions and contradictions which are part of the group process help the process of understanding. This Vygotskian approach based on a collectivist tradition

fits with the socio-political ethos in which social work is situated. Second wave activity theory promotes the notion that identifying the problem and negotiating this can in itself be a learning opportunity. This is certainly the case in social work education.

Viewing learning in social terms of reference promotes an appreciation of learning as a dynamic process which enables changes in behaviour and identity. This concept moves away from the acquisition model of learning exhorted in many education establishments and promoted via competence-based professional standards of proficiency which could lend themselves to this form of learning, focusing as they do on personal responsibility and performance management (HCPC, 2012; Orme, 2009; Wilson and Kelly, 2010). I concur with Sfard (1998) that participation in communities of practice enables us to construct an identity and that doing so is equally as important as acquiring skills and knowledge.

In order to consider how student social workers can make best use of supervision, a sociocultural theory of learning framework is chosen to acknowledge the dynamic learning opportunities which may be made available in a social context. More explicitly this will be conceptualised using Wenger's communities of practice perspective as a heuristic device. This perspective is particularly useful when considering issues for social work as it can be employed to analyse learning as a social phenomenon and considers the importance of transformative learning as a lived experience which often takes place within communities of practice and promotes the development of identity (Wenger, 1998).

As adult learners, social work students are encouraged to adopt the concept of self-directed learning and learning through experience (Hansman, 2008). In order to consider issues for student social workers in relation to supervision, the four components of this particular social learning theory will be used as a framework. These areas of meaning (learning as experience); practice (learning as doing); community (learning as belonging) and identity (learning as becoming) are described by Wenger as interconnected and so rather than being prescriptive should '...act as a guide about what to pay attention to, what difficulties to expect, and how to approach problems' (Wenger, 1998: 9), thereby allowing an exploration of learning to take place in which these key areas are considered. Indeed, their mutuality promotes

a holistic approach to learning closely aligned to the cohesive nature of social work education in which practice and theory are far from mutually exclusive (Trevithick, 2005). To acknowledge this approach, practice will be considered throughout as an underpinning concept.

I will begin by considering identity (learning as becoming) as this influences how we make sense of meaning and practice and also frames the work in an individual student context within a wider social perspective. Sands, (1996:169) describes how most conceptions of self and identity 'converge in their depiction of an internalised relationship between an inner reflective agent and external experiences'. When referring to 'student social worker' I am aware that this is basing their identity on a social structural categorisation though from a non-essentialist viewpoint as they are all individuals representing a diverse group and will engage with supervision using their own narrative identity (Fook, 2002).

### **Identity (learning as becoming)**

Social work as a profession acknowledges '...the profound connection between identity and practice' (Wenger, 1998: 149) and focuses its gaze on identity from a range of perspectives in order to recognise the relationship between our social, cultural and historical selves and how this impacts on our individual lived experience. Social work is bound by values and ethics and supervision is a key factor in promoting accountability and professional judgement within clear parameters (BASW, 2012). Wenger (1998: 146) presents a similar consideration of identity and notes how '...in everyday life it is difficult – and, I would argue, largely unnecessary – to tell exactly where the sphere of the individual ends and the sphere of the collective begins'. So when a social work student engages in a practice placement, as well as learning through the process of participation, they are also negotiating their own identities. In order to prepare them for this, study groups encourage students to consider their histories, culture and current identity. However, some students find it difficult to engage with the notion of identity at an early stage of the Programme. It may be that challenging the view of identity as separate from the interplay between participation and reification could support them in this learning journey (Wenger, 1998). Students could be encouraged to acknowledge that identities reflect our social relations in every aspect and thereby to move away from considering identity

and social interactions as being dualities. In doing so the interconnectedness of identity could be better considered (Fook, 2002).

Supervision of both formal and informal types should support the development of identity through negotiated experience. The range of experiences and how these are negotiated as well as the student role and interplay with colleagues and people receiving services all add to the layers that ultimately construct who the student is in any particular community (Wenger, 1998). It is important that supervision takes place at suitable times when the student is able to engage constructively and also that the level of expectation is appropriate to individual need. The investment made by students in the enterprise as well as the reified codes of practice to which they adhere promotes a particular perspective which may be shared by many in the community. This in turn impacts on how supervision is negotiated. Over time this sustained engagement enables students to interpret and engage with the repertoire of practice, so developing identity by nature of the negotiated experiences, events and memories which have taken place. It is important then that supervision builds on this developing identity formation and acknowledges the repertoire negotiation and constant becoming which takes place (Wenger, 1998). Supervision should make good use of generational encounters where student social workers are encouraged to forge their identities through relationships with 'old-timers' whilst recognising the temporal nature of social work (Wenger, 1998: 157; James, 2007). Some of the tensions which may impede this learning are around neo-liberal bureaucratic control leading to the techno-rational management of social work practices, often more interested in meeting performance targets than fostering professional development for student social workers. Supervisors are often overloaded with significant workloads of their own to contend with (Pullen and Cowden, 2012; Phillips, 2009).

'As trajectories, our identities incorporate the past and future in the very process of negotiating the present' (Wenger, 1998: 155) It is useful to recognise that students are often at a point in their lives where they are both negotiating joining new communities and so creating inbound trajectories but are also negotiating outbound trajectories from their families and friends. They are, therefore going through a significant period of multimembership identity renegotiation and change; and the temporal nature of identity is a significant factor for them. Being able to give meaning

to their individual trajectory and what they are hoping to achieve promotes a sense of stability (Tummons, J, 2012). Study groups and supervision can encourage this level of understanding and help students to deal with the inherent tension created by change. Supervisors and practice educators can provide narrative to enhance student understanding of what the social work role entails as a 'paradigmatic trajectory', thus enabling the student to consider what their future may hold and to further negotiate their identity (Wenger, 1998: 156). However, one issue concerning the use of study groups as a model is financial viability in an academic world where restructuring to accommodate globalisation and the commodification of education is significant (Nixon et al, 2001; Standing, 2011).

### **Meaning (learning as experience)**

'Meaning exists neither in us, nor in the world, but in the dynamic relation of living in the world'. A constant and dynamic process in our lives is that of negotiating meaning and in so doing there is no clear distinction between thinking and doing. We are constantly generating further meaning and entering new phases of negotiation in order to develop our worldview (Wenger, 1998: 54).

This perspective is at odds with the notion of reflection as a theory and instead places this important aspect of social work practice more usefully as a heuristic device or model by which we organise our experiences in order to make best sense of them. It could be argued that when systemising our experiences we alter them in order to learn from experience and further develop our sense of self, thereby modifying future interactions in light of experiential learning (Fook, 2002; 2012).

Undertaking formal supervision is one way of negotiating meaning which incorporates a range of skills and may be constituted differently depending on the context in which this takes place. According to Wenger, (1998), active participation is essential in order to negotiate mutual negotiated meaning. Within this notion is the acknowledgement that power differentials will play a part and that those involved may develop their 'identity of participation' whereby the relationship forged through participation impacts on our sense of self and becomes an intrinsic part of who we are. Therefore the concept of participation is transformative for both the student social worker and the community of practice in which they operate (Wenger, 1998).



The learning taken from a supervision session, therefore, can have far reaching consequences and the value placed on this activity should be suitably acknowledged (Simmonds, 2010).

A further concept related to meaning is that of reification, when abstractions are projected onto the world. One such example in social work practice is that of 'managing risk', the concept of which is itself an abstract notion, as is that of 'safe practice'. The techno-rationalist perspective of risk is at variance with a constructivist approach, more concerned with exploring the dominant discourse (Lupton, 1999). Supervision is organised as a way of ensuring that the mitigation of risk is dealt with effectively by the practitioner through consideration of appropriate legislation and procedures, congealed into physical supervision notes and case records in order to promote 'safe practice'. One concern in this regard is that the completion of a risk assessment as part of an instigation of safeguarding procedures doesn't necessarily capture the reality of a situation and 'the richness of lived experience' (Wenger, 1998: 61) and so should not be seen as an end in itself. Ideally, reification and participation should be viewed as complementary, however over bureaucratisation and a risk averse culture may challenge this notion and instead promote reification to a greater degree. Perhaps then, supervision should be used as a means of promoting the complementarity between participation and reification in order to move away from the potential misalignment which could take effect. It is important to achieve a balanced duality in order to promote the lived experience of service users and carers through the language and actions of professionals.

### **Community (learning as belonging)**

Social work education promotes a consideration of discourse around community which encapsulates a range of different contexts relating to locality, network and relationship. This discourse is constantly changing depending on a range of factors including those belonging to a socio-political frame (Cree, 2000). "...Working with communities of place or interest should be an integral part of the practice of many professions. It is this approach that should characterize social work." (Barr, 2007).

This assignment considers Wenger's use of community in order to explore communities of practice as a conceptual model rather than the explicit meanings

more usually considered in social work practice (Wenger, 1998). In order to understand how practice and community are associated he considers three dimensions, mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. These clearly relate to the practice of social work supervision and the dimensions may be useful in illuminating this further.

It is clear that in order to sustain supervision as a viable element of social work practice, mutual engagement is a key aspect, this being a defining feature of communities of practice. Whenever a student social worker enters the domain of a social work experience in whatever context, they are mutually engaged in the delivery of social work in some part. Be it through unsolicited, unplanned peer supervision when discussing a particular issue which may have arisen for a service user, to formal, recorded supervision, their role in the team has intrinsic value. Their presence can support the team's learning development as well as that of the student and much emphasis is given to this in social work education (Fook, 2012). Mutual engagement should lead to a sense of inclusion and for the student, parallels may be drawn between this and the broader promotion of social inclusion for service users and carers as part of the professional ethos (Pullen-Sansfacon and Cowden, 2012).

Wenger asserts that diversity plays an important part in communities of practice and this resonates with social work as a profession where individuals are aware of their need to work together but are also autonomous professionals encouraged to be promotional in relation to self-expression and critical reflection (Fook, 2002). Critics of Wenger suggest that greater attention could be paid to social divisions and memberships (Hughes et al, 2007). Certainly, issues relating to sex, gender, ethnicity and class, to name but a few, are significant in developing identity and form a vital part of learning for students. It is considered important for students to develop an appreciation of diversity as it relates to a range of different memberships (Fook, 2012).

Another issue which sometimes presents a challenge to social work students is the over-bureaucratisation of agencies and subsequent imbalance of supervision sessions where reification assumes greater importance than participation. Sometimes students find it difficult to maintain their continuing professional development in light of homogenous processes and caseload management (Knott

and Scragg, 2010). This may also impact on their ability to exercise discretion in the work that they do (Lipsky, 2010). Bourdieu (1977) theorises about human agency and how this may integrate with the world and social activity, so allowing students to develop their own sense of agency and self in light of collective experience.

Students are often placed in agencies with a strong multidisciplinary focus where developing professional identity constitutes collaboration across organisational boundaries. Edwards (2005: 179) considers that 'relational agency can ...underpin an enhanced vision of professionalism'. This involves working together to consider and respond to practice issues. In order to develop such agency, professionals require 'institutional shelters' as protection (Sennett, 1999). This becomes particularly useful as managerialism serves to erode decision-making and agency. Whilst the provision of support in developing relational agency and subsequent 'relational expertise' is an important role of supervision, the ability to work across institutional boundaries is not considered within the communities of practice metaphor (Edwards, 2005; 2011:33). This aspect of practice not recognised by Wenger but often considered in supervision is the operationalization of interdisciplinary work which constitutes a significant part of social work. Edwards (2011: 34) suggests that in order to develop relational expertise it is useful to consider boundaries between professions as spaces where resources can be brought together rather than barriers between practices. The common knowledge created '...is an important prerequisite to quick and responsive relational work'.

It would appear that the competence of the supervisor in being able to provide a place in which to explore social practice has a significant impact on the extent to which a student can promote their individuality and to mutually engage in supervision, both planned and carried out through interpersonal engagement with teams (Simmonds, 2010). Recent evidence from newly qualified social workers suggests that 'good reflective supervision increases role clarity, protects against stress and helps in the recruitment and retention of social workers' (Carpenter, 2013). However despite the Social Work Reform Board initiating an employer standards and supervision framework (2011), pressure on services relating to caseload management and performance targets means that supervision is often sacrificed to managerialism. Research suggests that currently, less than one third of

qualified social work practitioners receive regular supervision and calls for more effective social work supervision, considered to be that which is 'developing social workers' emotional resilience and promoting reflective practice' (Community Care, 2013).

The experience of engagement in supervision is not always considered as a positive one and students are encouraged to reflect on and discuss the tensions and conflicts which may arise from participation. Preparation for supervision on the undergraduate programme is managed in part through a system of study groups, whereby students share information and learn collectively in order to produce assignments which relate theory to practice. Peer assisted learning also supports preparation and relates well to Wenger's notion of joint enterprise as students work collectively and define the process of mutual engagement and accountability on their own terms (Jewson, 2007). How this learning is then transferred into their practice experiences of supervision has yet to be successfully measured, though there is anecdotal evidence that this provides students with a greater appreciation of how it feels to participate and negotiate in situations of mutual engagement. Perhaps providing opportunities for students to engage in a range of differently constituted groups at university may provide them with enhanced learning in this regard. Certainly, there is evidence that peer-assisted learning promotes professional understanding (McLelland et al, 2012).

When considering the potential for tension and conflict, Wenger makes minimal explicit consideration of issues of power though implicit reference to such is made when locating communities of practice in a wider context, with related resources and constraints. Within the practice of supervision, this is a potentially significant issue. For students, issues relating to power assume significance as social work is a constantly developing profession subject to political shifts in ideology and subsequent policy intentions (Fook, 2012). Supervision should be used in part to consider this macro aspect of the profession not least to acknowledge what is outside of the control of the individual and team and how to respond to these dynamics. The ability to be resourceful and innovative in light of restriction is often deliberated during informal or formal supervision. This could be seen in the context of Wenger's negotiation of enterprise or Lipsky's use of professional discretion. (Lipsky, 2010)

Social work practice settings are dynamic with a range of power relations, not least those organisational cultures more closely associated with managerialism (Standing, 2011). This then challenges Lave and Wenger's assumption that communities of practice are benign and relatively stable, particularly in the current economic and political climate. In recent years, local authorities respond to fiscal constraint in ways which impact significantly on power dynamics and the nature of communities of practice (Fuller et al, 2005). As such, it is important for students to learn about this aspect of practice and for them to develop an appreciation of the impact of the wider political and global agenda on their practice (Parton, 2002).

The length of time a student has on placement will inevitably impact on their ability to engage with the community of which they become a part. Wenger considers the notion of shared repertoire in this regard. Not only does the amount of time make a difference to learning but also the combination or participation and reification. For example, a student could spend time with a team during a period of significant change when the team are introducing a new assessment model, perhaps. This student may have a very different experience from another who spent time with the same team some months previously. Therefore students should be supported in acknowledging that social work practice, of which they are part, evolves as 'shared histories of learning', is inherently unstable and therefore, dynamic (Wenger, 1998: 87) and is in essence an emerging structure (Fook, 2012).

Supervision could be used to encourage an appreciation of the repertoire of shared points of reference to which students have access through their mutual engagement. This may help to alleviate the feeling of 'them and us' which sometimes persists during practice placements. This could in turn encourage student to engage with the dynamic activity of social work while creating new meanings arising from ambiguity and interpretations in order to promote engagement with professionals as well as the service users and carers (Fook, 2012).

Social work agencies are actively encouraged to facilitate placements for student social workers in order to promote a learning culture as part of organisational process (HCPC, 2012). It is the interaction and encounters between students, practitioners and service users and carers which best promote learning as a social process (Wenger, 1998). Practice supervisors receive training on how best to

support the needs of students and a comprehensive support structure is put in place in order to minimise concerns relating to lack of consistency or suitable learning opportunities. Nevertheless, some students find the transitional from classroom to placement learning disruptive and difficult. Wenger (1998) considers the effort required when entering a community of practice and being able to engage with different generations of practitioners in order to develop relationships. For students to learn they need to be granted legitimacy.

Similarly, it may be that students never fully engage with the practice opportunity for a range of reasons related to their prior learning including their own perception of identity or limited time in which to develop relationships (Fuller, 2007). They could therefore maintain a peripheral trajectory in which their identity may change to a lesser degree due to their limited participation. So, student status differs from that of newly qualified social workers in that when engaging in something in which there is an expectation of becoming a full participant, the identity trajectory becomes inbound and invested in the future. However, it is worth noting that even peripheral participation may lead to development of identity and so should not be underestimated (Wenger, 1998).

Lave and Wenger (1991) present a theory of legitimate peripheral participation which focuses in particular on how the newcomer adapts to and learns from the sociocultural practice. Whilst situated learning is premised on 'the view that agent, activity and the world mutually constitute each other' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 33); legitimate peripheral participation further develops this to consider the integration of learning through social practice. This notion presents us with a means of analysing and understanding aspects of the learning experience. It becomes apparent that learning takes place in coparticipation and that social engagement provides the context in which learning takes place. Learners only participate in practice to a limited degree and take limited responsibility. If we apply this theory to social work supervision it becomes clear that the act of supervision be if formal or informal is only one part of the social practice which takes place for the student and that they should be able to choose the level of engagement with which they feel comfortable. 'Understanding and experience are in constant interaction, indeed, are mutually constitutive' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 51-52). This theory can help to locate the

student in practice as a sociocultural member of the community in which knowing becomes the activity and learning develops identity.

In conclusion it would seem that supervision can be provided on an individual basis but is also recognised through informal contacts within a team. Those who do not receive appropriate individual supervision or who engage with the team and receive informal supervision often forge learning relationships with peers. Lave and Wenger (1991: 93) suggest that this 'benign community neglect' often provides one of the most useful way of learning effectively and that decentering the role of 'master' helps to focus analysis onto the community resources. It may also afford students the opportunity to engage with others who may be 'old timers' in relation to the social work but new to the agency. This mutuality of learning between new and old practitioners is little considered by Lave and Wenger (Fuller et al, 2005) though it represents an important area of student social work learning.

The complexity of modern bureaucratic settings impacts on the learning opportunities offered to employees. This development has the potential to limit the influence of Lave and Wenger's approach in relation to legitimate peripheral participation due to the developing diversity of forms and patterns of participation (Fuller et al, 2005). Students should be given the opportunity to consider the socio-political issues relevant to the profession in order to better prepare for the diversity and complexity of practice.

'Relationships and relating are core to effective supervision' (Simmonds, 2010). As such, supervision should offer a space in which to understand professional boundaries and to critically reflect on practice; both of which are features of forming common knowledge between professionals (Edwards: 2011; Simmonds, 2010). In order to develop the confidence to develop a professional persona, students require challenges and to be well-supported in managing these (Eraut, 2004). As well as receiving support via planned and impromptu peer supervision, students can make good use of peer assisted learning in order to promote 'new-found respect and understanding' (McLelland et al, 2012).

It is clear from student feedback that supervision which is 'a cornerstone of all good social work practice' (Laming, 2003), can have a transformative impact on learning

and influences the extent to which a student is able to engage with the process of practice learning and method of critical reflection. 'Much of social work practice demands that we draw extensively on our own personal resources and the capacity to understand and support the personal, social and emotional needs of service users...' (Hafford-Letchfield, 2007: 120).

Critical reflection is used as a method to encourage objectivity by questioning values and assumptions to promote pluralist ethical practice when making complex decisions (Bowles et al, 2006; Wilson, 2013). Supervision could relocate an understanding of reflection from an individualised learning activity based on particular models, to an awareness of how we can interpret our identities and lived experiences based on looking at social situations, so enabling students to move away from an instrumental consideration of reflection.

Supervision is a social phenomenon with the capacity to support transformative learning and development of identity. 'The greatest resource is that which exists inside of us and between us, if only we can bear to look', (Simmonds, 2010: 228).

### **Research implications**

In order to acknowledge the plurality of meanings and realities with which this research is concerned, an interpretive postmodern frame will be used to support applied qualitative research. This should enable a person-environment fit and promote the use of narrative as a way in which to capture an understanding of people's lived experience. This is in keeping with the therapeutic nature of social work as well as acknowledging power and the role of critical reflection in relationship-building (Alston and Bowles, 2013).

Narrative analysis will be used as the methodology in order to enable participants to connect with their surroundings and practice and to consider how they understand themselves. This will enable newly qualified social workers to learn through the research in order to develop their critical reflection (Fook, 2002; Carey, 2012). It will also provide an opportunity for supervisors and team members to consider their part in both the supervision process and the student social worker's world.



Social work student participants will be recently qualified but not yet in employment. This will ensure that they have at least two supervision experiences to consider and that they will be able to express their values and feelings openly, as this ability to be critically reflective is part of their learning throughout the social work degree programme. Interviewing them after they qualify but before they are employed as social workers should help minimise power differentials.

Semi-structured interviews will be employed to obtain narrative with minimal engagement from the researcher, apart from providing occasional prompts. Social work students will have already formed a relationship of mutual trust with me as researcher to encourage openness.

Detailed transcripts will be maintained. The narratives will be analysed through use and context of language as well as consideration of cultural and structural issues and the emotional responses of participants.

My interpretations will then be shared with the participants and their responses to this will be integrated into the thematic analysis of which they will play a part and comparative analysis will complete the research cycle.

Word count - 5075

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## Appendix 4

### The efficacy of peer-assisted learning (PALS) for social work education

#### Peer-reviewed journal

I have selected *Social Work Education: the International Journal*. My rationale is that the majority of social work journals do not place a particular emphasis on educational aspects, whereas this does. I am aware that there is a dearth of research into peer-assisted learning in respect of social work education, particularly in the UK, and so feel this paper could make an original contribution to the social work learning community.

The guidelines are for an article of 6000 words including references but excluding abstract (200 words) and keywords (5 – 10 keywords).

The journal has a rigorous peer-review process and promotes an anti-oppressive approach to education and practice. It ...'publishes articles of a critical and reflective nature concerned with the theory and practice of social care and social work education at all levels. It presents a forum for international debate on important issues and provides an opportunity for the expression of new ideas and proposals on the structure and content of social care and social work education, training and development.

In this way, the journal makes a vital contribution to the development of educational theory and practice in relation to social work and social care, promoting a set of standards in relation to the written presentation of ideas and experience which reflects the needs and requirements of both practice and education.

It is most important that all contributions demonstrate and promote anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive approaches to training and practice'.

## **The efficacy of peer-assisted learning (PALS) for social work education**

### **Abstract**

Social work education is currently under review to ensure that it meets the needs, expectations and demands of a diverse society (Department of Health, 2013). In response to concerns relating to the preparedness of students when entering this demanding profession, it is important to acknowledge that practice and theory are not mutually exclusive and that a critically reflective approach to teaching and learning underpinned with social work values is a prerequisite (Payne, 2005; Fook, 2013). To facilitate a critically reflective position, supportive networks play an important role in promoting the discursive examination of issues relating to the relationship-based, emotional content inherent in social work, (Ruch, 2013). The undergraduate social work programme at Plymouth University is underpinned by the epistemological principle that active participation in practice with individuals and communities creates a space where the process of combining knowing and learning can take place, thereby facilitating identity construction (Bernstein, 1992; Henkel, 1995; Sfard, 1998). Study groups provide an intimate learning environment in which students become active agents in identity formation (Monahan, 2009). Recently, a peer-assisted learning model has been implemented to compliment the collaborative learning experience. This paper explores and evaluates the efficacy of this model for social work education.

(199 words)

### **Keywords**

Social work education; critical reflection; peer-assisted learning; interprofessional practice; relationship-based

(10 words)

## **The efficacy of peer-assisted learning (PALS) for social work education**

### **Introduction**

Social work education is currently under review to ensure that it meets the needs, expectations and demands of a diverse society (Department of Health, 2013; Taylor, 2013). In response to concerns relating to the preparedness of students when entering this demanding profession, it is important to acknowledge that practice and theory are not mutually exclusive and that a critically reflective approach to teaching and learning underpinned with social work values is a prerequisite (Payne, 2005; Fook, 2013). Informed by Dewey's educational theory, the relational and dialogical aspects of social work practice support the view that 'reflective and reflexive processes potentially allow us to be self-critical and ethical...' (Dallos and Stedmon, 2013: 1; Cochran, 2010).

To facilitate a critically reflective position, supportive networks play an important role in promoting the discursive examination of issues relating to the relationship-based, emotional content inherent in social work, (Payne, 2005; Ruch, 2013). The undergraduate social work programme at Plymouth University is underpinned by the epistemological principle that active participation in practice with individuals and communities creates a space where the process of combining knowing and learning can take place, thereby facilitating identity construction (Bernstein, 1992; Henkel, 1995; Sfard, 1998). Students are encouraged to develop a critically reflective stance alongside the development of social work skills through a Vygotskyian collectivist approach. Study groups provide an intimate learning environment in which students become active agents in identity formation (Monahan, 2009). Recently, a peer-assisted learning model (PALS) has been implemented to compliment the collaborative learning experience. This paper explores and evaluates the efficacy of the model for social work education.

### **Contextualising peer learning for social work**

The University of Plymouth Access Agreement (2012) incorporates peer learning as a retention measure on programmes with a higher proportion of widening participation students. Retention rates may be influenced by a wide range of factors including student perception of individual progress and quality of the educational offer (Blanc et al, 1983). Offering additional support to students should influence retention and the current emphasis on improving student experience is a demonstration of the drive to manage attrition.

Peer learning is 'a two-way, reciprocal learning activity' which is mutually beneficial (Boud, 2001: 3; Colvin and Ashman, 2010). As well as formal learning, students benefit from vicarious learning where reflection on the experiences of others promotes understanding. Making connections and developing networks promotes engagement and reduces attrition (Colvin and Ashman, 2010). Encouraging collaborative learning in a practice context is mutually beneficial and reduces anxiety while developing confidence (McKenna and French, 2011).

Partly due to its emphasis on social justice and human rights together with an underpinning critical feminist pedagogy, which considers that education leads to

social change (Allen, 2013); social work education has a reputation for attracting students meeting the widening participation criteria who are traditionally underrepresented in Higher Education. Having secured funding from Access Provision 2012/13 following a Learning Development Team pilot in 2011/12, the Social Work programme is now in its second year as a provider of a Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS). This model has well-established benefits including improved personal and professional development and student satisfaction (Glynn et al, 2006). Whilst funded primarily to meet the needs of widening participation students, the scheme is available to all, thereby reflecting an oppositional stance to bureaucratic divisions which promote a social construction of difference (Burr, 1995). This paper considers the impact of PALS in social work while recognising that the collective term 'student' is socially constructed and thereby acknowledges students from a non-essentialist perspective, recognising their diversity and uniqueness (Fook, 2002).

Benefits of the PALS scheme identified in the funding proposal include the reinforcement of learning; identification of key questions and issues; that it provides opportunities to tackle 'threshold concepts' and promotes supportive learning communities. The latter is of particular importance in a widening participation arena as students from diverse backgrounds often find engagement with peers particularly challenging. This in turn has a detrimental impact on their ability to engage as active learners through collaborative participation (Lockie and Van Lanen, 2008). In an attempt to promote supportive learning communities, the social work programme incorporates study groups in each of the three stages. These are facilitated by academic and/or practice learning managers and present opportunities for consolidation of learning in an egalitarian learning environment where personal experience, multiple perspectives and worldviews are valued (Nagda, 2006).

The Learning Development Team at Plymouth University offers support for PALS across a range of disciplines. The approach developed in the undergraduate social work programme is that a proportion of Stage 2 students become PALS leaders and receive training to work in pairs with approximately 20 Stage 1 students per group. PALS sessions take place on alternate weeks for one hour. Subsequent to each session, PALS leaders engage in a debrief session facilitated by a consistent member of the social work team, as well as a representative of the Learning Development Team. For ease of reference, this paper will refer to PALS students as either 'leaders' or 'students'.

The structure of the Programme has made it challenging to identify allocated times when both Stage 2 leaders and Stage 1 students attend university simultaneously. Having received feedback from a previous cohort, the sessions are accommodated during lunch times, to avoid an extended day for students. Sessions are designed to consider existing material; to not involve new information and are not considered as teaching sessions. Instead, students are encouraged to consolidate their knowledge through collaboration, clarification and critical analysis (Fook, 2013; Yorke and Longden, 2004).



In the two years since the inception of PALS in social work, a selection process has not been required as part of the recruitment process, having relatively few students applying for the role of PALS leader, despite a financial incentive. Potential leaders are not required to achieve a certain level of academic attainment, though they should be committed to the concept of shared learning. Nine hours of generic university PALS leader training is provided by the Learning Development Team, including components such as problem solving and group facilitation, as well as study skills (Martin and Wilcox, 1996; Stout and McDaniel, 2006). An additional three hours are provided to incorporate a social work perspective. These training components closely mirror learning presented during study groups in the social work programme and could lead to the perception of duplication.

### **Evaluating PALS in Social Work**

In order to evaluate this initiative, comparisons will be drawn between PALS in social work and its precursor, Supplemental Instruction (SI). PALS is derived from the concept of Supplemental Instruction (SI), created by Deanna Martin in 1973 at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. It was also utilised in other parts of America, South Africa and Australia before development in the UK during the 1990's (Parton and Fleming, 2008). Based on a collaborative learning philosophy of supporting access to education for all ((Stout and McDaniel, 2006), its original intention was to reduce attrition and improve grades. The basic premise is that student retention is clearly linked to social as well as academic integration and students should be encouraged to develop a sense of belonging (Yorke and Longden, 2004).

Consistent with the original SI program, PALS is nonremedial; presents the leaders as 'students of the subject' (Blanc et al, 1983:81) and incorporates significant role variation depending on the subject and needs of the students. SI programmes target courses with high attrition rates and SI leaders, chosen on the basis of academic achievement, engage fully with the learning by reviewing assignments and note taking as well as sitting in on lectures. Peer assisted learning in Britain takes a different approach where leaders, usually from the year above, rely on recall to facilitate active learning based on course material. So, the SI model is more immersive than that of PALS in that leaders have a much greater awareness of the course material. As a result, comparison between SI and PALS presents a challenge, as this significant difference may well influence student attendance and subsequent efficacy, as there may be a perception that SI leaders, who have already completed the course, are more engaged with the material and subsequently have more to offer. So, one of the significant differences between models is that 'SI leader's attendance at each class meeting is considered essential to SI effectiveness'. According to Blanc et al (1983:88) this level of engagement helps to manage the sometimes distorted perceptions which students may hold of the learning experience. This viewpoint presents knowledge as prescriptive and absolute; instrumentalism which is in opposition to the discursive social work education model, which is framed in an interpretative, narrative paradigm (Fook, 2002; Stephenson et al, 1996). In terms of power dynamics it clearly identifies students as needing instruction to avoid 'distorted perceptions', setting up a hierarchy between leaders and students and presenting students in a deficit frame.

Martin and colleagues employ a research framework to consider how a range of factors inherent in the Supplemental Instruction programme impact positively on student performance as well as retention rates (Blanc et al, 1983). They consider how the service is proactive rather than reactive; course specific; and non-remedial. Leader attendance at teaching is compulsory; mutual support and interaction promote peer study group formation and feedback to lecturers is a useful consequence. A comparable framework is introduced at this point to develop an appreciation of the impact of PALS for students of the undergraduate social work programme, based on identified contributory factors to student engagement and performance.

The SI service is proactive and integrated into whichever course it is embedded at the outset, hoping to engage with students before they encounter difficulties. However, in practical terms, this has proven difficult to achieve on the social work programme. Partly due to the range and content of information presented at the beginning of the programme but also because PALS is considered as an adjunct to teaching, the service is introduced during induction week but doesn't take place until programme study groups have been established and teaching has commenced. Revisiting this timeframe and instigating PALS sessions from the outset may aid in promoting a proactive rather than reactive service.

Students are actively encouraged to attend, as exemplified by the first session being timetabled as part of their overall learning opportunity. However, once students acknowledge that attendance is voluntary, subsequent sessions are less well attended and students are strategic in their engagement, usually joining to gain information about forthcoming assessments. The central PALS team monitors attendance for funding and research purposes; 'successful programmes that go unreported soon go unfunded' (Martin and Wilcox, 1996:99). This instils a surveillance dimension which could lead to possible mistrust and ultimately to Foucaudian resistance (Foote and Frank, 1999). So whilst PALS appears to foster the social work ideal of working in partnership while seeking to minimise power differentials (Moffat, 1999); lack of attendance could translate as an exercise of power which is never the 'province of one group and not the other' (Kincheloe, 1997: xxiii).

As with the SI model, PALS in the UK is attached to specific programmes, ensuring that learning is contextualised and applied, rather than being presented as generic in nature. Whilst this is useful to a degree, it doesn't lend itself to identity formation in an interdisciplinary context. Social workers are increasingly required to work in multidisciplinary settings and their educational experience should model this to promote exploration of the complexity of practice and encourage more effective interdisciplinary work (Gardner and Taalman, 2013).

It is made clear from the outset that PALS, like SI, is not remedial. However, there is a tendency for students to engage when preparing for assessment and to locate PALS in a remedial context, thereby subverting the original intention (Glynn et al, 2006). Pals leaders engage with a range of preliminary training and receive financial recompense for their engagement throughout the year. Foucault might suggest that

both strategies of providing training and financial reward should discourage subversion from leaders (Moffatt, 1999). Conversely, students included in Stage 1 as repeating students who failed to pass the first year previously, could be perceived as engaging with subversion when presenting a negative view of PALS to their new Stage 1 peers. This behaviour may represent a perceived power hierarchy between repeating students and PALS leaders. The leaders, in effect, demonstrate what the repeating students were unable to achieve at first attempt. Perhaps repeating students may not feel as supported as their peers; do not feel that they need additional support or feel undermined by the PALS leaders, with whom they would have developed prior egalitarian relationships. As a consequence of these considerations, we should be mindful that 'as trajectories, our identities incorporate the past and future in the very process of negotiating the present' (Wenger, 1998: 155). Caution should be taken to ensure that repeating students are not labelled as 'delinquent', should they choose not to engage (Moffat, 1999: 231). Comparisons can be made between this dynamic and that of social work recipients, who may feel compromised should they choose not to conform to service delivery.

As previously mentioned, one element of PALS in the UK presents a significant departure from the SI model. Whereas leaders attend the teaching, which is considered 'essential to SI effectiveness' (Blanc et al, 1983:88); conversely, PALS relies on the memory of leaders who undertook Stage 1 learning in their previous year. At the very least, this could potentially raise issues of trust between the students and leaders. This could be a particular issue where modifications are introduced to social work programmes of which PALS leaders may not be fully aware, for example changes to assessment processes, many of which take place due to the developmental nature of social work education (Thorley, 2014). This could become a considerable issue for PALS across a range of courses due to the continuing international drive to promote curriculum development as a means of improving teaching quality. Alongside these funding and governance-led initiatives, social work education is also caught up in professional accreditation changes which, though they may promote curriculum development in a facilitative manner, still constitute a further dimension to include when reshaping programmes (Hurlimann et al, 2013).

Student perceptions of the legitimacy of leaders may impact on the development of trusting relationships and this power dynamic emulates the professional and service user social work relationship, where knowledge and skills are considered important factors in relationship-building (Trevithick, 2007). It has been noted that students are aware of perceived variations in the content delivery of peer teachers (McKenna and French, 2011). Whilst the leader role is not that of a teacher, there may still remain a possible concern regarding equality of experience between PALS groups.

Saleeby (1994) presents a postmodern, poststructuralist theory in which he considers the narratives between worker and client as cultural meaning systems which can be divergent. The same may be the case in the leader, student relationship. He challenges the concept of expert knowledge and instead considers the multiplicity of truths inherent in social work practice. Similarly, Foucault's work

acknowledges complexity and multiplicity and his thinking may help to expose categorical thinking (Chambon and Irving, 1999).

Perhaps this next point is the most significant when considering the status of PALS within the current social work programme. The SI model upholds the importance of mutual support between students to encourage high levels of student interaction. As an adjunct, this should bring about the development of peer study groups which in turn result in students representing minority groups or those who are disadvantaged becoming better engaged. However, the social work programme, having accepted that a course which 'addresses students' academic, non-academic, and personal factors can positively affect student success and retention' (Fowler and Boylan, 2010: 10), has already established a strategy to encourage mutual student engagement as an intrinsic part of the student learning experience. This is achieved through the study group system, in which students interact weekly in 'student-led' and 'tutor-led' sessions. Whilst efforts have been made to make possible attendance at both PALS and programme study groups, there is significantly greater attendance at the study groups facilitated by the social work staff team. Perhaps the duplication of collaborative learning strategies impacts on the engagement of students with PALS. Or maybe the reason for lower attendance at PALS could relate to the perception of programme staff holding expert knowledge. This view should be challenged to encourage a more Foucaudian appreciation of power as a productive multidirectional dynamic (Foucault, 1980). Programme expectations of student attendance at study groups and subsequent positive student feedback may also impact on engagement in PALS sessions. It is possible that students perceive peer support as less useful than sessions with a staff facilitator. Perhaps the concept of peer support is new to them or their educational backgrounds support this belief. It may also be that whilst the ethos of the study groups is to facilitate collaborative learning, the inclusion of academic staff may kindle a hope to engage in passive rather than active learning strategies (Lockie and Van Lanen, 2008).

Social work education on this programme aligns itself with critical pedagogy and acknowledges the interconnectedness of identity and social interaction. This is exemplified through the utilisation of study groups which could be considered as communities of practice underpinning the belief that '...in everyday life it is difficult...to tell exactly where the sphere of the individual ends and the sphere of the collective begins' (Wenger, 1998:146; Fook, 2002). Student feedback suggests that study groups are successful in promoting Yorke and Longden's (2004) identified aims of developing reflection through discussion and collaboration in order to better understand course content and assessment. However, study groups may not go far enough in encouraging students to integrate into university life or developing learning and study skills. As a co-curricular activity aimed at engaging with students as partners in learning, PALS may meet these latter aims more successfully, (Hilsdon, 2013).

The final point in the SI framework has proven advantageous when addressing issues of student satisfaction. Martin and colleagues found that the SI model is a useful mechanism for obtaining unsolicited feedback relating to academic concerns. Students are often reticent to acknowledge these concerns to those responsible for

assessing student performance. Whilst clearly advantageous for both students and programmes it is somewhat concerning to acknowledge that students feel they may be 'demeaning themselves' by raising academic concerns to teaching staff (Blanc et al, 1983:88). An emphasis of social work education should be to promote a democratic educational experience, modelled by mutual respect and trust (hooks, 2003).

### **Benefits and constraints of PALS for social work students**

Research suggests that the benefits of peer learning in this context are often more significant for leaders than the students and that the leaders could be considered as the 'real winners' (Donelan, 1999:2). The benefits of Supplemental Instruction are reported by leaders as improvement in academic skills as well as skills in communication and relationship-building. There are also benefits in terms of personal and professional development. Leaders gain valuable skills for future participation and employment through collaboration with academics (Stout and McDaniel, 2006). They also assimilate the aspirational role of 'experienced learner', consolidating their engagement with course material, as well as developing their study skills and those of administration and time management (Martin and Wilcox, 1996; Stout and McDaniel, 2006). 'One value of the SI experience cited by leaders was the promotion of an active, collaborative problem-solving approach to learning', (Lockie and Van Lanen, 2008: 4).

A significant benefit for social work students who become leaders lies in the ability to develop communication and relationship building skills, both of which are key social work attributes (Trevithick, 2007). Leaders have an opportunity to refine groupwork skills and to engage in a mentoring role, which has been recognised as a useful device in promoting inclusion (Cropper, 2000). They develop an appreciation of collaborative learning and diversity issues, prevalent not least in the range of learning styles demonstrated by students (Lockie and Van Lanen, 2008). To date, leaders are those students who chose to attend PALS sessions in their first year and having found the scheme useful for their own learning, have assumed the role of leader. This confidence in the scheme enables leaders to present a positive message to students concerning the efficacy of the model. It is clear that during their time with PALS, leaders demonstrate increased self-confidence leading to enhanced self-esteem and associated wellbeing (Stout and McDaniel, 2006). 'Discovering the joy of helping others' is acknowledged as a further benefit by SI leaders (Zaritsky and Toce, 2006 cited in Lockie and Van Lanen, 2008: 3). Whilst the concept of helping others relates closely to social work values, leaders should exert caution to avoid adopting a hierarchical expert model as opposed to a co-intentional learning model (Freire, 1972). Critical reflection during debriefs may help to avoid this and instead consolidate transformative learning (Allen, 2013).

Debrief sessions provide an additional mechanism for feedback between students and teaching staff. However, this could potentially be counter-productive as students may not feel that they can trust PALS leaders with sensitive information. This raises the issue of perceived power in education and a Foucauldian approach may help

students to consider the nature of knowledge and issues relating to power, marginalisation and exclusion (Fook, 2013).

Leaders have raised concerns relating to time management, particularly when allocating time to plan PALS sessions. Not only do they sacrifice lunch breaks to facilitate the group but they also plan sessions in their own time. This occurs at a point in their learning when the course already places significant extra-curricular demands on their time. Leaders note how having minimal preparation time due to other constraints can lead to stress before and during PALS sessions. Potentially, this could be oppositional to the perceived benefits. For this reason, PALS in social work is provided on a fortnightly, rather than weekly basis. This echoes research by Martin and Wilcox (1996) which identifies how, as opposed to the SI model, the UK higher education model provides less time for students of different years to engage in the same learning experience and modifications should be made to meet local conditions.

In relation to benefits for students, SI research clearly indicates the benefits of improved academic performance and attrition rates. Similarly, students engaged in interprofessional peer teaching note how both reflection on practice and learning as well as skills development are achieved with less anxiety than when practising with a lecturer (McKenna and French, 2011).

Whether the significant adaptations made to the UK version of Supplementary Instruction pose a challenge to the view that students attending PALS enjoy improved academic performance and attrition rates remains a contested matter (Martin and Wilcox, 1996). Certainly in PALS in social work there is inadequate evidence to support a view at this stage, partly due to the relatively small number of students engaging in the sessions.

There are occasions where PALS mirrors expectations and challenges inherent in social work, for example from a Foucauldian perspective when developing skills relating to personal judgement (Moffat, 1999) and when developing professional discretion (Lipsky, 2010). PALS leaders initiate their own preferred communication strategies, for example providing telephone support to students in addition to planned meetings. They also exert discretion when providing feedback via debriefs, where they choose what to disclose from the interactions they have with students. It has been suggested by Martin and Wilcox (1996) that debriefs are a valuable way of minimising power differentials and developing meaningful academic relationships between leaders and lecturers and this would appear to be the case.

Boundary management and role clarity between leaders and students may promote connectedness as well as providing an acknowledgement of the complexity of the relationship (Adams, 2009; Colvin and Ashman, 2010). Stout and McDaniel (2006) consider that the negotiation of boundaries helps leaders to develop their communication skills. Social work students have intensive teaching and learning opportunities to develop their skills of communication and PALS provides an opportunity for both leaders and students to consolidate learning in this key area of social work practice (Trevithick, 2007).

As with SI programmes, debriefs between PALS leaders and teachers provide opportunities to exchange information which can aid programme development. These informal meetings can also enable the teacher to discover anomalies in information-sharing within the Stage 1 cohort and to use this knowledge constructively to minimise confusion and misconceptions which may otherwise remain unresolved. The concept of confidentiality is an intrinsic social work value and leaders and students are, therefore, fully aware of the need to maintain confidentiality within these discussions (Trevithick, 2007). This is an example of where an underpinning value associated with peer learning complements that of social work.

Creating conducive learning spaces demands skills of empathy and negotiation as well as the ability to recognise and facilitate emotionality (Fook, 2002; Ruch, 2013). Social work is a demanding profession particularly in relation to managing emotional stress in order to maintain wellbeing (Trevithick, 2007). The model of debriefs encourages leaders to share their concerns whilst also planning future sessions and is a place where issues relating to boundaries and emotionality can be discussed. A further benefit which sits well with the profession of social work is the ability to problem solve in a group context. This model relates closely to social work supervision where 'struggles and successes' are considered and is, therefore a tangible way of preparing leaders for this aspect of professional practice (Stout and McDaniel, 2006:58; Phillipson, 2009). Debriefs enable leaders to take a critical approach to their role through developing reflexivity (Woodcock Ross, 2011). To take this to its logical conclusion, if the aim of social work supervision is to provide '...the best possible service to service users' (Brown and Bourne, 1996:10), then debriefs enable leaders to provide the best possible service to students.

The inclusion of a member of staff from the Learning Development team in the debriefs as well as a social work lecturer may impact on relationship-building between the academic and leaders but could also encourage the building of a quasi-professional relationship through the sharing of experience. It models interprofessional working and encourages leaders to explore the PALS sessions in more depth, to facilitate an appreciation of the complexity of the programme. The learning development team member will have a greater awareness of PALS training and so can facilitate revision of such. However the lack of consistency of who attends from the Learning Development team may impact on the relationship-building and subsequent development of trust within the group. This also represents a managerialist approach whereby resources for PALS leaders are centrally controlled.

The concept of peer assisted learning in the guise of PALS inevitably raises issues relating to power. If PALS is indeed a peer-led initiative, then why should leaders need to engage with debriefs, other than to plan the activity for the following session? Stout and McDaniel (2006:57) suggest that leaders develop communication skills including the employment of the 'language of students'. This comment is dualistic and presupposes a paternalistic discourse. However, an appreciation of power as consensual and belonging to the group can legitimise the

concept of peer learning through the act of coming together and recognise that power is an 'essentially contested concept' (Lukes, 1974:26; Arendt, 1970).

## **Conclusion**

Peer learning has the potential to offer positive, transferable outcomes to students and to provide a financially viable supplemental approach to education (Colvin and Ashman, 2010). In order to develop peer learning in social work, students should be encouraged to recognise the importance of collaboration over competition and trust in shared experience over reliance on prescriptive knowledge. Students often need support in appreciating the place of uncertainty in constructing new meanings; and the benefit of processing experiential learning through critical reflection rather than seeking perceived expert knowledge. This dilemma of expecting answers rather than creating knowledge and approaching learning from an instrumental rather than critically reflective stance is mirrored in social work practice (Fook, 2002). There may be advantages of introducing peer learning at a later stage of the programme, as students will be more familiar with the study group collaborative model and may be better prepared to develop relationship-based learning in a peer-supported environment.

Potentially, PALS could be developed in an interprofessional context. Both professional and educational benefits have been identified when engaging with peer-assisted learning between undergraduate midwifery and paramedic students (McLelland et al, 2013). PALS provides learning opportunities around the benefits of peer support and collective decision-making, both of which could prepare students for informal supervision when team-working as a health professional and promote a 'mutually positive experience' (McKenna and French, 2011: 144). There are parallels between peer learning in education and informal supervision occurring in practice (Allan, 2013). Just as Supplemental Instruction is intended to deal with lack of readiness for students entering HE (Hilsdon, 2013), so perhaps an interprofessional peer-assisted learning framework could support professionals during the transition from education to employment.

To diverge from the managerialist instrumental approach often associated with assessment both in education and social work settings and to encourage critically reflective integration of practice with theory, PALS in social work could be modified. Cohorts across all three stages could collaborate in order to critically reflect on issues relating to practice and the integration of theory, rather than focussing predominantly on assessment processes. Introducing a more pastoral approach, such as peer mentoring (Hilsdon, 2013), rather than PALS with its emphasis on responding to taught material may be advantageous. Moving away from an assessment-led, task-focussed focus would lend itself to the development of an interdisciplinary model where students from a range of professions could engage in peer activity and 'collective enquiry' (Haggis, 2006:530), thereby developing a greater appreciation of roles and responsibilities. A development of this nature would be advantageous in light of the recent move to a multi-professional regulator and the proposed Care Bill (2013) which promotes integrated working (Ixer, 2013).



Through the potentially transformative influence of critically reflective learning (Allen, 2013), which acknowledges the relationship between identity, language, knowledge and power (Foucault, 1980); students could develop a collective sense of humanization and deepening consciousness, appreciating that 'the pursuit of full humanity...cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity' (Freire, 1972: 73).

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## **Appendix 5**

### **How does informal support for social work students promote preparedness for interprofessional practice?**

#### **Abstract**

Current narratives around social work education suggest that students should be better prepared when entering the profession. Social workers are required to apply a critically reflective approach while working in an interprofessional context where competing values and ideologies often present challenges. Adult social care legislation promotes interprofessional working and holistic practice in which people engaging with services are considered as partners and experts by experience. Social work is a relational activity and supervision should be a prerequisite to enable social workers to incorporate the emotional aspect of their work to inform decision making. However, current research reveals how supervision is not always readily available and is often caught up in case management and safeguarding issues. As a result, practitioners rely on informal peer support as a substitute.

This action research engages a critical pedagogical stance to consider the role of peer support for social work students and whether promoting this in an interprofessional context could better prepare them for the vagaries of the workplace. In addition to formal teaching and learning, students are encouraged to develop supportive peer relationships through a range of planned activities. However, anecdotally, they often prefer to make their own arrangements. This research will consider student engagement with informal support in order to better understand how this may contribute to identity construction and professional development in an interdisciplinary context. Encouraging the sharing of practice wisdom across disciplines through peer support could present a more cohesive workforce with shared values. This, in turn, could promote a much-requested seamless service for people accessing social care support.

#### **Essay**

Tempting though it is for me to immerse myself in research which explores the lived experiences of people engaging with social services, I feel compelled to first consider the preparatory work which takes place prior to this. I intend to engage with how student social workers are prepared for the challenging environment of social work practice, steeped as it is in neoliberal ideology and patriarchal tradition. During the course of their study it is likely that students may at some time find themselves in the 'swampy lowlands' of social work practice and I am interested in finding ways of supporting them to manage this stressful but potentially transformative learning opportunity. The swamp contains the most relevant and significant problems, the resolution of which cannot be mediated solely through a techno-rational approach, which is more concerned with those more straightforward issues seen on the high ground (Schon, 1983). Teachers and students are expected to work within a framework of practice uncertainty and complexity while exercising a degree of rigour. This often creates dissonance and an oppositional stance between the rigour of

theory and research and the relevance of tacit knowledge and intuition (Dewey, 1964). This has the potential to impact on professional identity formation which in turn affects interprofessional working.

Having initiated a peer support scheme on the undergraduate social work programme at Plymouth University, I am aware of the lack of research in social work education relating to how informal peer support is used to promote learning. Current discourse around social work education suggests that students need to be better prepared for entering this challenging profession (Department of Health, 2013; Taylor, 2013). Due to the relational and dialogical aspects of social work practice, as informed by Dewey's educational theory (1964), it is acknowledged that social work values must underpin a critically reflective approach to teaching and learning in which theory and practice are not mutually exclusive (Payne, 2005; Fook, 2013). In general, social work education promotes a collectivist Vygotskyian tradition of learning, which promotes the active participation of students individually and in groups, to create a space where identity construction can take place. This process of combining knowing and learning is underpinned with a critically reflective stance (Bernstein, 1972; Henkel, 1995). Anecdotally, peer learning is proving advantageous in complimenting the collaborative learning experience. However, there is a need for further research into the efficacy of peer learning in general and how this may be best achieved in the current economic climate (Golia and McGovern, 2013).

As well as considering the impact of peer support on how students engage in an interprofessional context, I am interested in the influence of gender, class and previous educational and personal experience on student engagement in this context. I am aware that peer support currently happens in a range of ad hoc informal settings as well as those which are part of the planned Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS in Social Work). Much of this informal support takes place through engagement with social media, as the majority of students are 'digital natives', fully conversant with a range of technologies (Prensky, 2001: 2). However, I am concerned to ensure equity of experience, as not all students choose to engage in this way. Social work programmes include a significant amount of practice learning which is fully integrated as a key component of the learning experience. Students engage in a number of practice placements across all three years of study. For this reason, it is important to develop and maintain personalised structures of support to enable students to cope with the elements of distance learning, which are often imposed on them through engagement with practice learning, due to physical constraints relating to demographics. Students should be offered the opportunity to learn in a range of ways at a time and place which suits their work-life balance (New Media Consortium, 2010). This is especially true of the many students on social work courses who match a widening participation profile.

It has been the case since the inception of social work as a profession, that interprofessional collaboration has been a policy and practice imperative (Crawford, 2012). The academic subject benchmark statements for social work (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)) explicitly state that: 'Social work programmes are expected to prepare students to work as part of the social care workforce, working

increasingly in integrated teams across and within specialist settings in adult health, mental health and children's services, interprofessionally alongside professionals in the National Health Service (NHS), schools, police, criminal justice and housing, and in partnership with service users and carers' (QAA, 2008: 2). A move towards holism has been introduced through the promotion of a 'holistic view of service users' to encourage interprofessional working and closer engagement with service users and carers (CCETSW, 1992: 34). However, almost without exception, public inquiries and Serious Case Reviews, undertaken when there has been death or significant harm; and abuse or neglect are or could be factors; conclude that better communication through closer interprofessional working is key. For example, as in the case of a man with learning difficulties who was murdered: 'with better inter-agency working, Steven Hoskin would have been spared the destructive impacts of unrestrained physical, financial and emotional abuse in his own home' (Flynn, 2007: 20-1).

The social work curriculum has no agreed definition for interprofessional learning and there is little research evidence about teaching and learning in this context. However, I agree with Trevillion and Bedford (2003: 216) that the absence of 'a single defining characteristic', rather than being an obstacle, could 'open up new lines of enquiry'. Having recently joined the School of Health Professions, social work programmes are engaged in the mandate to develop interprofessional working within the School, as well as the current direction of travel within the wider University. This echoes current legislation and policy, such as the Care Act (2014), which promotes better integration between services. As well as the ethical context relating to working together to promote better lives for citizens, there is also a neoliberal expediency to promoting interprofessional working based on cost, efficiency and effectiveness (Standing, 2011). Current developments in legislation and policy should mandate the extent to which closer collaboration takes place and in turn could determine the practice opportunities offered to students on social work programmes. Part of my research will consider how peer support may potentially encourage learning across the significant boundaries which currently exist between professions. These often cause tension when professionals assume a territorial stance and it will be interesting to consider whether this power dynamic impedes opportunities for interprofessional peer learning for students across programmes (O'Sullivan, 2011; Giroux, 2005). I would hope that interprofessional peer support could achieve participatory collaboration 'across the shifting boundaries of professions and organisations, and in the spaces inbetween' (Whittington, 2003: 57).

I plan to focus on social work in adult social care. This is partly because this is my area of expertise but also because interdisciplinary working is of political significance in this sphere of social care due to the recent enactment of the Care Act (2014), to be implemented in 2015. Relating the research to current legislative initiatives will ensure currency and innovation. Demographic changes and economic sanctions imposed on adult social care also makes this aspect of social work a particularly rich source of exploration at this particular time (Crawford, 2012). Using Ball and Bowe's framework (1992), the research will consider competing discourses

in policy intentions; actual policy and policy-in-use at a time of significant legislative change in adult social care.

At this stage, I face the dilemma of whether to include an analysis of service user and carer support alongside that of peer support. I intend to utilise doctoral supervision and the ongoing literature review to clarify my decision making in this regard. Within the confines of this thesis, I may not be able to explore this rich aspect of learning in sufficient depth to do it justice. However, I am loath to exclude service users as I consider them as key stakeholders in interprofessional practice and agree with Trevillion and Bedford (2003) that it is important to move away from an essentialist view of interprofessionalism to one which engages with a broader educational culture.

Social work education is based on the epistemological principle that knowing and learning are intrinsically linked and that active participation in practice situations plays a significant part in the learning process (Bernstein, 1972). In order to better consider the impact of peer learning and subsequent identity development, Wenger's (1998) sociocultural theory of communities of practice could be incorporated as a lens with which to consider interprofessional peer learning. As part of professional development, engagement with other professionals, citizens and communities enables reflective practice and continued learning (Henkel, 1995). Participation in communities of practice promotes identity construction which is particularly important when working in an interdisciplinary context (Sfard, 1998). Alternatively, I may choose to engage with social exchange theory, in order to develop my thinking around the notion that 'there is some element of self-interest in all instances of social exchange...Social relations are established and sustained through reciprocity and mutual gratification' (Loxley, 1977: 36).

Peer learning in social work for children's services has been endorsed by the Social Work Reform Board (2009) which considers peer mentoring as fundamental to shared learning and professional leadership; and more recently across children and adults service provision by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2012). However, in practice this concept is often difficult to achieve due in part to technological advances leading to home working or to the proliferation of multi-agency teams comprising of only one social work practitioner. In relation to inter-professional working, the HCPC Standards of Proficiency (2012) make it clear that registrant social workers must 'be able to engage in inter-professional and inter-agency communication'; 'be able to work in partnership with others, including those working in other agencies and roles' and 'be able to contribute effectively to work undertaken as part of a multidisciplinary team'.

A recent concern relating to peer learning is an ethical one which considers the importance of client confidentiality. Whilst peer learning relating to policy or services is appropriate and useful, the maintenance of client confidentiality must be a prerequisite in respect of any electronic information sharing via email or social media (Russell, 2011). Discussion forums such as the Community Care online resource promote peer engagement but these are seldom in an interdisciplinary context. This suggests that more could be done to enable the sharing of electronic information



between professions. The lack of integration between health and social care providers in relation to communication strategies has long been a contentious issue and one which has impacted significantly on attempts to bring together professions in order to promote a more streamlined service for citizens (Weiner et al, 2002). So, not surprisingly, the review of child protection in England recommends closer relationships between colleagues (Munro, 2011).

Whilst much research has been carried out in relation to peer learning when working as a professional, little has been considered in relation to how students make use of peer learning and support in order to inform their own professional identity (Golia and McGovern, 2013). I plan to examine the forums in which inter-professional learning is currently made sense of through the use of student reflection and informal peer support. One outcome of my research could be the promotion of improved inter-professional liaison between students which could translate into their practice and continuing professional development. This, in turn could encourage 'professional camaraderie...a powerful force for overcoming the barriers and obstacles faced by beginning practitioners' (Golia and McGovern, 2013: 3).

This research will focus predominantly on peer support in relation to accessing supervision, as this is an inherent part of social work practice as well as the practice of other disciplines in the helping professions. Kadushin and Harkness (2002, cited in Golia and McGovern, 2013: 2) define clinical supervision 'as a process' in which 'supervisor and supervisee establish a small, interlocking social system that at its best is cooperative, democratic, participatory, mutual, respectful and open'. This resonates with Freire's concept of dialogical education in which educators and learners are considered to be 'equally knowing subjects' (1972: 31).

Student social workers engage with supervision throughout their studies, when involved in both practicum and classroom activities, designed to emulate group supervision. Despite this, little has been written about peer support for practitioners in relation to supervision in any of the helping professions and in particular, there is a dearth of research relating to the student experience of peer supervision (Golia and McGovern, 2013). My research is innovative in that it should bring an original contribution of knowledge to this aspect of social work education and practice, as well a broader understanding of peer learning in an interdisciplinary context. I hope to consider which disciplines are more likely to engage with peer support and whether this is related to role, context or value base. Could students from differing professions provide each other with mutual support in practice and academic settings? I am also interested in why some students appear to be more comfortable with the concept of peer support and am currently considering the work of Arendt and Butler in relation to collective identity as both a personal and political process (Kaplan, 1995). The ultimate question for further exploration will be whether the use of peer support promotes a more robust service for citizens using services and so promotes social justice.

A significant means of developing professional identity in social work is through supervision. The narrative around social work practice is that supervision needs to be both 'rigorous and reflective' to enable social workers to incorporate the emotional

aspect of their work to inform decision-making (Ingram, 2013: 2). One of the HCPC (2012) standards of proficiency is for registrant social workers to 'be able to use supervision to support and enhance the quality of their social work practice'. The Social Work Reform Board (2012: 6) considers how social workers in England should receive supervision weekly (for new workers), 'at least fortnightly...for the first six months of employment in a new agency or setting, and monthly...thereafter. However, due to increasingly bureaucratic and managerialist approaches to social work, supervision is often caught up in case management and safeguarding issues. A recent survey of social workers in England revealed that 47% were dissatisfied with supervision and half of those surveyed don't receive reflective supervision (Donovan, 2014). This is an ongoing issue and as a result, practitioners place significant value on informal support from peers which is considered to offer more support, be more readily available and to not be recorded (Ingram, 2013).

The apparent issue of recording supervision could relate to Lipsky's theory (2010) around professional discretion, whereby professionals in public services understand and develop ways of working with policy in order to manage ethical dilemmas, some of which are in contradiction with the neoliberal agenda. Contrary to Lipsky's view that practitioners are autonomous, I am interested in supporting students to develop their ability to use discretion while acknowledging the importance of 'contextual competence' in order to reframe dichotomous thinking and to develop and maintain relationships with clients as well as other professionals (Fook, 2002:146). Inter-disciplinary peer learning acknowledges the ontological importance of interpersonal relationships and how these are a 'precondition of social work practice' (O'Leary et al, 2013). Once students qualify and become registered as professionals, their experience of peer support could encourage the development of a 'relational state' where 'the workforce would generate value and mobilise others' (Cooke and Muir, 2012:15).

I am interested in whether informal peer support helps to engage with the co-existence of techno-rational approaches alongside the emotional relationship-based concept of work in the helping professions. Research demonstrates how social work practice requires aspects of both in order to mitigate the potential for missed opportunities when supporting people (Ferguson, 2005). Does peer learning enable social work students to critically reflect on the emotional aspects of their practice and if so, could this also encourage reflection across inter-disciplinary boundaries? There is little research on peer supervision in any of its guises, whether ad hoc, planned or facilitated (Gollia and McGovern, 2013).

With regards to emotional development as a professional, it is acknowledged that as well as requiring an 'object' to respond to, be it an event, thought, artefact or person, cognitive processes follow the initial physiological reaction (James, 1890; Lazarus, 1991). In practice terms, emotion influences behaviour, actions and decision-making (Ferguson, 2005). While negotiating the current techno-rational practice environment, students often engage readily with the managerialist orientated professional construct of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Gorman, 2000). However, Rogers (2001) suggest that we should add emotion to this construct and suggests that bureaucratic organisations do not actually remove emotions but rather

they disguise and suppress them. If this is the case, then the same is likely to apply for professionals in other disciplines with whom social workers interact. This is concerning as managing these emotions without support could inevitably lead to stress and worker burnout, (Hamama, 2012). The relational aspect of peer supervision has been noted in how it focuses on the emotional wellbeing of the student or practitioner (Golia and McGovern, 2013).

Ingram (2013: 4) considers how social workers may seek alternative support due to the failings in supervision. Currently, supervision often fails to provide effective conditions to negotiate 'negative capability'; this being the ability to manage one's emotions and thoughts during a period of confusion and uncertainty. In order to mitigate stressful situations, social workers utilise peer support which involves the sharing of similar experiences and acknowledgement of emotions (Solomon, 2004). Peer support in this context promotes immediacy and the sharing of 'practice wisdom' (Ingram, 2013: 10). This in turn encourages professional growth and development as practitioners (Golia and McGovern, 2013) but also suggests that it may be less beneficial to receive peer support in an interdisciplinary context due to variations in experience and emotional engagement. The concept of peer support is one which is familiar in the helping professions. This often relates to the lived experience of those people using services where it is recognised that for peer support to be effective there needs to be a common purpose, a relationship based on trust and empathy (Mead et al, 2001). However, this engagement with peer support doesn't appear to have been developed to a significant degree in a professional context and certainly, engagement with peer support between professions is an aspect of my proposal which is currently under-researched.

'The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them', (Foucault, 1984: 118, cited in Ball, 2013: 144).

My way of experiencing the world is one in which I seek to understand and describe rather than explain. All knowledge is affected by the values of the person who produces or receives it and so is 'value-mediated' (Ormston et al, 2014). I consider that the object of inquiry, whatever that may be, is culturally inscribed and historically situated, part of many processes and contexts. Ontology and epistemology are intrinsically linked and as a researcher, I am part of the process and the design and methods used can't be separated from the way reality is perceived. This leads to my ontological position as being that of a constructionist rather than taking a positivist viewpoint in which ambiguity and fluidity are not encouraged (Crotty, 2013). Along with Foucault and Lotz (1963: p297), I believe that 'ontology is truly itself only when it is personal, and persons are truly themselves only as ontological'.

My basic worldview follows Freire's concept of 'conscientization', this being the critical consciousness which directs reflection and praxis in order to promote the voice of the oppressed. I consider that research and social work are both inherently

political, value-based activities which require self-reflection and, therefore, immersion in the research in order to better understand dominant ideologies. This resonates with Freire's view of people as partners in research, as knowledge does not transcend history or culture (Freire, 1972).

I am drawn to the hybrid, emancipatory bricolage nature of critical pedagogy research, as this fits well with a constructionist position wherein I will be located in the research; developing ideas as they present themselves; recycling knowledge as part of the process and focusing on the 'nuts and bolts' of the situation (Kincheloe et al, (2011: 168).

Part of the appeal of critical theory for me lies in the fluidity and lack of specificity required. The fact that it is constantly changing and evolving is comparative to the dynamic nature of social work and so is a good fit. It can relate to a range of different epistemological positions and so allows for change and development (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). As I am still developing my thinking around my position as a researcher, this should facilitate my developing research-mindedness.

I acknowledge the political stance associated with critical theory and again this relates well to social work which is essentially a political activity in which issues of power are prevalent and relationships should encourage challenges to oppression in favour of equality and independence. My main focus for this research is around adult social care and the Personalisation agenda. The whole concept of such is based on the identification of need and subsequent assessment leading to the possible provision of support (Glasby & Littlechild, 2009). As such it is deeply entrenched in a power dynamic whereby domination of certain groups in society is managed by agents of the state (Standing, 2011).

Having been influenced by atonal music as part of the Frankfurt school, I appreciate the cultural movement in which critical theory is embedded. 'The repertory of atonal music is characterised by the occurrence of pitches in novel combinations, as well as by the occurrence of familiar pitch combinations in unfamiliar environments' (Allen, 1977). This definition helps me to conceptualise interprofessional working, by reframing atonal music as interprofessional working and then substituting the word 'pitch(es)' with 'professional(s)'. When I first experienced atonal music, the rationality and rigour appealed to me but when composing pieces of my own I soon acknowledged how the results of this rational thought could often seem incoherent and incomprehensible to those not actively engaged in the process. I recall a lack of interest in this musical tradition from my peers. To a degree, this reflects my experience of interprofessional working as a social work practitioner.

Lewin's action research is concerned with practical enquiry through reflective transfer leading to actionable theory. As such the emancipatory and reflective nature of this fits well with critical theory. Action research originates with Kurt Lewin and is more a philosophy than a process. It considers how social change should be the outcome of research and that 'research that produces nothing but books will not suffice' (Lewin, 1948 in Atkins and Wallace, 2012:126). The practical aspect of action research appeals to me as 'simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations' undertaken to achieve possible outcomes of

improving practice and our understanding of it as well as improving the situation in which practice takes place (Car and Kemmis, 1986:162). It is reflexive and draws on the researcher's consideration of their own role and how this impacts on the research. It allows a self-analysis of personal values, attitudes and assumptions as well as past experiences. It draws on the perspectives of others and relies on the support of a critical friend. This helps to promote reliability and integrity into the research. This relational, qualitative approach aligns itself more closely with the porous, fluid relational methods used in social work practice, than a quantitative research methodology. This research and social work in general tend not to support neoliberal ideologies, though there are elements of evidence-based practice. Action research should prove particularly useful when considering interdisciplinary working as it is applied rather than scientifically robust and 'seeks opportunities for collaborative efforts, ones that highlight changes in the professional, personal and political dimensions' (Noffke & Somekh, 2013: 4). This collaboration may not be achievable to a similar degree in qualitative research based on ethnography or case studies or in quantitative research which promotes a strong evidence-base.

I am aware of the criticisms of action research in relation to rigour and ethical issues and will mitigate these by ensuring that I fully understand the approach and present the research in a reflexive and focussed manner (Atkins and Wallace, 2012). I need to consider whether the research should encourage active collaboration by developing aspects of Participatory Action Research (PAR), as influenced by Freire. This would fit with my underpinning philosophy and would encourage participants to actively engage in the research, so students become partners in identifying the issue and working towards a solution. This relates closely to a solution-focused model, so integrating social work theory: 'Causes of problems may be extremely complex, their solutions do not necessarily need to be' (Trepper et al, 2006: 133).

When considering ethics, whilst I acknowledge concerns relating to my dual role as researcher/practitioner and the power ascribed to this, I am in agreement with Zeni, (2013: 257) that 'the power and interpersonal complexity of the 'insider' role do not necessarily create an ethical threat'. This could be counteracted with a sense of responsibility, caring and social commitment which may be achieved through engaging reflexively with Noffke's analytical framework based on the action research dimensions of the personal, political and professional (Noffke and Somekh, 2013). I acknowledge that research cannot be value free but through a reflexive process of negotiation with participants, I hope to make my assumptions and values transparent to promote 'empathic neutrality' (Ormston et al, 2014: 8). Should I choose to engage with service users, I plan to involve the well-established Service User and Carer Consultative Group, whose remit is to support the social work programmes. Their mandate and previous engagement with research will minimise power differentials and ethical concerns.

Data collection will take a narrative approach, as there is an interrelationship between this and action research (Pushor and Clandinin, 2013); though at present I am not set on a definitive range of methods. It is apparent that while I tend to take a deductivist position, considering 'hypothesis-relevant facts' based on previous theory which is then tested, it is also helpful to acknowledge that I may incorporate an

inductive model at certain moments during the research (Wengraf, 2004: 2). I will be actively involved in what is being investigated and so will revise and develop the analysis in cycles, gathering data throughout. I envisage utilising a range of methods to obtain this data including keeping a reflective diary. I am interested in Wengraf's biological narrative interpretative method (BNIM), not only because it acknowledges my influence on the research and how this needs to be incorporated but also because it has the capacity to formulate purposeful questions for semi-structured interviews. This should help to promote triangulation and assuage concerns about validity. This could combine with a consideration of critical incidents or episodes to elucidate the lived experience of participants, including me. This method closely aligns itself to social work education and as such, will promote familiarity and pragmatism. It will also help to minimise power differentials as participants will be able to create data in the form of critical incident narratives, as a fundamental way of knowing (Tripp, 2012).

The analysis will be negotiated within the cycles of the action research to maintain fluidity. The BNIM appeals to me as it has a clear structure which may appear formulaic initially but then develops in order for the 'individuality of the researcher' to be felt (Wengraf, 2004: 233). This correlates with the atonal music which influences my thinking. This will be triangulated with consideration of my reflective accounts and critical episodes using thematic analysis in collaboration with the participants in order to present autobiographies which may be used to 'shape [our] personal and professional lives' (Tripp, 2012: 112).

With regards to the findings, I would hope that informal peer support may be identified as a significant part of student learning in an interdisciplinary context. Anecdotally, I am aware of student's efforts to come together to form an interdisciplinary group in order to learn about each other's professions and see this as a potential start for further interdisciplinary working as part of their prescribed teaching and learning. It may well prove that parallels can be drawn between the student experience and that of staff. Research suggests that informal consultation with colleagues and sharing of experience presents the most valuable support for many professionals. This certainly resonates with my own experience. The findings may also demonstrate the important role of service users and carers in promoting informal learning and this could lead to developments in engagement of these 'critical friends' across the School of Health Professions.

4,953 words

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## Appendix 6 – Excerpt from RDC2

### Social work education – spanning boundaries

‘From our early roots social work has been working at the boundaries of personal and public spaces, across professional settings, with systems of various sizes, over the life course and with every conceivable human condition. We work with and on behalf of people whose problems in living are complex and do not fit into neat categorical boxes’. (JSWEC, 2015).

An aim of social work education is that students are socialized into a professional identity. Framing social workers as ‘boundary spanners’ meets this aim. This prepares students for complex interprofessional practice, is a central tenet of social work, while maintaining a commitment to social justice. Boundary spanners as those who ‘work between systems whose goals, though superficially complementary, may carry inherent conflicts requiring mediation, negotiation and strategy’ (Oliver, 2013:777). This concept engages with a social identity perspective, appreciating that professional identities draw on previous experiences, personal values and cultural identity scripts as well as education. These scripts can be gained through peer engagement to actively construct professional identities and develop a sense of self. Whilst these scripts are sometimes ambiguous, engaging with peers or professionals and working with unifying perspectives such as the person-in-environment approach may reconcile difference (Payne, 2005). Learning from peers and adapting identity scripts together supports the production of ‘a shared repertoire or communal resources’ and ‘a sense of joint enterprise’ (Wenger, 2000:229; Appendix 2). This co-construction is supported through teaching and learning strategies such as study groups.

Conversely, interprofessional work can challenge professional identity due to changes in status and ambiguity of role and boundaries. When faced with these dilemmas and identity threats, social identity theory posits the likelihood of responding by abandoning our developing group identity; retreating to professional silos and redefining our professional characteristics. To minimise identity threat and collaborate effectively, the ability to span boundaries is a characteristic of significant value in interprofessional practice. I agree that ‘social work is an inherently boundary-spanning enterprise’ in which ‘persuasion and friendly influence’ is used to instigate change and the educational emphasis on acknowledging group dynamics very readily supports interprofessional team work (Oliver, 2013: 777-8).

‘Complex public policy problems tend not to be amenable to tired traditional or conventional approaches. Their resolution demands new ideas, creativity, lateral thinking and an ‘unlearning’ of professional and organisational conventions and norms’ (Williams, 2002: 110). Crossing boundaries requires courage, an element of risk-taking and the ability to exercise discretion in order to collaborate effectively in a prominent role (Lipsky, 2010). These skills, alongside the ability to function in multiple contexts, develop over time and whilst not the sole preserve of social workers, the underpinning integrative theoretical perspectives, values of social

justice and human rights and relational aspect of social work present a good fit (Walker and Nocon, 2007). I am interested to discover whether peer support amongst students and newly qualified social workers promotes the professional identity development as 'boundary spanner' for social workers who are negotiating the often 'dense and complicated policy swamp' and 'framing problematic situations in different ways' as 'purposive practitioners' (Williams, 2002: 104 -106; Schon, 1991).

Oliver (2013) calls for research into whether the concept of 'boundary spanner' can be integrated into social work education in an interprofessional context. My research will do so by considering the reciprocity of peers and whether this facilitates reflexivity and resilience as part of the professional script of social work. Do learning environments support this relational activity? Policy initiatives throughout the last decade extol the virtues of collaborative working and I agree with Williams (2002) that boundary spanning capacities should be part of the curriculum for practitioners across a range of disciplines.

Williams (2002:119) suggests that boundary spanners are 'jack of all trades and master of none' often with an unconventional career profile who are motivated by a commitment to service users. This resonates with my experience and utilising Action Research will enable me to develop an understanding of my own situation in this regard.

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	MPhil/PhD, ResM, BClin Sci, EdD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Or Other (please state) <input type="checkbox"/>
	Taught Masters <input type="checkbox"/>
4.	a) Funding body (if any): b) If funded, please state any ethical implications of the source of funding, including any reputational risks for the university and how they have been addressed. *Note 3
5.	a) Duration of project/programme: *Note 4 up to 3 years b) Dates:2016/17
6.	Has this project received ethical approval from another Ethics Committee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> a) Committee name: b) Are you therefore only applying for Chair's action now? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7.	Attachments (if required): a) Application/Clearance (if you answered Yes to question 6) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> b) Information sheets for participants Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> c) Consent forms Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> d) Sample questionnaire(s) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> e) Sample set(s) of interview questions Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> f) Continuing review approval (if requested) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> g) Other, please state:

*\*1. Principal Investigators are responsible for ensuring that all staff employed on projects (including research assistants, technicians and clerical staff) act in accordance with the University's ethical principles, the design of the research described in this proposal and any conditions attached to its approval.*

*\*2. In most cases, approval should be sought individually for each project. Programme approval is granted for research which comprises an ongoing set of studies or investigations utilising the same methods and methodology and where the precise number and timing of such studies cannot be specified in advance. Such approval is normally appropriate only for ongoing, and typically unfunded, scholarly research activity.*

*\*3. If there is a difference in ethical standards between the University's policy and those of the relevant professional body or research sponsor, Committees shall apply whichever is considered the highest standard of ethical practice.*

*\*4. Approval is granted for the duration of projects or for a maximum of three years in the case of programmes. Further approval is necessary for any extension of programmes.*

8	<p><b>If you are staff</b>, are there any other researchers involved in your project? Please list who they are, their roles on the project and if/how they are associated with the University. Please include their email addresses. <i>(Please indicate School of each named individual, including collaborators external to the Faculty/University):</i></p> <p>N/A</p>
	<p><b>If you are a student</b>, who are your other supervisors?</p> <p>Gayle Letherby</p> <p>Have you discussed all ethical aspects of your research with your Director of Studies prior to submitting this application? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
9	<p>Type of application:</p> <p>Initial application <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Resubmission with amendments <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Version Number: 1</p> <p>Amendment to approved application * <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Renewal <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>* For full details of the amendments procedure, please see the guidance notes</i></p>
10	<p>Summary of aims, objectives and methods (max 250 words)</p> <p><b>Main Aim</b></p> <p>To consider whether peer support promotes the ability of students to span interprofessional boundaries, and if so, how.</p> <p><b>Subsidiary Aims:</b></p> <p>To explore whether peer support promotes the use of creativity and discretion.</p> <p>To reflect on the significance of emotional management for students within adult social care settings.</p> <p>To consider the usefulness of critical reflection.</p> <p>This research will focus on students in adult social care placements. This will facilitate consideration of whether the recent introduction of the Care Act (2014) promotes health and social care integration.</p> <p><b>Methods:</b></p>

	<p>A social exchange theory lens informs this evaluative research which utilises a qualitative method. Critical theory and critical pedagogy underpin the research. I am concerned with improving practice through comprehending lived experience. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is exploratory and inductive and focuses on the interpretation of meaning. Through reflection, it will enable the analyses of patterns of meaning for students' lived experiences and make sense of my own interpretations.</p> <p>Purposive sampling based on practice placements will lead to the identification of 10 social work students all of whom are engaged in social work within adult placements, so promoting homogeneity. As I have a duty of care to the students and to avoid disappointment, should a large number of students show interest, I will invite them to submit their critical reflections which will be included in the data analysis. Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews will develop from critical reflections prepared by the 10 identified participants. This narrative device will give a voice to the students, minimise power dynamics through co-construction and encourage reflective sense-making of their practice experience. The data will be transcribed to provide a semantic record from which emergent themes will be developed (Smith et al, 2009; Spencer et al, 2014). My use of a reflective journal will enable reflexivity within the process.</p> <p>Smith, J; Flowers, P. &amp; Larkin, M. (2009) <b>Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research</b>, London: SAGE.</p> <p>Spencer et al (2014) 'Analysis: Principles and Processes' in J. Ritchie; J. Lewis; C. McNaughton Nicholls &amp; R. Ormston (eds) <b>Qualitative Research Practice</b>, (2e) London: SAGE. Chapter 10.</p>
11.	<p>When do you need/expect to begin the research methods for which ethical approval is sought?</p> <p>March 2016</p>
	<p>How long will this research take and/or for how long are you applying for this ethical approval?</p> <p>Planning for 15 months. Applying for up to 3 years</p>



12	<p>What will be the outcomes of this project?</p> <p>I will gain understanding of whether engagement with peer support in an interprofessional context encourages social work students to span professional boundaries.</p> <p>This will inform my teaching and will enable me to share this knowledge within the School of Health Professions with the intention of introducing interprofessional working for students.</p> <p>I also plan to develop this into a publication aimed at other social work academics.</p>		
13	<p>Is the project subject to an <b>external</b> funding bid? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (<i>please complete questions 14- 18</i>)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (<i>please go to Part B</i>)</p>		
14	<p>Bid amount:</p>		
15	<p>Bid status:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not yet submitted                      Submission deadline:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Submitted, decision pending</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bid granted</p>		
16	<p>University Project Finance Team costing approved with Dean's signature?</p> <p>Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>.              No: <input type="checkbox"/> (Please contact the University Project Finance Team as soon as possible)</p>		
17	<p>Has the funding bid undergone peer review?      <input type="checkbox"/> Yes      <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>		
18	Partners & Institutions:		
	Name (including title)	School:	Institute / Organisation:

## Part B: ETHICAL REVIEW STATEMENT

*The purpose of this statement is to clarify whether the proposed research requires ethical clearance through an Ethics Protocol. Please read the relevant section of the guidance notes before you complete your statement.*

**Please indicate all the categories into which your proposed research fits:**

	<b>Data collection / analysis involved:</b>	<b>Action required:</b>	
1	This study does not involve data collection from or about human participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement and add a brief (one page) description of your research and intended data collection methods.</i></li> <li><i>Part C not required.</i></li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	This study involves the analysis or synthesis of data obtained from/about human subjects where such data are in the public domain (i.e. available in public archives and/or previously published)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement and add a brief (one page) description of your research, the nature of the data and intended data collection methods.</i></li> <li><i>Part C not required.</i></li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	This study involves the analysis of data obtained from/about human participants where the data has been previously collected but is not in the public domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Please complete Part C – Ethical Protocol</i></li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	This study draws upon data already collected under a previous ethical review but involves utilising the data in ways not cleared with the research participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Please complete Part C – Ethical Protocol</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Submit copy of original ethics protocol and additional consent materials (if relevant) attached.</i></li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	This study involves new data collection from/about human participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Please complete Part C – Ethical Protocol</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Submit copies of all information for participants AND consent forms in style and format appropriate to the</i></li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

		<i>participants together with your research instruments.</i>	
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**Please Note:** Should the applicant wish to alter in any significant regard the nature of their research following ethical approval, an application for amendment should be submitted to the committee together with a covering letter setting out the reasons for the amendment. The application should be made with reference to one or more of the categories laid out in this document. 'Significant' should be interpreted as meaning changing in some fundamental way the research purposes and processes in whole or part.

## Part C: ETHICS PROTOCOL

Please indicate how you will ensure that this research conforms to Plymouth University's Research Ethics Policy - *The Integrity of Research involving Human Participants*. Please complete each section with a statement that addresses each of the ethical principles set out below. Please note that you should provide the degree of detail suggested. Each section will expand to accommodate this information.

**Please refer to Guidance Notes when completing this section.**

1	<p><b>Informed consent</b></p> <p><i>Please attach copies of all draft information / documents, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules, etc intended for the participants, and list below. When it is not possible to submit research instruments (e.g. use of action research methods) the instruments should be listed together with the reason for the non-submission. Please also indicate the attachments in Question A7.</i></p>
	<p>Information Sheet for Potential Research Participants (students)</p> <p>Interview schedule</p> <p>Consent form</p>
2	<p><b>Openness and honesty</b></p> <p><i>It is generally accepted that research with human participants would not involve deception. However if this is not the case, deception is permissible only where it can be shown that all three of the following conditions have been met in full.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. Deception is completely unavoidable if the purpose of the research is to be achieved.</i></li> <li><i>2. The research objective has strong scientific merit.</i></li> <li><i>3. Any potential harm arising from the proposed deception can be effectively neutralised or reversed by the proposed debriefing procedures.</i></li> </ol> <p><i><u>If deception is involved</u>, applicants are required to provide a detailed justification and to supply the names of two independent assessors whom the Committee can approach for advice. Please attach relevant documentation and list below.</i></p>
	<p>There will be no deception.</p>

3	<p><b>Right to withdraw</b></p> <p><i>Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding their right to withdraw from the research.</i></p>																
	<p>The Information Sheet for Potential Research Participants (students) contains the following:</p> <p>'If you do decide to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Should you change your mind after having signed the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time up to the end of the data collection without needing to give a reason and without any prejudice or disadvantage '.</p>																
4	<p><b>Protection from Harm</b></p> <p><i>Indicate here any vulnerability that may be present because of the:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>participants e.g. children or vulnerable adults.</i></li> <li>○ <i>nature of the research process.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>If you tick any box below, please indicate in "further information" how you will ensure protection from harm.</i></p> <p><i>Does this research involve:</i></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="316 1294 1342 1848"> <tr> <td><i>Children</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Vulnerable adults</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Sensitive topics</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Permission of a gatekeeper in place of consent from individuals</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Subjects being academically assessed by the researcher</i></td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Research that is conducted without full and informed consent</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Research that could induce psychological stress and anxiety</i></td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Intrusive intervention (eg, vigorous physical exercise)</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>	<i>Children</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Vulnerable adults</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Sensitive topics</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Permission of a gatekeeper in place of consent from individuals</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Subjects being academically assessed by the researcher</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Research that is conducted without full and informed consent</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Research that could induce psychological stress and anxiety</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Intrusive intervention (eg, vigorous physical exercise)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<i>Intrusive intervention (eg, vigorous physical exercise)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>																
	<p>Further information:</p> <p>I will not be directly involved in assessing student's work either through practice placement activity or academic submission. However, I teach the students and am Programme Lead. The use of Action Research will promote differentiation</p>																

	<p>of role and purpose through clarification and acknowledgement of my own learning journey.</p> <p>Due to the nature of social work, discussing the need for support in placement activity could potentially lead to psychological stress and anxiety. Students will be advised that should this be the case, I will be available following the research meeting and their study group tutors are also available should additional support be required.</p>				
	<p><i>Do ALL researchers in contact with children and vulnerable adults have current DBS clearance?</i>      Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>.      No: <input type="checkbox"/>      N/A: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>If Yes, Please give disclosure number(s)</i></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><i>Name</i></th> <th><i>Number</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>If No, please explain:</p>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Number</i>		
<i>Name</i>	<i>Number</i>				
5	<p><b>External Clearance</b></p> <p><i>I undertake to obtain written permission from the Head of any external institutions (school, social service, prison, etc) in which research will be conducted. (please check box)</i> <input type="checkbox"/></p>				
6	<p><b>Participant/Subject Involvement</b></p> <p><i>Has this group of participants/subjects already been the subject of research in the current academic year?</i>      Yes <input type="checkbox"/>  No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>				
7	<p><b>Payment</b></p> <p><i>Please provide details of any payments, either financial or in kind, made to participants for participation, compensation for time given, etc.</i></p>				
	N/A				
8	<p><b>Debriefing</b></p> <p><i>When? By whom? How? Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding debriefing.</i></p>				
	<b>Debriefing/Feedback</b>				

	<p>The Information Sheet for Potential Research Participants (students) includes the following:</p> <p>‘Following your involvement, you will be invited to meet with me at a later date to discuss your reflections on the process. If you would be interested in receiving information about progress of the project or a summary or copy of the final report, please contact Beth Moran by email’.</p>
9	<p><b>Dissemination of Research</b></p> <p><i>Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding dissemination of this research.</i></p>
	<p>The Information Sheet for Potential Research Participants (students) includes the following:</p> <p>‘Any information will be disseminated in an anonymised format. The information from the project will be offered to you as a participant. It will also be disseminated to those people involved in the EdD programme as well as to stakeholders, such as local employers of social workers; Skills 4 Care; social workers; social work staff at the University; service users and carers. I may also publish the report in an appropriate journal’.</p>
10	<p><b>Confidentiality</b></p> <p><i>Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding confidentiality issues.</i></p>
	<p>The Information Sheet for Potential Research Participants (students) includes the following:</p> <p>‘Information will be treated as confidential throughout the process. No sources will be identified and responses will be anonymised in any published work. Any data generated in the course of this project will be kept securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the project. Information gathered from any source will not make reference to individual participants in any respect’.</p>

1 1	<p><b>Ethical principles of professional bodies</b></p> <p><i>Where relevant professional bodies have published their own guidelines and principles, these must be followed and the current University principles interpreted and extended as necessary in this context. Please state which (if any) professional bodies' guidelines are being utilised.</i></p>
	<p>As a social worker, my research will fit within the ethical principles set out by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC):</p> <p><a href="http://www.hcpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10003B6EStandardsOfconduct,performanceandethics.pdf">http://www.hcpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10003B6EStandardsOfconduct,performanceandethics.pdf</a></p>



12	<p><b>Declarations:</b></p> <p><b>For all applicants,</b> your signature below indicates that, to the best of your knowledge and belief, this research conforms to the ethical principles laid down by Plymouth University and by the professional body specified in C.11 above.</p> <p><b>For supervisors of PGR students:</b></p> <p>As Director of Studies, your signature confirms that you believe this project is methodologically sound and conforms to university ethical procedures.</p>			
		Name(s)	Signature (electronic is acceptable)	Date
	Applicant	Beth Moran	B Moran	16/12/2015
	Other staff investigators:			
	Director of Studies (if applicant is a postgraduate research student):	Dr Julie Anderson	J Anderson	16/12/2015

**Completed Forms should be forwarded BY E-MAIL to Claire Butcher ([claire.butcher@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:claire.butcher@plymouth.ac.uk)), Secretary to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee no later than 2 weeks before the meeting date.**

You will receive approval and/or feedback on your application within 2 weeks of the meeting date at which the committee discussed this application.

## **Plymouth University Professional Doctorate (EdD) Research**

### **Information Sheet for Research Participants (students)**

Dear

I am inviting you to be part of a research study. In order for you to make an informed decision about any involvement, please read the following information. If anything is not clear or you would like further information, please contact me, Beth Moran at [beth.moran@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:beth.moran@plymouth.ac.uk)

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

I am interested in exploring how social work students engage with peer learning in an interprofessional context. As my background is in adult social care, I am interested to consider peer learning and interprofessional working in this context. There is very limited research in this field and I would hope that this research will inform future developments. In particular, I hope to develop closer links with other professions through teaching and learning strategies. This research will form part of my Professional Doctorate (EdD) studies.

This research will form a significant part of my doctoral thesis and will be available to read on completion. The information from the project will be offered to you as a participant and any information will be disseminated in an anonymised format. It will also be disseminated to those people involved in the EdD programme as well as to stakeholders, such as local employers of social workers; Skills 4 Care; social workers; social work staff at the University; service users and carers. I may also publish the report in an appropriate journal.

#### **Why have you been chosen to take part?**

I would like to talk to you about your experience of peer support in your placement and your views about this in relation to interprofessional working. I have contacted all students in Stages Two and Three who have practice placements in adult social care settings. I very much hope that you will consider giving your time to support my own learning.

Should a large number of students offer to take part, I will choose a number of students according to your placement setting, so that I have a broad range of responses. I will base my decision on the type of placement in which you are engaged. A wide range of placements will enable me to make comparisons between your experiences. If you are not chosen for an interview I would still be interested in reading your critical reflection and using this to inform my research.

### **What does the research involve?**

If you agree to participate, I would like to conduct an interview with you so that you can talk about your experiences and your views of peer support in your placement. In order to prepare for the interview, I am inviting you to bring along a brief reflection on an incident(s) when peer support was evident or missing from the experience. This reflection would only need to be brief i.e. a few sentences to enable us to have a starting point for discussion. It would also be helpful for me to keep this for reference.

If you agree to be interviewed, you will be asked to sign a consent form at the interview, which should take no longer than an hour. You will be asked if the interview can be audio-recorded so that I can transcribe it for the purpose of analysis. No identifying information will be used in any report of the research.

### **Confidentiality**

Information will be treated as confidential throughout the process. No sources will be identified and responses will be anonymised in all written work.

As per the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2016: 5.2), service user confidentiality will be respected. Such information will only be disclosed if it is in the service user or public best interest i.e. preventing harm.

Data generated in the course of this project will be kept securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the project. Information gathered from any source will not make reference to individual participants in any respect. Personal information such as names will be stored separately from the research data which will include a code number for each student. Paper documents and electronic files will be held securely in lockable cabinets or password-protected electronic devices.

HCPC (2016) <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/publications/standards/index.asp?id=38>

**Do you have to take part?**

No. It is your choice as to whether you are involved in the study. Whether you choose to take part or not will have no bearing on your BA (Hons) Social Work studies. If you do decide to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Should you change your mind after having signed the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time up to the end of the data collection without needing to give a reason and without any prejudice or disadvantage.

**Debriefing/Feedback**

Following your involvement, you will be invited to meet with me at a later date to discuss your reflections on the process. If you would be interested in receiving information about progress of the project or a summary or copy of the final report, please contact Beth Moran by email.

**Many thanks for taking time to read this and I hope that you are interested in taking part. If so, then please contact me by email by (date).**

## **Plymouth University Professional Doctorate (EdD) Research**

### **Interview Schedule**

- What is the nature of the work you do on your placement?
- What does interprofessional working look like in your placement?
- Who do you consider to be your peers?
- What does peer support look like in your placement?
- Can you tell me about how you find working with peers?
- Could you take me through your critical reflection?
- How did you find writing this?

#### Probes

- Can you tell me more about that?
- How did it make you feel?

Please note: No sources will be identified and responses will be anonymised in all written work.

## Plymouth University Professional Doctorate (EdD) Research

### Consent Form

I (name of student) give consent to be part of the EdD research undertaken by Beth Moran:      Yes       No

I give consent to be interviewed by Beth Moran:

Yes       No

I understand that should I wish to, I can stop the interview at any point:

Yes       No

I give consent for the interview to be recorded via note-taking and use of a digital recorder:

Yes       No

I give consent for anonymised quotations from the interview to be used in Beth's thesis and other writing:

Yes       No

Should I change my mind, I am free to withdraw at any time up to the end of the data collection without needing to give a reason and without any prejudice or disadvantage:

Yes       No

Signed: .....

Date: .....

Please note: No sources will be identified and responses will be anonymised in all written work.

