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***“When David Bowie created
Ziggy Stardust”***

**The lived experiences of social
workers learning through work**

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Abstract

The findings from this qualitative study sit at the intersection of knowledge about workplace and professional learning, offering new insights into how social workers learn through work. The study explored the unique lived experiences of social workers' learning through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

IPA was selected to focus on the nature of the social workers' lifeworld and their lived experiences of learning in the workplace. In-depth individual interviews gathered rich descriptions from sixteen social workers. The double-hermeneutic cycle, a feature of IPA, explored the meaning that the social workers drew from their experiences and the researcher making sense of the participants' sense-making. Individual and unique experiences of the participants were explored, generating themes for the social workers through an immersive process of analysis for each case in turn.

Superordinate themes were then identified across the group that revealed the complexity of social workers' learning experiences. These were, *Journey of the self*; *Navigating landscape and place*; *Navigating tasks*; *Learning through the body*; *Learning through others*; *Practices and conceptions of learning*; and, *Learning by chance*. These aspects of the social workers' lived experiences weave together in a complex and enmeshed web, each thread connected to the others as part of the learning process. Striking metaphors were used by social workers to convey the meaning they associated with their learning in the workplace.

The thesis shows the nature and complexity of individual social workers' experiences and how understanding these can help design more effective workplace continuing professional learning opportunities. Drawing on rich theoretical ideas from phenomenology and workplace learning, the thesis offers a hybrid conceptual web model for social work professional development. This model acknowledges the unique experience of social workers within a complex context involving navigation of task, place and embodied learning.

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I would like to thank the social workers who agreed to be interviewed and allowed me to bear witness to their lived experiences. I remain humbled at the skills and qualities that are brought to unimaginable and indescribable work every day and night.

I have had the privilege to be inspired through my life by people I have encountered. As a young volunteer in rape crisis work, almost thirty years ago, I was profoundly influenced by two women who helped me learn through listening to their lived experiences of surviving. This cemented the importance of listening to powerful individual experiences for myself as a learner and subsequently as an educator. I have been encouraged and supported in my learning journey by so many people since then.

My supervisors, Dr Mark Wareing and Professor Jan Draper, have been unwavering in their support and positive encouragement and I sincerely thank them for their inspiration, authenticity and professionalism. Sincere thanks also to Dr Joyce Cavaye who had faith in me undertaking the programme and who supported me from the outset, to the inspirational EdD team at The Open University and my global peer community of doctoral researchers.

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Acronyms and professional terms

Accommodating	The term is used to refer to the process of a child becoming a Looked After Child (LAC) and being placed in local authority accommodation under a voluntary arrangement, where the child's parents agree to the child being accommodated; or in local authority accommodation or at home, under compulsory measures decided by a children's hearing or court.
Agency Decision Maker (ADM)	An appointed decision-making role in an organisation required under regulations and guidance on Looked After Children (LAC).
Children's Hearing System	Scotland's care and justice system for children and young people.
Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO)	The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 requires local authorities to appoint a single Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) for the purposes of cross-cutting social work functions listed in legislation.
Child Protection Order (CPO)	An emergency legal measure to protect a child in an emergency situation made by the Sheriff following application usually made by a local authority. This abbreviation is also used in Scotland for Community Payback Order, a court disposal and used extensively in criminal justice social work settings. Within the thesis CPO is in relation to a Child Protection Order as defined here.
Child Protection Register	Every local authority in Scotland has a Child Protection Register. It is a list of children who have been identified as being at risk of harm or further harm. The risk of harm or neglect is considered at a Child Protection Case Conference. Where a child is believed to be at risk of significant harm, their name will be added to the Child Protection Register (a child protection registration).
Core Group	A network of relevant professionals, parents, family members. Part of care planning processes for children and the term often used to mean a meeting of these people.
Family Support Worker	A specific role in many social work teams within children's services, although may be referred to in varying ways across different organisations. Family Support Worker is often considered as a paraprofessional role in statutory settings. This role is not currently regulated by the SSSC.
GIRFEC	Getting It Right For Every Child is a Scottish national policy relating to all children's services in Scotland and with

elements enshrined in The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014).

Kinship Care

Term is used to describe care by extended family or, in some cases, close family friends where a child is not able to live with their birth parent(s). This can be in formally agreed placements and where children are subject to different types of legal orders.

Lead Professional

Term related to working with a multi-agency child or adult's plan, currently associated most often with plans under the Getting It Right For Every Child policy and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014).

Looked After Child (LAC)

Under The Children (Scotland) Act (1995), 'Looked After Children' are defined as those in the care of their local authority – sometimes referred to as a 'Corporate Parent'. The terminology of the system for caring for children has been under review and intentions to alter some of this language is part of a national plan as of February 2020. The abbreviation LAC is commonly used in discourse by social workers referring to reviews and plans for children.

**People who use services/
Service users**

People who use services provided by social workers. Service Users is also a common term used in practice. Neither term express the complexity of the service and recipient relationship. The thesis uses *people who use services* and *service users* as terms.

Permanence

Theoretically refers to the concept of a child having a sense of security and belonging for the duration of their childhood. *Permanence* also refers commonly in social work discourse to the area of practice that involves legal procedures and formal legal orders relating to planning for *permanence*, including recommendations and plans for Looked After Children such as adoption and fostering. This term for practice processes is used in participant accounts in the thesis.

Placement

Placement is used extensively in two ways within social work:

1: Social work practice learning placement during qualifying training

2: Placement referring to the arrangements and placing of a Looked After Child, e.g. in foster care, kinship care, residential accommodation.

Practice Educator	Professional responsible for facilitating and assessing learning, including student social workers under the requirements of the Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland. Practice Educators have usually undertaken a qualification for undertaking this role.
Practice Learning Qualification (Social Services)	Qualification designed for those involved in facilitating learning including practice educators. At the current time these qualifications require to be approved by the SSSC as a Specialist Award under their Rules and Regulations.
RRMG	Residential Resource Management Group – in the context of the extracts in the thesis, a local planning forum allocating resources, chaired by senior social work managers and relating to plans for children.
Short Break	A temporary arranged break for a child away from their family or placement as part of care arrangements to support the child and/or their family/carers.
SSSC	Scottish Social Services Council, the regulator for Social Services in Scotland. The SSSC publish the national codes of practice for people working in social services and their employers, register people working in social services, including social workers and make sure they adhere to the SSSC Codes of Practice, promote and regulate the learning and development of the social service workforce and undertake the function of the Sector Skills Council in Scotland.
SSSC Codes of Practice	The Scottish Social Services Codes of Practice for Social Services Workers and their Employers.
Statutory	Term commonly used to delineate between local authority and third sector organisations, but also referring within the thesis verbatim extracts to the legal duties, responsibilities and tasks undertaken by social workers.

Dialect terms

Boab [Bohb]	Male name, Scots version of Bob, abbreviated from Robert
Braw	Good
Cannae	Can't
Didnae	Didn't
Fag	Cigarette
Folk	People
Ken	To know, as in <i>I know, I ken</i>
Laddie	Young boy
Lassie	Young girl
Nae	No
Wee	Little

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction to thesis

This research explored the unique lived experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The central research question, "*What are the lived experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace?*" is at the heart of this study. The study set out to explore the nature of social workers' lived experience through the lens of workplace learning and offers new insights into the complex and multiple threads involved in the phenomenon. Chapter 1 will introduce the study and provide contextual information about social work education in Scotland. I will then summarise my stance as a researcher, explaining the origins of and motivation for the research, then introduce the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Outline of the research

The central research question was explored through a qualitative study of social workers' lived experiences in relation to the nature of their lifeworld and their learning in the workplace. The study sought to fundamentally revisit the nature of social workers' learning, to understand what this is like, in the context of work. The study focused on exploring the phenomenon of learning in, through and at work, and the meaning of this for social workers. Deeply understanding what learning is like for social workers, provided new insights into the phenomenon as lived in an ambiguous, complex work context. A workplace learning lens was used in developing the study, to discuss the findings of the research and to contribute to the knowledge about social work professional learning from this perspective.

The selected methodology was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith *et al.*, 2009). In-depth individual interviews gathered rich descriptions from sixteen social workers that were designed to uncover the phenomenon of learning for social workers to answer the research question. The double-hermeneutic cycle, a feature of IPA, explored the meaning that the social workers drew from their experiences, followed by the researcher making sense of the participants' sense-making. My personal process of sense-making is woven into the thesis and my background and identity as a researcher are introduced in this chapter. Individual and unique experiences of the participants were explored, generating themes for the social workers through an immersive process of analysis for each case in turn.

Themes for the group were then uncovered through a disciplined analysis process. The findings sit at the intersection of knowledge about workplace and professional learning and offer a contribution to the knowledge base about how social workers learn on the job. The focus of the study was on *learning* rather than *training* undertaken when employed, using the lens of the workplace and the perspectives of the participants to explore detailed and in-depth descriptions of learning experiences rather than content or outcome of learning programmes. The thesis will show the nature and complexity of individual social workers' experiences and how understanding these can help design more effective workplace continuing professional learning opportunities.

1.3 Context of the research

1.3.1 Defining social work

Social work has a broad and visionary international definition that is referred to across nations, organisations and practitioners:

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.”

(IFSW, 2014, Global Definition of Social Work section, para.2)

This global definition of social work is often referred to within policy, practice, frameworks and rhetoric. The reality of practice and experiences of social workers can be quite different from this rhetoric across the UK nations (Moriarty *et al.*, 2015). Since the Social Work (Scotland) Act (1968), the profession has continually adapted to the changes triggered by social and economic trends and policy shifts. Changes in other professions and the partnership landscape for care, support and protection of children, young people and adults have also triggered the evolution of social work (Daniel, 2013).

The scope of the professional social work role includes clear and reserved functions that social workers, and in general local authorities, are responsible for. These specific functions are related to formal statutory requirements and interventions (Scottish Executive, 2006). Social work extends far beyond the realms of these reserved functions and its practice takes place in an increasingly complex, policy and legal context that is ambiguous and unpredictable. The profession and practice of social work remains a challenge to articulate and therefore communicate, at individual, organisational and socio-political levels. Social work education and continuing professional learning aims to prepare and develop social work professional practice in this context.

1.3.2 Social work education in Scotland

Within the United Kingdom (UK) each nation has a different framework and regulatory system for social work education and continuing professional learning. Although there are strong similarities in the fundamental principles and essence of UK approaches, there are differences in how the regulatory frameworks influence practice, planning for and investment in continuing professional learning (Kettle *et al.*, 2016). Social work education in Scotland is regulated by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act (2001). SSSC are responsible for the approval of qualifying programmes, continuing professional learning requirements and the registration of social workers from the point of their entry as students. *The Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland* outlines the entry, teaching, learning and assessment requirements for training, including detailed practice learning elements of this (Scottish Government, 2003). A summary of these requirements is provided in Appendix 1 for reference.

There is currently no formal post-qualifying learning framework in Scotland for social work, although there are requirements to maintain continuing professional learning for registration as a social worker (SSSC, 2017). The continuing professional learning requirements include a minimum of 90 hours over each three-year registration period and that social workers need to undertake learning in relation to the protection of children and adults. There are different requirements for newly qualified social workers (NQSW) in the first year that they are registered after completing their qualification. NQSWs need to complete 144 hours of

continuing professional learning in the first year of practice, including at least 30 hours that focus on the protection of children and adults (SSSC, 2017).

There is a range of accredited, formal, informal and self-directed learning opportunities available to social workers. What is available, and access to this, depends on variable local partnership or individual agency arrangements to deliver, fund or support it (Gordon *et al.*, 2019). There is current work underway led by the SSSC to develop a supported year for *Newly Qualified Social Workers* (Daniel and Gillies, 2016) and the development of a statement defining *Advanced Social Work Practice*, each with the complexity of learning for social workers at its heart. Supporting the continuing professional learning of social workers at these different stages requires an understanding of the complexity of the role and the needs of these learners. The context of social work education and practice is relevant to consider as this is related to the rationale for the research and the implications that will be explored in the thesis. I will now outline my position as a researcher then explain the structure of the thesis to conclude Chapter 1. Chapter 2 will then explore research about social workers' learning.

1.4 Origins of and motivations for the research

1.4.1 Genesis of the study

The study stems from multiple motivations, personal and professional interests that influence my identity as a researcher and the specific focus of the study. The origin of the study was my interest in enhancing the opportunities for social workers to learn about things that mattered to them and which equipped them for their difficult work tasks. At the outset of the study, I was working as a learning and development advisor for a local authority and responsible for the continuing professional learning of social workers, within a much broader organisational context. The origin of the study is linked with three main personal frustrations within this professional role: a focus on provision of training; lack of social work specific learning spaces; and different assumptions about the nature of social workers' learning. I will explain these frustrations before outlining how my background and identity as a researcher relate to the study.

I was frustrated at a continuing emphasis on provision of large-scale training programmes to address practice issues. Although rhetoric has strongly shifted in personnel development from training to *learning*, policy, practice and resource

responses remain characterised by provision of courses that are visible and tangible to measure. In an integrated service landscape involving health, education and social care practitioners, there was also a strong drive for learning opportunities to be open to all workforce groups. There are undoubtedly great benefits of interprofessional learning at all career stages but there is also a necessity for safe learning spaces that enable role and profession specific reflection. Safe professional spaces enable professionals to share experiences that foster and strengthen their practice and professional identity. Different assumptions about the nature of learning, explored in Chapter 2, also influence learning and development responses. Although social work professional learning is widely associated with deep, situated, reflective learning, I perceived there to be insufficient meaningful opportunities for social work practitioners to do so beyond the qualifying stage.

The combination of these frustrations led to my initial draft of an action research study which sought to improve workplace learning for social workers. A shift from this methodology was influenced by a creeping realisation, that if we did not really understand what social workers' learning is, how could we seek to improve it? There was, in my view, a shared assumption in the professional field that a large body of knowledge about social workers' learning exists. My study used the lens of the workplace, carrying out the interviews through this lens to build on existing knowledge and gain new and deeper insights.

This shift in methodology is fundamental to the focus of the study as carried out. Rather than being something that happened before the study, this change was instrumental in clarifying the goal of the research, the central question and therefore setting the foundations. The redesign of the research is detailed in Chapter 3 with the three fundamental aspects of IPA, *Idiography*, *Phenomenology* and *Hermeneutics* fitting well with earlier influences on me as a researcher and enabling a distinct, clear focus on the phenomenon of learning, avoiding a premature focus on improving something that is not fully understood. The study needed to consider various ambiguous elements: the social work role and task; the workplace; and the nature of social workers' learning. Fundamentally I questioned that if we do not understand how to articulate the role and task, how can we articulate what it requires to be able to undertake the task, and how do we educate social workers to do something we cannot articulate?

The research retained a very clear focus and commitment to the central question thereafter, “*What are the lived experiences of social workers’ learning in the workplace?*” This overarching research question was thereafter the single and crucial question that informed the design of the study, returning continually to centre on the phenomenon.

1.4.2 Background and identity as a researcher

My interest in undertaking this research is influenced by multiple standpoints in addition to the learning and development advisor role described above. It is hard to distinguish personal from professional motivation in relation to my interest in listening to and trying to make sense of people’s lived experiences. I will outline the different aspects of my background and identity as a researcher for two reasons. Firstly, these different aspects influenced the design of the research, the process of undertaking in-depth individual interviews and my sense-making journey. Secondly, my background and identity ultimately influenced my perspective on the findings and implications for the research that are discussed in Chapter 4, 5 and 6. Figure 1 shows the multiple roles, lenses, views and perspectives that represent my researcher standpoints from different aspects of my personal and professional identity, experience and interests. I would not be able to define myself as any one of these and will explain more detail about the ways that these different roles and lenses have influenced the study.

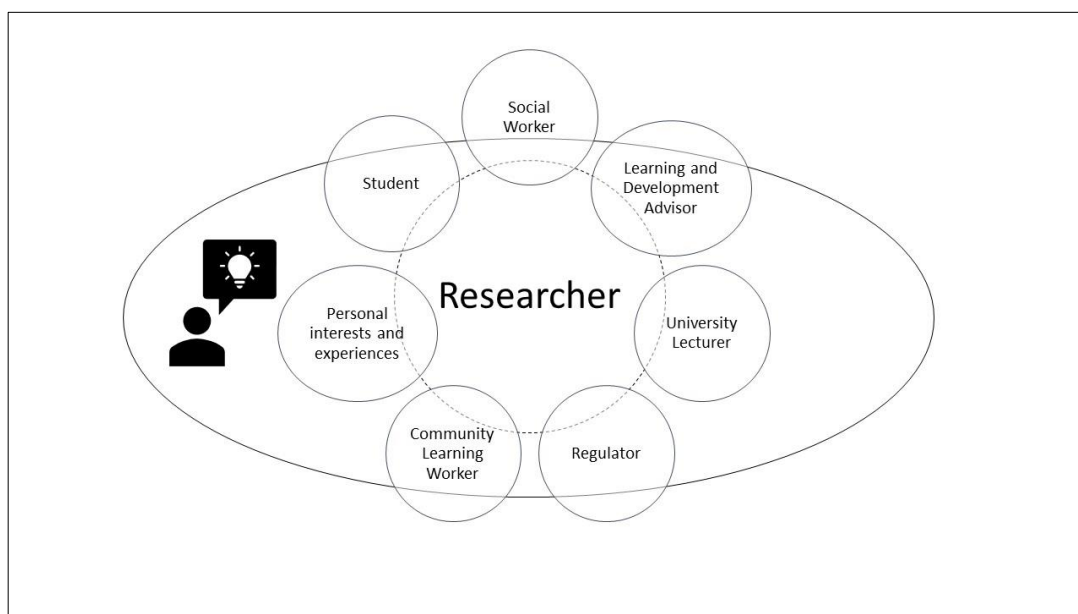


Figure 1: Researcher standpoint

1.4.3 Personal interests and experiences

My journey as a researcher began far earlier, than the role described in section 1.4.1, in relation to my interest in human experiences. I was profoundly influenced as a young volunteer in a local rape crisis centre learning from the lived experiences of women using the service. I had been studying Philosophy and English at university after leaving school and left this after two years, finding purpose and a sense of belonging in this volunteering role. Empathy, careful listening, safety and respect for individual experiences were central to the approach. I was very quickly involved as an educator, training other volunteers. This kick started both tracks of my career, as a practitioner in the helping professions and as an educator, promoting and facilitating the learning of others.

I was extensively involved in therapeutic practice in the substance misuse field, as a community worker and social worker, which used counselling and motivational approaches to support those using the services. The ethos and skills of these approaches rely on careful active listening, attention to the detail of language, paraphrasing, clarification and reflecting back. I was confident in selecting individual interviews as data collection method and in the potential of these to elicit rich description based on my experience of therapeutic work. The outcome of skilled interviewing using these techniques is in-depth personal exploration, articulation and sense-making. Although research interviews are intended for a very different purpose, my individual interview approach and practice experience offered a similar reflective space where personal disclosure could be held in a safe environment.

When studying philosophy, I was very drawn to existential theory and in particular the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and the detail within his work that described and interrogated the nature of human existence. My interest in existential philosophy had begun as a child when my father was involved as an amateur actor in a play centred on Sartre's existential concepts. I would practice lines with my father as he rehearsed without any realisation that my interest would manifest in later academic study. When I first considered using a phenomenological framework, I was concerned that I would become lost in abstract philosophy as my natural leaning would be to do so. I have explored the rationale for selecting IPA further in Chapter 3.

1.4.4 Self as community learning worker

I worked extensively with young people and adults in the next stages of my career, then qualified as a community education worker. My work in this area sparked a long-standing legacy of interest in transformative adult learning (Mezirow, 2018) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) where learning through doing and significant personal change are fundamental to the learning process. I was deeply committed to the principles and practice of community learning that enabled personal growth and fostered social justice. As a practitioner, reflective learning, was embedded in the culture of the profession. Learning in informal settings was also a core feature of community learning. These specific points are mentioned to acknowledge the foundation on which my research identity developed and do not seek to explain the significance of these theories in the professional field. The principles of reflective and experiential learning are espoused in many different professions, including social work. My experience has been that this can feel very different in the culture of specific professions and in different working environments. My research intentionally went back to explore the nature of learning as lived by social workers, without assuming that ideas about reflection or transformation might feature and I will explain more about this in Chapter 2 and 3.

1.4.5 Self as registered social worker

I am a qualified social worker, registered with the SSSC and have experienced my own journey of learning as a professional in and through practice. I studied social work through a work-based learning qualification route many years after starting to work with people in different settings and roles. I was relatively late to social work as a professional career and in fact consciously decided not to take this route for many years. I felt ambivalent about the role and fit with my ethical principles, values and preferred approach to working with people. A chance event led to me study the qualifying programme. The agency I worked in were offered sponsorship to support a member of the staff to undertake the qualification and I was asked if I wanted to do this. I initially turned this down and left the director to discuss options for who else they might support. Walking down the stairs away from the conversation I was gripped with a fear of missing out on the opportunity and went back up to announce, "I'll do it!"

Undertaking the qualification through a work-based route acknowledged the experience that students were bringing to the course, and the importance of

learning through work. My own formal practice learning experiences during this course were excellent in terms of my experience of *being* and *learning* in other workplaces. Learning from people using services remained important to me throughout this study. An important part of a practice teacher's report about me was a quote from a man I had worked with in a drug treatment service who summarised, "*she's braw*". The word braw is used widely in Scotland to indicate if something or someone is great, splendid, or excellent. Although a brief statement, the endorsement was elaborated on in terms of my authenticity, empathy, and respect for the man throughout my contact with him.

1.4.6 Self as academic and university lecturer

I worked as an associate lecturer with The Open University for sixteen years and until the end stages of this doctoral study. I became a fellow of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) with academic practice and online education qualifications. This educator aspect of my career developed alongside my continuing work as a professional in direct practice. The power of learning for individuals, along with an appreciation of diverse learner styles, needs and experiences remained a central part of my role as a lecturer.

1.4.7 Self as learning and development advisor

I undertook the study as an insider-researcher (Gray, 2014) in a local authority organisation where I was employed as a learning and organisational development advisor. I was responsible for the continuing professional learning of social work, social care, housing and community development employees across services as part of my remit. I outlined above that the principal motivation for the study came from this role. Within the role I was also an active practice educator for social work students and led the delivery of a practice learning qualification for a partnership in Scotland until July 2019. This qualification is for those who are supporting and assessing social workers in their practice placements, which form part of their undergraduate degrees. I was also able to undertake direct social work practice while working in this role within the same organisation. Staying connected to social work practice in this way supported retention of my own skills and credibility for my role in learning and development.

1.4.8 Self as social work regulator

I changed substantive employment in 2019, moving to a learning and development advisor role for the national social services regulator, whilst continuing my doctoral research. My sense of being a registered social worker really changed when I moved to work for the regulator in relation to my heightened awareness of the formal legal power and implications of fitness to practice processes for social workers. I had completed all data collection and a good proportion of the analysis at this stage. My changed role seemed to raise more potential tensions for me than the participants, for example being allocated work which did not align with the perspectives that were emerging in my analysis. I return to my reflexive notes about these issues in Chapter 5 and 6. I revisited the ethical approval basis of my study at this point and checked that there were not any conflicts of interest.

1.4.9 Self as doctoral student

My relationship to the central research question is linked with these different standpoints that bring together my experiences of learning and facilitating the learning of others in diverse settings. I am deeply interested in individual experiences, what learning means for people and how we can design effective learning opportunities in the workplace. It has been important to consider the inherent responsibilities and manage the boundaries of these roles as an insider-researcher. My own personal interests, emotions and experiences as a person, and as a professional, that I have outlined, are also important features of the overall standpoint. Developing awareness of and managing these different standpoints has been a key feature of the ethical foundations, research design and my reflexive process, explored in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

My relationship to the research approach has also been introduced in Chapter 1. Ultimately, the study has required me to develop and strengthen my researcher identity within the centre of my different roles. Remaining committed to IPA methodology, and using a phenomenological research lens throughout the process, has been part of this personal process. Selecting IPA instead of a different phenomenological framework helped prevent me becoming lost in the underpinning philosophy.

1.4.10 *The metaphor of Ziggy Stardust*

The title of the thesis is drawn from a striking metaphor used by a social worker in my research to reveal the essence of his unique lived experience of learning in the workplace. Ziggy Stardust is a powerful liberated iconic persona created by a musician in the early 1970s. The metaphor of “*When David Bowie created Ziggy Stardust*” was used to convey the meaning of one social worker’s whole, embodied experience of learning and the creation of a new persona, within an alien landscape of practice. This will be explained in Chapter 4 which provides detail of the findings in relation to the research question about the lived experience of social workers’ learning in the workplace. The title of the thesis therefore reflects the uniqueness of lived experience and the focus of the study. I will now outline the holistic process of undertaking the research and how the thesis is structured.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The research has been a holistic process and the thesis will show how the study was crafted at different stages, from the literature review through to the design choice, data collection and analysis stages. Figure 2 represents the holistic research process and highlights the relationship between aspects of the research. This will be used to consider the literature in Chapter 2 and the research design in Chapter 3. Different fields of literature are illustrated in the left-hand circle of the diagram with the position of the study at the centre of this circle. The central research question is shown at the core of this circle. The literature review and the central research question has informed the research design and process shown in the right-hand circle of Figure 2.

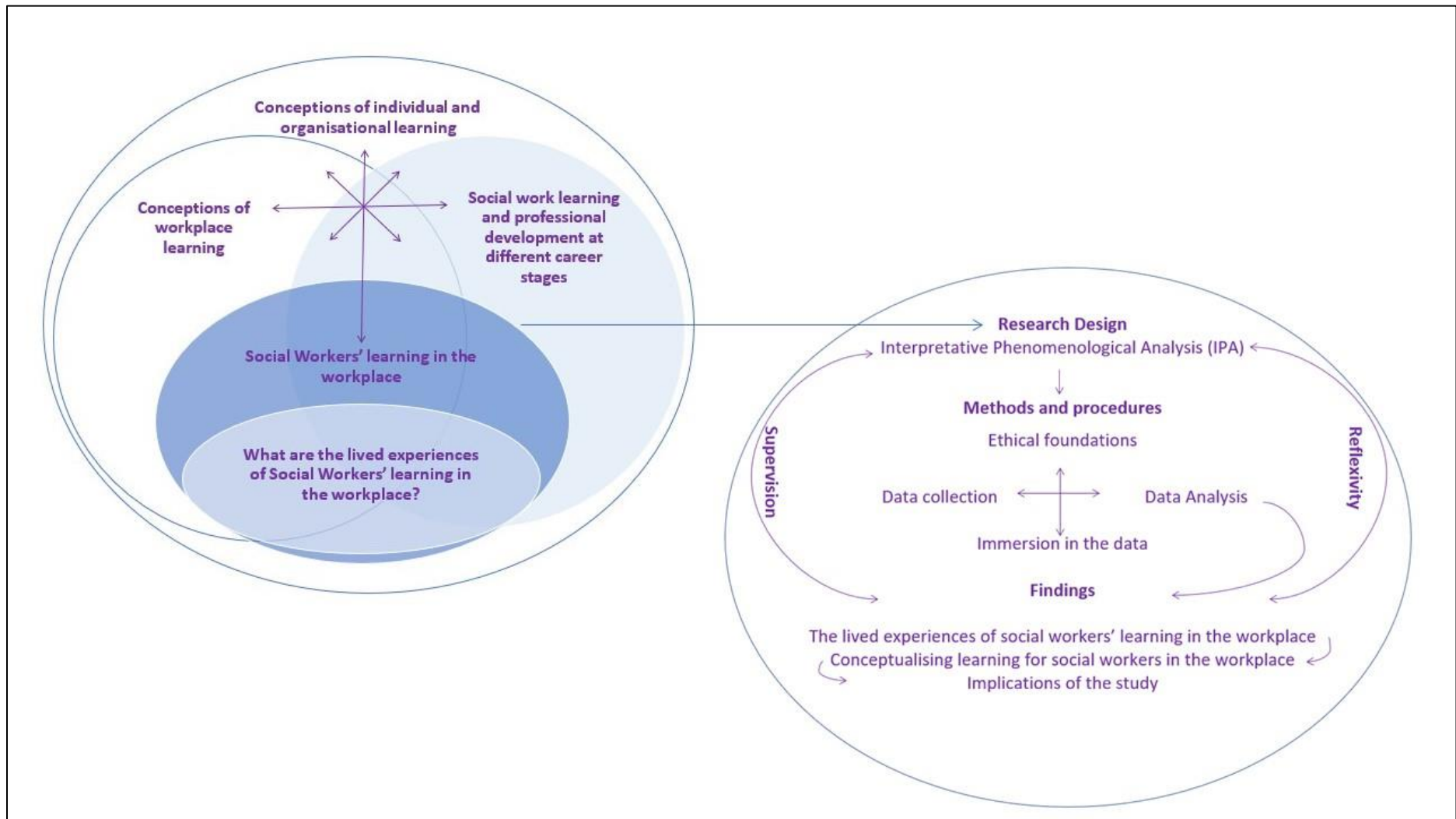


Figure 2: Crafting the holistic research process

The thesis will provide detail of these different research stages to illustrate the holistic process and attention to the component parts. An introduction to the thesis has been provided in Chapter 1, which outlines the context, focus and central research question of the study. Chapter 1 also provided a summary of my researcher position and why the study matters to me from different aspects of my personal and professional interests and motivations.

Chapter 2 will provide an outline of relevant theoretical and conceptual ideas about learning to contextualise the study before outlining the strategy for the literature review and a synthesis of the empirical literature found. The literature review locates the study at the intersection of different fields of knowledge and will identify the contribution of the research within these. Conceptual ideas about individual and organisational learning are summarised before exploring the literature search strategy and what is currently known about social workers' learning in the workplace.

Chapter 3 demonstrates the context, rationale and detail of the methodology, methods and procedures that have enabled the exploration of social workers' experiences, highlighting the ethical foundations and my reflexive approach. This chapter includes why an IPA approach was a suitable approach for this study in terms of the research question and my position as a researcher. Images and examples from stages of the research are included to show how the research has been carried out. These examples show detail of how the study remained committed to idiography, phenomenology and the double hermeneutic interpretative process that form an IPA approach.

The findings of the research are presented in Chapter 4 through visual representations and verbatim accounts of individual social workers' experiences, followed by a discussion of findings across the corpus. Visual web diagrams are used to represent the essence of each of the sixteen social worker's lived experience of learning in the workplace. Seven superordinate themes for the group are, Journey of the self; Navigating landscape and place; Navigating tasks; Learning through the body; Learning through others; Practices and conceptions of learning; and, Learning by chance. A web diagram that draws these group themes together is also provided to help represent the lived experiences of social workers learning in the workplace. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary of key reflective points from my process as a researcher in relation to the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 reflects on the findings and conceptions of social workers' learning in the workplace, integrating ideas from the research with phenomenological and workplace learning theory. A conceptual model for understanding the experience of social workers' learning in the workplace is offered which uses the findings from the research and these applied theoretical ideas.

Chapter 6 provides a short concluding discussion along with important implications for individual social workers, organisations and social work education. Leadership for social work professional learning is also considered, linking how the research can support a shift in the value, recognition and effective design for workplace learning that can be promoted at all levels of the profession. The thesis concludes by revisiting the unique contribution of the study that was introduced in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the knowledge encircling the central research question “*What are the lived experiences of social workers’ learning in the workplace?*” A summary of conceptions of individual, organisational and workplace learning is introduced that is an important context for the study. This discussion is followed by the strategy for the literature review and a synthesis of knowledge and empirical research relating to social workers’ learning in the workplace. Themes within the literature found are explored, including knowledge about social work learning at different career stages and relevant ideas about workplace learning from research into social work practice. The review of literature leads to the rationale for my study, which focuses on learning in the workplace. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the unique contribution that the study makes and confirms how this is positioned in the fields of literature. The research question sits at the intersection of different perspectives across the dimensions of literature shown in Figure 3, which forms the left-hand circle previously shown as part of the holistic research process in Figure 2.

2.2 Baseline of the study

This chapter begins with a contextual baseline of key concepts from the fields of knowledge about individual, organisational and workplace learning that surrounds the central research question. The chapter then explains the literature review strategy that was designed to inform the study, to explore the landscape of current knowledge about social workers’ professional learning within the workplace and seek empirical evidence about the lived experiences of learning in that context for these professionals. A synthesis of literature found is then provided, that leads to the rationale for my study, which focuses on social workers’ experiences of learning in the workplace. These different components are included in this chapter as together they contextualise the study at the intersection of different fields of knowledge that is not always shared across different professions.

Social work as a profession acknowledges that it draws from other academic and professional disciplines to inform practice. Social work education and professional learning similarly draws from a range of perspectives to inform

teaching. Human resources and personnel development are the professions that produce knowledge and theory about workplace development and workplace learning. My study looks through a workplace learning lens to explore the lived experiences of social workers' learning through doing their work. The phenomenological approach that is described in Chapter 3 is designed to explore unique and individual lived experiences and the complexity of what it is to be learning to do an ambiguous job in a volatile, uncertain, changing and ambiguous setting. The thesis is also clear in its intention to focus on workplace learning rather than it being primarily about social work professional education or practice.

To retain the educational focus, it has been vital to draw from workplace learning theory to provide new and slightly different insights into understanding this phenomenon. It was important for the literature review to specifically seek empirical research that used this lens or related to workplace learning.

As an IPA study, it was important that I did not define what the concept of learning meant for individuals and acknowledged the potential biases coming from my own standpoint outlined in Chapter 1. The study has very clearly returned to explore what this phenomenon is for social workers. It would have been possible to include more ideas from many different theoretical perspectives about learning in through and at work. Key influences on my own experience of social work learning acknowledge certain approaches, for example, social work has a rich tradition of promoting ideas about reflective and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) or ideas around tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966) and practice wisdom. Similarly, in relation to workplace learning I would expect to focus on literature about learning organisations (Senge, 2006), learning cultures (Schein, 2004) and action learning (Revans, 1982) from practice responses to organisational development. A discussion of Illeris' (2011) model of workplace learning is included in Chapter 2 as this is can be regarded as a transtheoretical. Other learning theories can be positioned within this model and it does not conflict with these. This provides a baseline for articulating what is meant by workplace learning in the thesis. It was also important not to become lost in abstract perspectives before exploring the phenomenon. I return to consider the literature throughout the reflexive process detailed in Chapter 3 and returned to in Chapter 4. I also return to connect my findings to literature found and theoretical perspectives in Chapter 5 of the thesis.

The strategy for the literature review, explained in section 2.5, shows the focus and inclusion criteria for a search of empirical literature. A synthesis of the literature was organised according to the main overarching areas that this was found to cover. Studies that focused on learning through a workplace lens for social workers were scarce, although there were studies that related to this. Studies were found that focused on social work learning and education or on social work practice and the ideas generated from these that relate to workplace learning are integrated into this chapter. The literature found has been organised to show what is known about workplace learning at different stages of social workers' careers. Theoretical perspectives that are important to acknowledge from the qualifying stage are included to help understand the nature of how workplace learning is understood in the profession.

2.3 Position of the study

The research question sits at the intersection of different perspectives across the dimensions of literature shown in Figure 3, which forms the left-hand circle previously shown as part of the holistic research process in Figure 2. The research is concerned with going back to explore the nature of learning in the workplace, for social workers. The study is located at the intersection of different fields of knowledge about individual learning; organisational learning; social work professional learning; and workplace learning. This central research question, "*What are the lived experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace?*", is at the core of the study, drawing from and contributing to different areas of existing knowledge and offering new insights into how these fields connect.

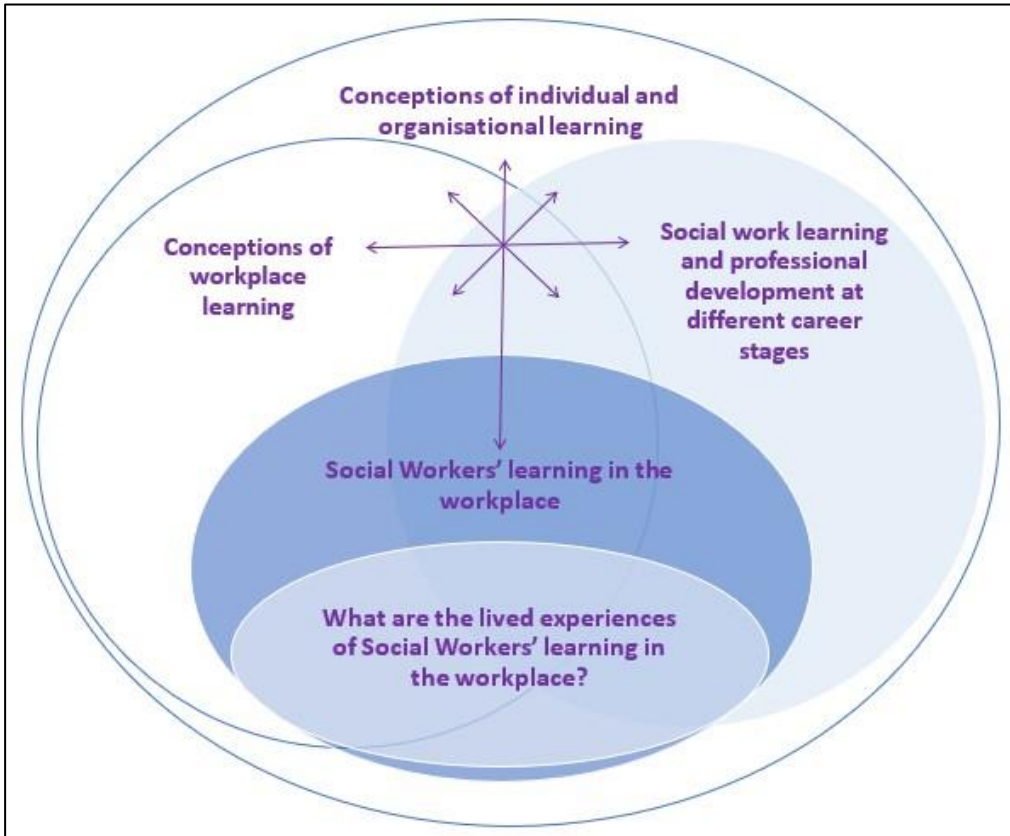


Figure 3: Focus of the research study within the field

This chapter will now consider conceptions of individual, organisational and workplace learning before outlining the literature review strategy and synthesis that position the research question at the heart of the fields shown in Figure 3.

2.4 Conceptions of individual and organisational learning

Ways of understanding individual learning are diverse and involve different complex biological, physiological and/or social processes. Multiple definitions are used in theory and practice to describe learning which is a fundamental complexity in researching the phenomenon. Ideas about what constitutes learning or knowledge are important contextually for the research as these characterise professional discourses and meanings associated with individual experiences. Assumptions about the nature of learning are therefore a crucial part of the broader context of the research focus. A full overview and analysis of educational theory are beyond the scope of this thesis. Important summary points are provided before discussing knowledge about social worker's learning in the workplace. I will briefly discuss ideas about conceptions of individual learning and organisational learning before considering conceptions of workplace learning.

2.4.1 Individual learning

Theories of individual learning draw on different assumptions about learning. Within any individual definition of learning there are layers of meaning which influence any corresponding facilitation or teaching. Metaphors for learning can help articulate the meaning of what this experience is like or what it is associated with. Ways of understanding learning also influence the design of content and what types of learning are valued or promoted within organisations and by individuals. The nature of learning is often understood or debated as a duality of metaphors, either *acquisition* or *participation* (Sfard, 1988). The most simplistic summary of these metaphors is that acquisition involves gathering or gaining knowledge and participation is a process of active involvement in creating and developing knowledge through learning activities in context. Metaphors of learning as *assimilation*, *accumulation* or *accommodation* essentially focus on acquisition, although this may be fostered via participative methods. Many other metaphors can be linked with participation and involve the whole person within an active embodied process leading to interpersonal change. Learning as *transformation* (Mezirow, 1978) is a longstanding metaphor associated with critically reflective adult education and consciousness raising processes. Transformation fundamentally shifts identity and may be “*epochal or progress sequentially*” (Mezirow, 2018, p.118). These metaphors highlight differences in what might be assumed about learning and the process for the learner.

Ideas from adult learning specifically consider pedagogy and processes of learning across the lifespan beyond infancy and childhood. Jarvis (2006) offers a comprehensive learning theory which integrates experiential learning processes (Kolb, 1984) with transformation or change in an individual’s lifeworld. Jarvis highlights that learning is an existential phenomenon and a holistic process involving body, mind and the senses in learning *to become* a person (Jarvis, 2006). The whole person within the learning process is also closely associated with the forming and development of identity and sense of self. Learning as *being* (Gibbs, 2008) and learning as *becoming* or *belonging* (Wenger, 1997) are metaphors which encompass aspects of self and identity. Learning is also often described as *formal* or in contrast as *informal* (Eraut, 2007). Formal learning is associated with organised and often accredited educational activities where there is a clear intention to teach or to learn. Informal learning may take many forms but

includes unstructured learning with varying degrees of intention or consciousness (Eraut, 2007).

Theories of individual learning confirm that this is a complex, personal process and that there are multiple aspects to the experience. Both formal and informal learning theories characterise the discourse of social work, expectations of how social workers gain the necessary knowledge they need for practice and approaches to support this throughout their career. Individual learning for social workers involves their learning as *being* and *becoming* as they develop their professional identity and this continually evolves (Webb, 2016; Wiles and Vicary, 2019). There is also an expectation to acquire a range of baseline theory or factual knowledge and to learn in and through the practice of working with people. There is a strong focus in social work as a profession and within social work education that learning involves the development of critical thinking, reflective and reflexive practice. Social work learning is usually understood to include the development of skills and competences which enable practitioners to undertake a role which is rooted in human rights and social justice, where ethical practice needs to be negotiated within a work role where there are competing moral, legal, organisational and policy demands. What is known about the process of learning as a social worker and how this takes place will be explored further in section 2.4. The research question did not impose a definition of what learning is and allowed social workers to describe their lived experience in order to discover the essence of this phenomenon from their perspective.

2.4.2 Organisational learning

In addition to literature that considers the role of individual learning, organisational learning theories position the organisation as a complex system that is itself able to learn and within which individual learners also learn. Individuals learning within an organisation do not necessarily lead to organisational learning (Senge, 2006). Organisational learning and development theory and practices are closely associated with the human resources discipline, but have developed their prominence in health, social care and social work leadership policy and practice (SCIE, 2008). Organisational learning theory includes perspectives from organisational psychology and human resources practices including, organisational development, talent management and workforce learning and development.

Senge's principles of a "*Learning Organisation*" (Senge, 2006) remain prevalent in organisational development theory and research, alongside more recent ideas about the physical ecosystem of workplaces (Scharmer, 2013). The organisation is seen as a living system with moral, ethical and ecological aspects as well as an evolving learning process influenced by the learning of individuals within it. Any organisation is part of a broader ecosystem and for social work this might include the overall professional field, in the social services sector within the broader social, economic and policy context. Learning may influence and be influenced by this system. Organisational learning is mentioned briefly here in the thesis as it is important to acknowledge before exploring workplace learning. I will now consider conceptions of workplace learning before outlining empirical research about social workers' learning in this context.

2.4.3 Conceptions of workplace learning

Workplace learning is another important area of distinct literature, linked with organisational development, human resources as well as educational theories, in which places of work are the primary site for learning (Beckett and Hager, 2000, Billett, 2001, Boud and Middleton, 2003). Workplace learning can take many forms and be understood as any learning associated with the job which "*arises directly out of workplace concerns*" (Lester and Costley, 2010, p. 2). Informal, formal and incidental learning in the workplace context are considered fundamentally different to learning through educational institutions and can be highly structured to maximise the opportunity to learn (Billett, 2001).

The nature of a workplace is identified as a crucial component of the learning environment, according to whether this is "*expansive or restrictive*" in the opportunities that it affords (Engeström, 2008) and the practices that it encourages (Engeström, 2001 and Felstead *et al.*, 2005). Expansive learning theory (Engeström) draws on cultural-historical activity theory and involves individuals in transformative work activities within learning environments which are part of a broader network or system. In simplistic terms, the workplace as a learning environment will either support individuals' capacity to learn through being able to interpret their work activities and develop new ways of acting or otherwise. The individual, the organisation and the interaction between them is central as part of the learning process.

Learning in the workplace may offer a hybrid of informal and formal opportunities (Colley *et al.*, 2003) and incidental learning may also be triggered by working tasks (Marsick and Watkins, 2001) as part of a continuum of non-formal learning possibilities (Hodkinson and Macleod, 2010). Empirical studies into workplace learning in different trades show evidence of how patterns of task allocation are related to learning and development (Felstead *et al.*, 2005; Fuller *et al.*, 2007) and suggest the design of this is central to success. Current human resources practice uses the term “*learning in-the-flow of work*” (Lancaster, 2019, p. 26) to foreground and promote the opportunity to recognise and embed learning that takes place in the workplace. Although not new in essence, this phrase helpfully captures the notion of learning as an integrated aspect of active work tasks that the learner is engaged in. Lancaster highlights the strong correlation between work and learning, arguing for a shift in workplace practices to encourage and support activities close to the “*workface*” (Lancaster, 2019, p. 26). Workplaces as learning environments are diverse and need to be understood in relation to the type of work enterprise that social work involves and the sites that this takes place in.

Workplaces can also be understood as professional learning environments identified as “*communities of practice*” (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These communities are characterised by multiple networks and relationships within which knowledge is generated and shared. The idea of the working environment as a landscape metaphor is developed from this earlier work by Wenger-Trayner *et al.* (2014) on communities of practice. The networks of workplace relationships and multiple elements of a complex system represent the knowledge and learning for and of practitioners (Wenger-Trayner *et al.*, 2014). *Knowledgeability* is introduced as a concept to define the intangible skills and competences of a professional within this landscape which are hard to articulate but are understood within it (Wenger-Trayner *et al.* (2014). A journey as a learner through this landscape involves the “*becoming of the person*” in relation to identity and further reference is made to the importance of “*finding oneself in the landscape*” (Wenger-Trayner *et al.*, 2014, p. 20). Conceptions of learning within the workplace as landscape position the person fully involved, and immersed, in this specific context.

Being within the work world is seen as a fundamentally human experience and includes existential questions about what work is, within everyday experiences (Gibbs, 2008). This draws from philosophical ideology that work is distinguished from labour, has potential for personal fulfilment and is fundamentally linked to

human freedom (Arendt, 1958). In any workplace the learner can be assumed to have a defined working task or role and a particular knowledge or skill set required to be able to undertake this. Gibbs outlines the concept of professional development as “*our becoming*” rather than “*a curriculum for skills*” (Gibbs, 2014, p. 147). The centrality of the whole human person in these conceptions is linked to individual embodied experience (Hager, 2004), an “*integral part of human life*” (Wenger, 1997) and integration of learning into the biography of the person (Jarvis, 2014).

In relation to professional learning, Eraut delineates different forms of knowledge as *cultural, personal, process, propositional, tacit, implicit, explicit, public and private* (Eraut, 2009). Within the workplace the process of learning can take place through different activities, including *perception, transmission, experience, imitation and participation* however these might be integrated (Eraut, 2009). The ways of considering different forms of knowledge and the ways in which this knowledge might be generated, provides a further layer for considering the complexity of workplace learning and broader conceptions of what constitutes learning or knowledge.

Conceptual models for understanding workplace learning draw different factors together and offer a way to understand different elements and interactions in the learning process. Illeris provides a conceptual theory for the structure and process of learning in the workplace, highlighting how the interaction between the learner, environment, input and incentive are woven together (Illeris, 2003). Raelin (2008) suggests that learning is acquired within tasks and the workplace is not only the physical space but our shared meaning, behaviours, ideas and relationships. Polanyi highlights our need to “*dwell*” in these environments in order to understand rather than just observe them (Polanyi, 1966, p. 16). These are three examples which highlight that learning in the workplace is regarded as a participatory social process. The importance of context and significance of the relationship between the learner and their environment is identified as a crucial feature of workplace learning and practice (Eraut, 2007; Lave and Wenger, 1991). These different theories and models of workplace learning risk over-simplification and it is important to remember that each considers the complex dynamic nature of the workplace environment and the agency of learners within. I will consider one of these models more fully to highlight more detail about the dynamic nature of

workplace learning and return to consider this in Chapter 5 in relation to the findings of my research.

The *Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life* (Illeris, 2011), shown in Figure 4 offers a way of understanding the elements of workplace learning and the dynamic processes involved. This comprehensive model offers a trans-theoretical perspective taking into account multiple conceptions of learning which can be positioned at different points of what Illeris describes as the “*tension field of learning*” (Illeris, 2011, p. 244) within the centre of the dimensions of learning which form the outer points of the triangles.

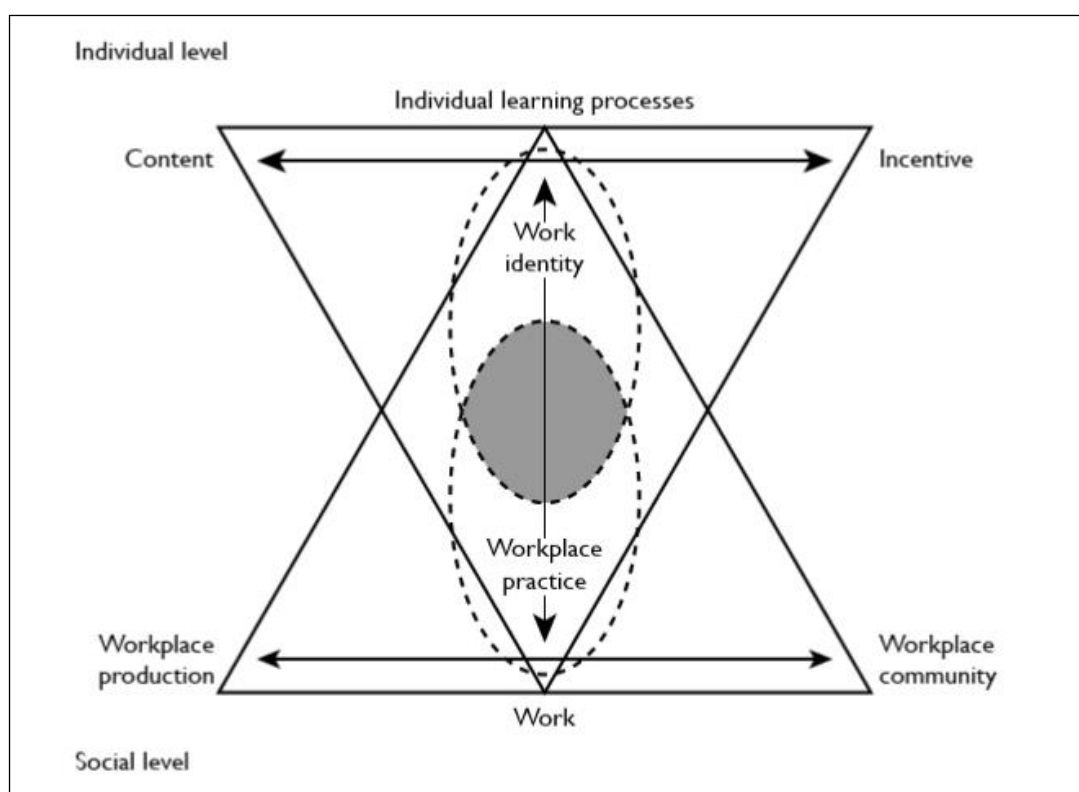


Figure 4: *Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life*, Illeris (2011)

At the individual level, of Illeris’ model, along the top axis, the learning *content dimension* involves the outcomes of learning, knowledge, skills, understanding and qualifications. It also involves attitudes, personal growth and development of the self, which are clearly relevant to social work workplace learning. At the right hand of the top axis, the *incentive dimension* involves motivation, emotion and volition. The *interaction dimension* of learning relates to the interaction between the individual and the learning environment and specifically here, the workplace learning environment. Illeris defines the *technical-rational environment* and the *social-cultural environment* at different ends of the bottom axis. Illeris identifies

individual *work identity* and *workplace practices* as the dynamic engine of learning within the centre circles of the diagram.

This model provides a baseline for articulating what might be meant by *workplace learning* within the thesis. The ideas summarised about the nature of individual, organisational and workplace learning also provide a foundation for outlining what is known about how social workers learn through their work. Understanding the complexity of what the nature of the workplace might involve is relevant to the central research question about the lived experiences of social workers' learning in this landscape. I now go on to describe the literature review process and examine its findings.

2.5 Searching for and exploring the literature

It was essential for me to inform the shape and focus of my research by a thorough literature search and review, to explore the landscape of current knowledge and justify my study rationale. An important aspect of phenomenological research is to actively suspend preconceptions about the phenomenon of the study, referred to as *bracketing* or *bridling* (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Vagle (2018) proposes that within phenomenological studies, an extensive literature review can interfere with openness to exploring phenomenon. Dahlberg *et al.* similarly suggest that "*knowing too much can make it hard to bridle*" in phenomenological research (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2008, p174). IPA in contrast draws the perspective of the researcher into an interpretative cycle of sense-making as discussed in Chapter 3. This brings the foreknowledge of the researcher into the process, but it is vital that they are aware of its origin, influence and potential interference. Some existing knowledge, in terms of literature on social work learning, has a contribution to the genesis of the study and motivations for undertaking the research. Balancing the tension between undertaking a robust literature review with retaining an openness in this phenomenological research was managed through the disciplined research methods which are detailed in Chapter 3.

The fundamental purpose of the literature search was to find existing evidence relating to social workers' lived experiences of learning in the workplace. An initial search was undertaken at the early stages of the doctoral study, then revisited and developed in each subsequent year, to ensure currency. I returned to the literature in relation to the findings in Chapter 5. This section provides details of the search

and a narrative literature review (Hammersley, 2001) to show the landscape in which the research is located and sets a credible baseline orientating the study in relation to this (Vagle, 2018). My narrative literature review is based on a detailed search strategy involving several steps which I outline here.

The search for literature included Open University library and database searches as the first step, for example, through *Education Research Complete* (EBSCO), using keywords, combinations and Boolean operators. These included search terms relating to *social work*, *social worker*, *workplace* and *work-based learning*, *professional* and *continuing* learning. Combinations of these words were also used to search. A range of terms were used as there are different words used to describe professional learning in the social work field. Journal and repository keyword and author alerts were also set up, for example, direct journal alerts through The Open University library, ZETOC (database and journal search and alert service), Google Scholar (broad web scholarly literature search service) and Mendeley (reference management and alert service). These alerts covered keywords, authors and studies using interpretative phenomenological analysis or other phenomenological approaches and were live for the duration of the research process. As a second step I also undertook a hand search of identified journals including, *British Journal of Social Work*; *European Journal of Training and Development*; *International Journal of Training and Development*; *The Field Educator*; *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*; and, *Practice-Social Work in Action*. A further summary of the search terms and sources used is provided in Appendix 2.

Social policy and practice-related documents provided a further source included in my overall search to contextualise and inform my study. This was included as a range of studies, for example, those which formed part of the *Review of Social Work Education in Scotland* (SSSC, 2016), have been undertaken in social work professional learning and are a major feature of the current knowledge landscape. Professional and regulatory bodies were also selected as possible sources based on their role in social work learning and development. These sources included, *The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD)*; *The Scottish Government*; *Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)*; *Social Work Scotland*; *British Association of Social Workers (BASW)*; *Scottish Association of Social Workers (SASW)*; *Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS)* as well as comparative other UK national bodies. A search through relevant

research centres and repositories also ensured approaching the literature from both the social work professional learning and the corresponding workplace learning fields. Further details of the sources used are provided in Appendix 2.

I identified three main inclusion criteria for exploring primary research, firstly that the literature ranged from the 1970s to the present day; secondly that it was about or included United Kingdom (UK) social workers and was written in English language; and, thirdly that it was relevant in terms of specific focus on learning in the workplace. The time span for inclusion was decided as although the context and practice of social work is continually changing, there may be ideas about learning that are consistent and relevant to my study. The time from 1970-2020 spans temporal space from before the introduction of degree-level qualification in Scotland, prior to regulation of this training by the SSSC and since then. The second inclusion criterion was important given the diverse nature of social work education and practice in the broader global context. UK papers were considered, although there are differences in regulatory and post-qualifying requirements for social work training across Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland. Some research found spanned the UK nations while others focused on specific areas. The third inclusion criterion was crucial to focus on literature that was centred on social workers' learning in the workplace. The centre circles of Figure 3 foreground *learning* and the *workplace* as primary areas of interest. Ensuring a focus on literature about learning was essential to provide a foundation for staying on track with the educational focus of the research.

A vast amount of literature exists about social workers' learning and there is a rich tradition in the profession which promotes learning. Although clear criteria were set for searching the literature, the process took a long and winding path through a broad spectrum of research. The initial search yielded many papers although specific empirical studies about social workers' learning in the workplace were elusive. The majority of papers found were not included because they focused on, student social workers; qualifying or accredited work-based learning programmes; or, formal post-qualifying frameworks. This meant that I had to explore the relevance of available evidence from the literature found, to the overall landscape identified in Figure 3. I selected literature according to overall currency, relevance and connection to learning in the workplace. It is possible that some literature will have been missed which was not found in the search because learning was not the primary focus, although it may feature somewhere within the findings. The

literature review which follows will provide more details about the literature considered and evaluate the findings from fifty-two selected papers that contextualise the centre circles of Figure 3. I will articulate the relevance of the literature selected through a discussion and synthesis of themes before outlining a rationale for my study.

2.6 Finding out about social workers' learning

The themes of the found literature were that research exploring social workers' learning spans two main overarching areas, firstly, studies about social work learning and education; and, secondly, studies into social work practice often in relation to specific settings or roles. A further body of literature explores the nature of social work as a changing profession connected with the ideas introduced in Chapter 1. These three areas are fundamentally related to social workers' experiences of learning in the workplace, although only a few studies specifically focus on this beyond the initial education stage. I will broadly outline key ideas which are drawn from across the research about social workers' learning and development and more deeply focus on some particularly important studies which help show what is known about the workplace context of this learning.

2.6.1 Social workers' learning and development

I found that exploring research about social workers' learning immediately raised the multiplicity of meanings associated with what learning is and which of the skills or knowledge that social workers subsequently develop are most valued. Social work professional learning draws from multiple perspectives and assumptions about learning. I found that research about social worker learning and development can be understood as spanning different career stages, all of which are distinct yet connected. These stages of career include research firstly about social work education within qualifying level programmes, secondly from the newly qualified phase and thirdly post-qualifying or continuing professional development. Learning in workplace settings is integral to all these stages and described in different ways accordingly, most usually as practice or practice-based learning at the qualifying stage, with a shift to continuing professional development beyond this stage which would involve learning through and from direct practice in work contexts.

The term *shared professional learning* is proposed by Kettle *et al.* to describe learning “*in and between contexts that support development of professional competence and confidence as well as professional identity*” (Kettle *et al.*, 2016, p. 11). This recent qualitative study, specific to social work and undertaken in Scotland, is based on an international literature review, using interviews and focus groups to help promote the notion of integrated learning across the career with shared responsibility across partners. The study gained information from wide-ranging academic, practice and strategic workplace partner informants through focus groups and questionnaires. Within this important overarching study, Kettle *et. al* (2016) indicated that the responsibility for learning by workplace organisations is not actualised albeit regularly espoused. Encouraging the importance of shared responsibility is a key finding which links academic and practice-based learning. Although this study proposes the importance of learning at all career stages, there remains a focus on the initial and early career in the detail. The workplace is foregrounded as the site for professional learning in my study, using data from first-hand experiences to inform workplace practices that can support shared responsibility.

2.6.2 Learning up to the qualifying stage

Research in social work education up to the qualifying stage, I found, focused on taught curricula, student experiences, the involvement of service users and carers, or specifically focused on practice learning. Social work education on qualifying programmes across all UK nations involve a mandatory practice learning component assessed by practice educators, discussed in Chapter 1, and detailed in Appendix 1. The position of practice learning is significant at this stage, with students learning through a workplace setting, where there will be some form of organised work with service users and carers. Practice Learning research focused on exploring arrangements and provision of placements or facilitating students’ learning. There is focus on exploring the experience of either students or practice educators within this research. A substantial range of literature provides attention to enhancing learning, models for reflective learning and the importance of learning. Studies of this type were found to focus on student cohorts and relate to practice learning or specific curricular areas. Literature involving student experiences of learning were not considered in the review, even when this was focused on the practice element. Practice within this context is taking place within a workplace setting but is fundamentally different. The rationale for learning as a

social worker at the qualifying stage is closely linked to the assessment framework, developing knowledge, skills and evidencing competence at the beginning of career. The status and role of a student is therefore different within the workplace in terms of their learning than a social worker learning at other stages.

In relation to practice educator experiences, within the UK context Eno and Kerr (2013) provide a review of the experience of practice educators managing failing students. Finch and Taylor (2013) and Finch (2015) also explore the experiences of practice educators and university tutors respectively in the complex and emotional process of failing students. Although these studies are not specifically related to workplace learning beyond the student stage, they draw on existing literature and offer perspectives from the professional field that highlight the emotional experience of those involved in social work student learning, particularly where assessment is a factor.

Research into the experience of people using social work services and their involvement in social work education is also a key area of study. The focus of these studies about user-involvement in learning is also often related to the qualifying stage. Learning with and from service users through practice may have relevance for workplace learning at later career stages. Research into how learning is facilitated at the student stage is also likely to have important parallels with the possibilities for continuing professional learning in the workplace but needs to explore and acknowledge the differences in learning beyond the student stage. Learning in workplace practice sites as a student is inextricably linked to assessment criteria and processes which will influence the content and experience of learners. Nissen *et al.*, (2014) proposes that lifelong learning as a qualified social worker is reliant on establishing good habits at the student and newly qualified stages. I will explore the literature in relation to workplace learning beyond initial social work education at the newly qualified stage before considering continuing professional learning across the career in the post-qualifying stage.

2.6.3 Workplace learning in the newly qualified stage

The relationship between social work education and readiness for professional social work practice is often identified by research in relation to the learning needs of qualifying and newly qualified stages, for example: Welch, *et al.*, (2014a); Grant *et al.*, (2016); and Daniel and Gillies, (2016). These studies draw from a broad

spectrum of practice experiences including those who are managing the direct practice of, and the learning and development of, social workers in the workplace. Welch, *et al.* (2014a) drew from a mixed-methods study which explored the perspectives of newly qualified social workers and 26 managers in Scotland. This study confirmed the importance of learning through practice at the pre-qualifying stage in order to develop a sense of “*becoming competent*” (Welch, *et al.*, 2014a p20). The study found that training and development are acknowledged by both managers and social workers as including formal learning and learning on the job. The importance of employers planning for these learning opportunities is highlighted but there is no in-depth analysis of the experience or potential of workplace learning explored. Grant *et al.* (2017) found inconsistencies in experiences of effective supervision, feeling of preparedness and access to professional learning opportunities on entering employment. The temporal and physical transition of shifting from student to qualified social worker is acknowledged as a crucial process.

Daniel *et al.* (2016) draw from extensive literature on the newly qualified phase, comparative frameworks in the United Kingdom and focus groups with key informants to outline an evidence base for what the qualifying year in Scotland should include. It is noted that social workers at this stage would benefit from enhanced practice-related skills and knowledge in specific areas such as assessing and managing risk and writing professional reports. The importance of the workplace context and the resources which would be required to support professional development, are highlighted although these are closely linked with the conception of an overall framework and associated standards. Key findings from these different studies indicate the importance of deep, authentic practice-related learning as a foundation in qualifying education which is supported and fostered thereafter.

In Scotland there is a strong current research agenda continuing to explore social worker experiences at the newly qualified stage. In the broader UK context, there are also studies which explore perspectives from social workers at this stage. The context of qualifying and post-qualifying learning along with the policy context differ across the UK nations and the research from different areas can reflect these contrasts in their focus. Scotland currently has no formal framework in the same way as other UK nations and the experience of learning therefore is not connected to an assessed year. There is nonetheless an expectation by the

regulator that learning is undertaken to maintain registration as a social worker (SSSC, 2017), detailed in Chapter 1 and Appendix 1. The position of workplace learning within the literature found takes different forms and is beginning to shift to a more detailed focus on what learning through work might mean for social work, which I will now discuss.

Grant *et al.* (2017; 2018; 2019) report on a current longitudinal mixed methods study commissioned by the SSSC as part of the Review of Social Work Education (SSSC, 2016). This study has involved an annual online questionnaire to all newly qualified social workers, interviews and observations in the workplace. The research follows the same cohort over a five-year period from qualifying and explores experiences, opportunities and elements of learning and development. The research is not centred on learning specifically but focuses on the experiences of social workers at this stage as they adapt to the demands of practice. Learning is an emerging central component of the findings, related to how social workers learn, through supervision, self-directed activities and formal training opportunities. Key findings to date include that newly qualified social workers learn on the job, but that workplace learning opportunities are not necessarily accessible or available to social workers (Grant *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, there is little strategic attention or resources allocated to workforce development at the current time (Grant *et al.*, 2018; 2019).

The workplace is the primary site for learning at the newly qualified stage, in contrast to the qualifying stage where students will have had variable and diverse experiences of practice learning. Induction, informal and formal opportunities are required to effectively support social workers. The experience of social workers regarding this is inconsistent across Scotland at the newly qualified stage and the transition phase shifting from the qualifying education into employment (Grant *et al.*, 2018). The research identifies the importance of culture and structures to support and sustain professional learning within the workplace for social workers. The research offers important considerations for professional learning across the career and the foundations for this across stakeholders. There are clear synergies between this research into the early career and my study, which explores the experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace beyond that stage. My study also deepens the evidence from social workers' experiences about the nature of learning and focuses on this specific phenomenon.

2.6.4 Workplace learning in the post-qualifying stage

Learning and development is often associated with frameworks which influence the focus of research. It was important for my study to explore workplace learning at the post-qualifying stage, beyond the requirements of newly qualified social workers and returning to a focus on what the nature of learning might be. The aims of continuing professional learning or post-qualifying learning are seen to be driven by multiple economic and policy aims across different professional groups including social work (Daley and Cervero, 2016). Daley and Cervero (2016) link continuing professional learning to personal transformation. Cooper, (2010) states that attitudes to continuing professional development are connected to the way social workers may practice. For example, motivation to learn is equated with motivation to practise well.

Most of the literature found in relation to social work continuing professional learning is linked to formal programmes, regulatory requirements or frameworks. The context is different across the UK nations and the Scottish arrangements as previously discussed and the differences in these frameworks and their associated learning opportunities are detailed in Moriarty and Manthorpe, (2014) in an English study and in the following Scottish studies: Gillies, (2015); Gordon *et al.*, (2019). The explicit focus of these studies is not how social workers learn or experience their learning in the workplace, but they reveal these important insights. Gordon *et al.* found that there was a high value placed on learning through work, including self-directed and reflective learning, practice discussions and supervision (Gordon *et al.*, 2019). These learning opportunities were increasingly limited and not consistent for practitioners (Gordon *et al.*, 2019). The study used an online survey of learning and development leads across all Scottish local authorities, telephone interviews and focus groups with social workers. Further findings from this study recommended the development of a national framework. Evidence that workplace learning is important is shown in the literature, however, this does not focus on workplace learning specifically. Recommendations about workplace learning is strongly linked to the frameworks and regulatory expectations of social workers.

The term *shared professional learning* (Kettle *et al.*, 2016), articulates the situated nature of social work learning across settings and across the career. McCulloch and Taylor also highlight the connection between what happens in academic foundations for learning and the professional practice arena. McCulloch and Taylor

identify the challenge of “*integrated and competitive professional landscapes*” (McCulloch and Taylor, 2018, p. 5) bridging perspectives from the academy and professional social work leadership indicating the need for further research in this area. Webster-Wright (2009) states that for authentic professional learning there must be a further shift in discourse about how we reconceptualise continuing professional development to consider the holistic nature of this rather than in fragments or planned content. Webster-Wright’s research draws from practitioner’s lived experiences and found that although this discourse had shifted, it had no impact on professional development practices delivering “*content rather than enhancing learning*” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 702). These findings are echoed by other studies in relation to the newly qualified stage (Grant, 2017; Grant *et al.*, 2017; Grant *et al.*, 2018). Specifically, social workers described that there were limited support and development opportunities and supervision processes focused on workload management (Grant, 2017).

Social work professional identity is another area of research which is linked with personal and professional development. My study did not seek to explore identity specifically therefore this was not a focus of the literature review. There are some important points, however, in relation to studies about social work identity which are included. Webb (2016) outlines that the process of being and becoming a social worker involves complex, individual, intrapersonal and social processes. These processes are linked with social, political and personal factors. Although there are key differences in the social work education and practice fields across UK nations, Wiles and Vicary (2019) identify a process of identity formation for social workers which appears to be shared across different countries. Practitioners highlight tensions in their professional identity and convey that although this is continually evolving, it remains “*out of reach*” (Wiles and Vicary, 2019, p.12). These points are included due to current interest in the concept of professional identity as it relates to the ambiguous role of social workers, outlined in Chapter 1.

These studies consider some of the issues for professional learning at the post-qualifying stage in the context of frameworks and formal expectations and some of the processes through which social workers learn. Several of the studies integrated in this review have been funded by, or commissioned by, the regulator to inform developments on professional learning, for example, Daniel *et al.* (2016); Gillies, (2015); Grant *et al.* (2017); Grant *et al.* (2018); Grant *et al.* (2019) and, Gordon *et al.* (2019), which may account for a focus on regulatory and formal

frameworks. What is clear is that there is strong evidence in the literature found that highlights the need to conceptualise and plan differently social work continual professional learning. This must show fully an understanding of what this phenomenon involves.

Other studies that do not necessarily have learning as the primary focus of the research, such as those focusing on social work practice, also help us understand important aspects of learning to consider. I will outline some of the significant areas of these studies before setting out the rationale for my research.

2.6.5 Social workers' practice and learning in the workplace

Social work is rooted in the ideology of reflective practice and the research identified in the search is that it spans, knowledge (Kelly, 2017); involvement of service users (Beresford and Croft, 2004); supervision (Kettle, 2015); relationships with colleagues (Avby, 2015); identity formation (Webb, 2016); resilience (Carson *et al.*, 2011); and, ethics (Banks, 2016). Models of reflective practice such as the “*Practice Pyramid*” (Gordon and Mackay, 2017) and the “*Theory Cycle*” (Collingwood, *et al.*, 2008) draw from research with students, but need not be restricted to this initial qualifying stage. These studies draw from the experience of practitioners and confirm the complexity of the landscape of social work and the process of learning within it.

The rhetoric of learning as ‘*participation*’ is foregrounded in social work education and continuing professional learning discourse although ‘*acquisition*’ remains the characteristic in reality in plans for, and experiences of, workplace learning (Skinner and Whyte, (2004) and Beddoe (2009). Interviews with social workers and workplace representatives revealed that the ideology of a learning organisation is far from the practitioner’s reality (Skinner and Whyte, 2004). A content analysis of social workers’ continuing professional learning records confirms this (Beddoe, 2009). Gould and Baldwin position social work practice as the “*crucible of learning*” within the complex arena of individual and organisational learning (Gould and Baldwin, 2004, p. 4). This suggests that workplace practice is likely to be central to the experience of social workers’ learning, although currently rhetoric and reality do not align.

In addition to considering whether learning organisations and cultures are actualised, it is vital to acknowledge that the position of the personal, private and

public self of the professional social worker are all contested (Cooper and Pickering, 2010). An extensive literature review found that the roles of social work are contested (Moriarty *et al.*, 2015). What is regarded as legitimate knowledge is also of continuing interest, debate and continues to evolve in social work research (Kelly, 2017). Social workers are understood to continually need to “*construct and reconstruct knowledge [and] skills*” (Lester and Costley, 2010, p. 19) and the knowledge required is complex. Daniel identifies the profession as *in flux* in a contextual paper around workplace learning for social work (Daniel, 2013). Given these factors and the diversity of conceptions of learning and knowledge, the nature of how we can facilitate, teach, or support social workers’ learning in the workplace, is complex to fathom.

Social work professional learning is subject to the paradox of increased scrutiny, yet abandonment in terms of resources and the profession is identified as “*under siege*” by Cree *et al.*, who undertook a knowledge exchange research project spanning the academy and practice partners in the Scottish context (Cree *et al.*, 2016, p. 549). Kelly states that social work has no agreed knowledge base and is in “*a continual state of evolution, critique and development*” and knowledge itself does not “*guarantee it has utility*” (Kelly, 2017, p. 45). McCulloch (2018) proposes that social work education and practice sits within perpetually competing perspectives and specifically highlights conflict between how learning philosophy and learning practices are articulated. Social workers are therefore learning in the workplace within this context where the nature of the professional role and what constitutes knowledge are uncertain and contested. The dynamic context of the workplace as a learning environment for social workers also involves the places in which work is carried out.

Evidence from ethnographic observation of children and family social workers in work environments in England provides a lens to see the complexity of these dynamic workplace settings. Ferguson highlights how practice is “*routinely enacted*” in places beyond the office in “*atmospheres ... [and] conditions that assault the senses*” (Ferguson, 2009, p. 1106). The home visit is one of the significant workplace spaces where social work is “performed” with “extra layers of atmosphere and reverberation” (Ferguson, 2009, p. 479). Other ethnographic studies undertaken in Scottish social work contexts discuss “*sense making*” in practice (Helm, 2011; 2016; 2017; Helm and Roesch-Marsh, 2016) a system of ecology for professional judgement in direct opposition to a rational-technical way

of learning and being in practice. The system of the workplace is acknowledged within these different studies, identifying that we must explore practice as situated and that individual knowledge and skills are insufficient to prevent errors (Helm and Roesch-Marsh, 2016). An IPA study of social workers' experience of complexity showed that it was difficult for them to understand and predict outcomes in their practice with professional networks seen as vital (Hood, 2015). Although not exploring learning as the phenomenon under study, social workers revealed that the reflexivity of the network of professionals is as important as that of the individual social worker (Hood, 2015).

A further concept critical to social work practice and continuing professional learning is the "*use of self*", explored in a recent study which shows the fluctuating position of this in education and practice over time (Gordon and Dunworth, 2017). In addition to the sense of and use of self, attention to lived experience and the voice of individuals, is another important area explored in research. This is primarily seen in relation to those using social work services, particularly to understand specific phenomena such as illnesses or in the learning and assessment of social workers (Beresford and Croft, 2004; Doel *et al.*, 2008). Research again here focuses on the student and academic integration of user involvement in assessment and education rather than daily practice after qualifying (Crisp and Lister, 2002; Duffy *et al.*, 2017). Social workers' narratives also reveal the complexity of everyday practice and ways of reflecting on this (Gordon, 2018). Gordon highlights the low profile of social workers' voices and best practice stories for continuing professional learning in research and shows the importance of these stories for capturing the nuances of everyday individual experiences of social work (Gordon, 2018).

Everyday practice, and learning through this, also involves the emotional context of social work. The role of emotion in social workers' practice is complex and explored in different ways within research. Emotional Intelligence and the importance of learning this for social work practice was explored using interviews and focus groups of practitioners working in different settings (Morrison, 2007; Ingram, 2013). Ingram links this with reflective practice, self-awareness and empathy and recommends reclaiming emotions in social work. Specific emotions experienced in or influencing practice, such as an exploration of social workers' experiences of *shame* (Gibson, 2016) or *fear* (Allen and McCusker, 2020), show the importance of designing learning that equips social workers for these

demands. These qualitative studies draw from a scoping review (Gibson, 2016) and active practitioners' accounts (Allen and McCusker, 2020) both acknowledging that the emotional aspect is a crucial influence on practice and professional decision-making. Cree *et al.* (2016) identified negative aspects of the workplace for reflective practice which were the pressures of the work tasks, protected time and availability of learning opportunities. In contrast, Ferguson (2018) describes defence against painful emotions as a primary limitation to reflective practice for social workers. This ethnographic study has been undertaken in two English local authority, children and family social work services. These different barriers to reflection as a learning process importantly contextualise the intrapersonal and practical influences for social workers and the possible limitations on capacity for workplace learning.

The nature of how emotions influence social workers' learning as part of an overall embodied experience is not straightforward or indeed accounted for in designing workplace learning. Maclean, Finch and Tadam (2018) offer a new "SHARE" theoretical model for social work, hooking into the sensory experience and proposing the importance of the senses connected to deep critical reflection. In other recent research Kellock (2018) uses phenomenological research to explore the experience of social workers in relation to mindfulness practice, specifically around the embodied practice of social work. The role of the body and emotion in social workers' experience is highlighted by empirical works and theoretical models such as these. Wolfe, (2006) suggests that we make meaning through emotions in learning and that there are pros and cons of adding an emotional component to the learning opportunity. The experience of "*embodied knowing*" (Lawrence, 2012a) and acknowledging the body for informal and formal learning is highlighted by Lawrence (2012b). A research approach which can explore these embodied and sensory aspects is important for the central research question *What are the lived experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace?*

The literature review has aimed to provide a context for my research which shows major issues and connections across areas (Vagle, 2018) whilst balancing presumptions about the phenomenon being explored in my study. Literature found about social workers' learning and their experiences of practice show the complexity of their role and the focus of research into social work education up to the qualifying stage. Learning through practice is considered primarily in relation to the qualifying elements of degree programmes, with sparse literature directly

focusing on the experience of social workers' learning through their work tasks, beyond their early career. The complexities of the relationship between different stakeholders involved in social work professional learning and what is involved in learning to be a social worker are also clearly established through review of this literature. I will now outline the rationale for my study and the contribution of the research to the field of workplace and professional learning for social workers.

2.7 Rationale for the study

The literature review shows that current research in Scotland focuses on social workers' learning at the qualifying and early stages of their career. In the broader UK context existing research is predominantly linked with post-qualifying frameworks. Learning at these stages is assessed, directed by the state via the national regulator which may influence the content, process and experience for social workers. There is a focus on standards, expectations and plans for how this will be quality assured. Developing professional learning at these initial stages of career are of course important. Existing research currently neglects a focus on professional learning beyond these regulatory frameworks and improvement/enhancement agendas. Research into workplace practice offers a lens into the complexity of the landscape for social workers' learning and what social workers need to learn to do. There is a gap in articulating what the multiple elements of social work tasks involve and the knowledge and skills that are required to undertake them. Exploring social workers' experiences of learning in the workplace needs to acknowledge this uncertain terrain, which influenced the design of my research. Exploring how we understand the nature of learning through work for social workers, beyond early career stages, may offer ideas about enhancing professional learning within the workplace context.

The key research question is *What are the lived experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace?* The study aims to investigate the essences of the phenomenon of learning in the workplace for social workers using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework. IPA approaches have been effectively used to explore the experiences of social workers in social work practice: for example, in understanding social work professional knowledge (Gould and Harris, 1996); the impact on practice educators of failing students (Basnett and Sheffield, 2010); and, the lived experience of managing emotion and professional experience of complexity in practice (Hood, 2015). The IPA approach

will be defined and justified in Chapter 3 as an appropriate method to explore the nature of learning as lived by social workers in the workplace. My research findings about the phenomenon of learning as a social worker in the workplace which are discussed in Chapter 4, led me to revisit literature and consider connections which are woven within my discussion in Chapter 5 and informed my thinking about the implications of my research in Chapter 6. The contribution of my study to the field, identified at the centre of Figure 3 is outlined next.

2.7.1 Unique contribution of the research to the field

My research offers a unique contribution to the knowledge base about how social workers learn in the workplace. The focus is on *learning* rather than *training* undertaken when employed and learning in the workplace is the primary site for social workers' learning through daily practice. Learning *to be* a social worker and learning *as a* social worker is difficult to negotiate at any stage of the career. This research uses the lens of the workplace and the perspective of the participants to explore detailed and in-depth description of learning experiences rather than content or outcome of a learning programme. The study offers ways of understanding learning through work via the lenses of individual experiences across the span of their career beyond the early or newly qualified stages. The depth, detail and connection of these experiences to ideas about the embodied experience of learning, navigating the landscapes and tasks of practice, and the chance nature of professional learning within the workplace, has implications for the focus of workforce development and social work education. I will explore these implications in Chapter 6. My research offers a clear contribution of the voice of social workers and their human experience at the intersection of the workplace and professional learning literature. Understanding more about the nature of the learning experience may subsequently help inform the design of workplace learning for social workers including how we can reduce the chance element of learning opportunities.

Chapter 3 Research Design Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction to research design

This chapter presents the ethical foundations of the research followed by an overview of the methodological framework Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The essential characteristics and intentions of IPA are provided before outlining the rationale for, and the detail of, the research methods for collecting and analysing the data. A summary of how the methods and procedures were tested through an initial study is included to show how these informed the main study. The research study was designed to adhere to the principles and practice of IPA research throughout the planning, data collection and analysis phases (Smith *et al.*, 2009). I will highlight why the chosen methodology and methods were a good fit for the central research question, which explored the lived experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace. I have considered the detail of each stage of the research process (Figure 5) carefully and will demonstrate this within this chapter. Figure 5 is the right-hand circle from the holistic research process introduced in Chapter 1.

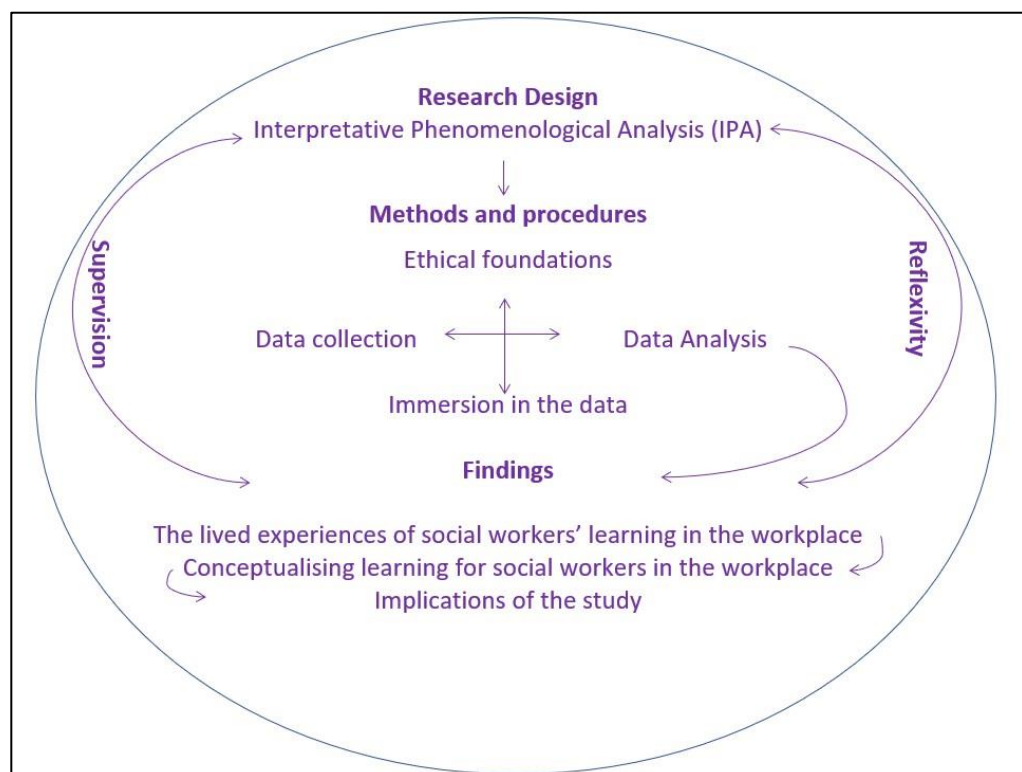


Figure 5: Research design and process

3.2 Ethical foundations

The research design discussed in this chapter was ethically appraised to consider “*consequential, ecological, relational and deontological*” dimensions (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009) This appraisal aligned with the expectations of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and has guided the research design and my reflexive process. Ethical attention to the research design is integral to the methods and procedures for data collection, management and analysis which are detailed in this chapter. Full approval from The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) was secured (Appendix 3). I revisited this approval when I changed job role as detailed in Chapter 1, to review any implications for the study. Approval from the organisation that the research was carried out in was also agreed at an early stage.

The “*consequential or utilitarian*” aspects of research are concerned with the possible consequence or value of the study and whether it is fundamentally worthwhile to do (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). In my study this primarily relates to the possible impact, either positive or negative, on social workers, social services and the people who use them. All aspects of the study, including the fundamental aim, were designed with a foregrounded ethic of respect for individuals (BERA, 2018). The research approach provided attention to the individual participants’ experiences, listening and validating the issues of importance for them. The research aimed to ensure the participants’ sense of meaning is considered as the gateway to further analysis by the researcher. Although the research focused on unique experiences, themes and ideas generated may be relevant to other social workers and other people learning in the workplace. The research has potential benefits to individuals, services, professions and organisations, articulated in the rationale for the study and in Chapter 6, which discusses the implications. The research also connects to the service user experience of social workers and highlights the centrality of their role in how and what social workers learn. The ethic of respect extends to the researcher themselves and their responsibilities (BERA, 2018) and the methods and procedures were designed to generate sufficient rich, depth data for my research. BERA (2018) state that researchers should work within the limits of their competence and my experience in interpersonal and interview skills meant that I had confidence in the research process and methods detailed throughout this chapter.

It was important to be aware of and manage the benefits and risks of being an insider-researcher (Ross, 2017) and my different roles (Lester and Costley, 2010). Having access and vantage from within the research site can yield rich data. Being aware of and managing conflicts of interest was an ongoing aspect of the research process. My employment role within the organisation involved responsibility for managing and delivering learning activities for social workers and other employees and I was also closely involved with the *Chief Social Work Officer's* management team. I was also an appointed *Agency Decision Maker* (ADM) which is a decision-making role required under regulations and guidance on Looked After Children (LAC). In this area of work, evidence is provided by social workers to recommend plans to formal permanence panels when children can no longer be looked after by their birth parents. These plans include where the recommendation is for permanent adoption or fostering arrangements. The ADM role involved reviewing all evidence following formal panels and deciding, on behalf of the local authority, the legal route that would be sought for caring for a child. The power inherent in my roles within the organisation was considered frequently in the reflexive process, discussed in section 3.3, in relation to how this might influence participation by social workers in the research.

The “*external and ecological*” (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009) responsibilities of my research spanned a network of people to whom I would be responsible. As a researcher and doctoral student, I was accountable to BERA and Open University guidelines. As a registered social worker, I was responsible to uphold the Scottish Social Services Council Codes of Practice (SSSC, 2016) and the British Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (BASW, 2014). These professional codes include that social workers need to support the wellbeing and protection of people and uphold human rights, dignity, respect and “*public trust and confidence in social services*” (SSSC, 2016, p. 24). Clarity and truthfulness are an essential component of ethical practice under these professional codes and the “*deontological*” dimension of research ethics (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). Professional integrity is at the centre of social work ethics (BASW, 2014) and this was upheld by being clear through the information provided to participants, including their right to withdraw and respect in the style of interview, management of data and presentation of findings. Identifying potential sensitive aspects of the interviews in advance also formed part of attention to ethics. There was a possibility that participants would highlight issues that would challenge the workplace, wider sector norms or reveal areas of poor practice within

services. The information provided to participants at the recruitment stage included details about managing sensitive issues and my responsibilities relating to risk to participants or others (Appendix 4).

As an insider-researcher it was also crucial to manage organisational expectations of the study (Costley, 2010), that this was part of a doctoral programme and not primarily designed to lead to practice or service changes, although any findings might influence future activities. I agreed the boundaries of the study clearly in advance with the relevant gatekeepers, including the Chief Social Work Officer within the local authority and their management team. I carefully publicised the study at the time of recruiting participants to avoid any direct approaches that could be considered coercive. An invitation to take part was circulated widely by the Chief Social Work Officer without any obligation to take part. As a learning and development advisor, I felt that there may be expectations to represent organisational interests, such as policy areas driving learning and development activities that might conflict with the individual interests of participants. Being clear about my role as a researcher within my written documentation and then revisiting this within the interviews, was important for all these ethical considerations.

Establishing trust is a key feature of the “*relational*” dimension of ethics (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). Participants may have known me from my role as a learning and development advisor and/or as a registered social worker. I hoped that my reputation and approach to ethical practice and trustworthiness helped encourage participation, clarify my commitment to anonymity and highlight the right for participants to withdraw at any time. Conversely, I was aware that some participants might choose not to take part because of any existing relationship. Having these roles enabled access to the research participants and offered me insights from my own experiences into the study themes. Although these interests fostered the research design and questions, I consciously kept these perspectives out of the interview process. I was aware throughout the study of potential ethical issues arising from my different roles and managed these through personal reflection, supervision and negotiation with participants as part of the process, detailed in the next section of this chapter.

Data were collected and recorded during interviews with full consent and stored using secure and protected drives and locked files for any paper-based material. It was essential to transcribe digital audio recordings of interviews verbatim for IPA

(Finlay, 2011) to be immersed in the data and stay close to the detail of participants' accounts. Interviews took place on institutional premises within locations agreed with participants that were conducive to interview. In addition to ethical management of data, it remained crucial to be aware of the legislative context. All aspects of processing personal data were managed in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (ICO, 2018) which came into being during the research. I maintained these ethical foundations throughout the research study and my attention to the reflexive process will now be discussed.

3.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an essential element of the researcher role and was integrated throughout my comprehensive approach to undertaking the study. Recording reflection fits well with expectations of transparency and having an audit trail of the data collection and analysis processes (Vicary, Young and Hicks, 2017). Being reflexive ensured that as a researcher I was aware of my own emotions, reactions and biases and that my dual roles as an insider-researcher were not blurred (Brocki and Wearden, 2006) or "*running towards [a] blindspot*" (Ely *et al.*, 1991, p. 182). My prior experience in counselling skills, as a social worker and as a community development worker all required in-depth self-awareness, analysis and reflection *in* and *on* action (Schön, 1983) where "*reflective learning*" remains in "*danger of becoming little more than a slogan*" (Gould and Taylor, 1996, p. 2). My personal and professional development as a social worker and these other roles helped me be a reflexive researcher.

Throughout the research process, I used different ways to reflect. I kept a reflective journal to explore thoughts, feelings, progress, challenges and how these were shaping or influencing the research. This written journal captured and explored the general stage of the research, or any specific dilemma or issue. I also used an audio diary throughout the process of data collection and during analysis, to capture and acknowledge my emotions, values, or reactions at immediate points. This worked well, for example, straight after interviews or whilst working on transcription. At the data collection stage, I used some structured questions to explore connections with my assumptions, values and emotions (Roller, 2015). Using a basic structure to guide my reflection helped identify my responses to activities and, importantly, be aware how these were influencing the research.

Another important question within my reflection was how I remained committed overall to the IPA approach. Section 3.4.2 will outline and explain essential aspects of IPA, *Phenomenology, Hermeneutics* and *Idiography* (Smith, 2017) and I used my journal to reflect on and demonstrate commitment to each.

Several layers of the study were directly linked to my own interests and experience and my engagement in reflection and supervision allowed me to readily identify my current assumptions (Brocki and Wearden, 2006) and presumptions. The significant emotional experience (Ross, 2017) of the researcher is described in “*vital metaphors*” by Anzul *et al.*, (1991, p. 182) in relation to “*learning, research-as-life*” and the “*transformation of the self*” during the research process. These metaphors highlight the intensity of researcher experience which resonated with my feelings whilst undertaking the study. For example, I began the doctoral student journey in order to really learn about social workers’ experiences and learn skills and knowledge as a researcher. Both areas have been very personal and led to shifts in my own professional identity.

Reflexivity is more than just satisfying a tick-box approach and is essential as a fundamental and integrated aspect of the research and researcher process. Four selected extracts from my reflective diary at different stages of the research are included as Appendix 5, to illustrate my approach. Extract A from the beginning of the research process considers a turn in the overarching approach and methods for the study. Extract B is from the data collection stages and explores my reactions and reflections on undertaking an interview. Extract C is from the analysis stage when I was immersed in data and extract D reflects on findings and considers what I thought I had really found out. What these extracts show is some of the important issues that emerged for me through the journey, the potential influence of my different roles, managing ethics and emotions and the importance of reflexivity as an integral part of the holistic process of my approach. Reflection on my findings in Chapter 4 is also illustrated by research diary extracts.

The details of the research methods and procedures that now follow, based on these ethical considerations, provide a robust foundation for the findings which are subsequently discussed in Chapter 4.

3.4 Methodology – Interpretative phenomenological analysis

3.4.1 Phenomenological research

An interpretivist qualitative methodology was identified as suitable for exploring experiences of learning. Phenomenology refers to a philosophical approach or a form of qualitative research although some concepts are central to both (Paley, 2017). Phenomenology is fundamentally concerned with the essence or structure of human conscious experience in the lived world from a person's subjective perspective. I will briefly outline phenomenological philosophical traditions then focus on the qualitative research approach.

The origins of phenomenology in philosophical traditions is commonly attributed to Husserl. Intentionality is a clear part of Husserl's thinking, where consciousness in lived experience is directed at something. A person is conscious of phenomena beyond themselves and the essence of these things form meaning about the nature of the world. Returning to "*the things themselves*" is to explore the essence of lived experience suspending the "*natural attitude*" of everyday life (Husserl, 1970). Heidegger developed Husserl's ideas, with existential and interpretative aspects, to incorporate ideas about the experience of *being*, using the term *Dasein* for the notion of a person *being in the world* and understanding self in that world (Heidegger, 1962). Three western traditions are associated with phenomenological philosophy, *transcendental*, *hermeneutic* and *existential*. Husserl's ideas are generally known as transcendental phenomenology, which focus on the world as lived and transcending experience to uncover reality. Hermeneutics, associated with Heidegger's ideas includes an interpretive aspect, seeking to understand as well as describe the nature of things and the subjective experience of people in the lived world. Existential philosophy is an overarching term which focuses on a fundamental interest in the phenomena of the human condition. While this is a very brief description of wide-ranging complex phenomenological philosophy, key aspects of phenomenological research that are drawn from these traditions is explored next.

Phenomenological research is concerned with the "*essences*" or essential elements of human lived experience and how individuals make sense of these (Vagle, 2018). Dahlberg describes an essence as "*a structure of essential meanings that explicates a phenomenon of interest*" (Dahlberg, 2006, p11) that

makes the phenomenon what it is. Giving voice to the participants is identified as the fundamental goal of phenomenological research (Larkin *et al.*, 2006).

Phenomenological research also draws on specific ideas stemming from different philosophical traditions, although lived experience is always at the centre.

Phenomena are explored as lived by the person within their lifeworld, where the immediate experience is explored beyond the everyday aspects that are taken for granted. Hermeneutic phenomenological research is concerned with searching for the essence of a phenomenon and uncovering meaning. Rich descriptions of experiences are sought to explore a deeper understanding of the meaning of the essences of the lifeworld. This brief review of phenomenology as philosophy and as research is now developed to consider what is meant by the lifeworld before detailing the IPA approach.

The lifeworld is articulated by van Manen as comprising “*lifeworld existentials*” that he considers as “*the universal themes of life*” (van Manen, 2014, p302) which can offer a way of understanding differentiated parts of lived experience. The lifeworld existentials are not separate entities but are integrated and fundamental aspects of a person’s whole lifeworld. Van Manen considers hermeneutic phenomenology as a “*pedagogic practice*” with the researcher involving themselves in deep life world stories. A simple outline of the lifeworld existentials is included here:

Temporality (Lived time) is how a phenomenon is experienced in relation to felt time, subjective time as opposed to time measured by the clock (van Manen, 2014). This can feature as part of lived experience in sense of past, present and future or sense of direction.

Spatiality (Lived space) is how a phenomenon is experienced in relation to space, it is the “*space we find ourselves in*” and “*felt space*” (van Manen, 2014, p. 102).

Corporeality (Lived body) is how a phenomenon is experienced in relation to the body and we are always in our body consciously or otherwise (van Manen, 2014). Merleau-Ponty (2002, [1945]) describes phenomenology of perception suggesting that it is through the body that we experience the world.

Relationality (Lived others) is how a phenomenon is experienced regarding relations with others (van Manen, 2014). This includes how lived experience incorporates social relations to give a sense of meaning in the world.

Materiality (Lived things) is how a phenomenon is experienced in relation to things (van Manen, 2014). Van Manen has extended his ideas to also define lived technology, (Lived cyborg relations) as another aspect of materiality being the way that a phenomenon is experienced in relation to technology and machine.

I returned to the *lifeworld existentials* outlined above to reflect on the research findings in Chapter 5. I now provide an overview of the IPA approach to set the context for the remainder of this chapter.

3.4.2 Interpretative phenomenological analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis draws from a range of the philosophical phenomenological traditions but is notably influenced by hermeneutics and strives to both capture and make sense of lived experience. Interpretative

Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) encompasses three essential aspects that draw from different philosophical and academic perspectives, *Phenomenology*, *Hermeneutics* and *Idiography* (Smith, 2017). The combination of these offered me a way to bring several interests together, whilst retaining a clear focus on the central research question. I will explain why these different aspects are important to my research question and how they are suitable for this study.

IPA is *phenomenological* in seeking to learn about the nature of experiences of a particular phenomenon, in particular contexts as lived by participants. My interest in the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology made me lean towards a more purist phenomenological approach. My personal interests would have enjoyed seeking to reveal and describe the phenomenon. It was vital to retain a practical focus and bring the potential abstract ideas to a more concrete approach that I felt would fit with a professional doctorate study. Hermeneutics would also have offered a suitable approach for the study however IPA allowed the freedom to draw from a range of philosophical elements along with a clear and explicit focus on the position of the researcher in the interpretative process.

IPA is *interpretative* in claiming a distinctive “*double hermeneutic*” aspect, firstly searching for meaning; and, secondly, where the researcher aims to make sense of the participant’s own sense-making (Smith and Osborn, 2003, p. 51). This involves exploring the “*reflective personal and subjective experience of the world*” (Smith and Osborn, 2003, p. 51). There is an active role for the researcher in the process (Smith, 2015, p. 26). The hermeneutic cycle within this research approach

involves reading and re-reading textual description, reflective writing and interpretation through a disciplined process (Smith and Osborn, 2003). Within this hermeneutic process, the researcher's own conceptions are an integral part of the sense-making journey. Analysis can involve both *empathic* and *questioning hermeneutics* that involve questioning the text as well as capturing the lived experience. The researcher has an active role and dynamic, interpretative relationship with the transcript moving frequently from the parts to the whole and back to the parts. Other hermeneutic approaches have a clear focus on developing understanding and meaning from lived experiences and are also likely to involve the researcher's perspectives to varying degrees. Within IPA the explicit role of the researcher in this hermeneutic process is helpful for this study. The background to the research project outlined in Chapter 1 clearly relates to exploring participants' experiences from a specific context.

The concept of idiography within IPA relates to the focus on individual experience of how a person makes sense of their experience of the phenomenon being studied. There is full attention to detailed examination of individual cases and focusing on the meaning of an experience for any given participant. The importance of learning from individual experiences and ensuring that these are not lost within any generalisation is closely related to my personal values and experiences outlined in Chapter 1. Idiography is of course a feature of other approaches, however the commitment to this being so explicit in IPA in combination with the other elements is appropriate for the kind of data that I needed to answer the central research question.

The IPA approach therefore draws together the importance of uncovering the essential elements of lived experience, the centrality of the individual case and uniqueness of this experience and the meaning associated with this experience. IPA is emerging as an approach that is increasingly used in studies about different professional issues and experiences. The approach has origins in psychological research but has been used extensively in health and other contexts. IPA is increasingly being used within a social work context. As an emerging and evolving approach IPA is open to critique in terms of how it really differs from other methods and there is certainly a risk of over-simplifying the demands of any research approach. IPA is an ideal research approach for focusing on unique and individual experiences in a particular context (Smith, 2009) and therefore for this study into the lived experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace. For

this study, IPA brought the opportunity to bring a concrete approach to potential abstract ideas whilst retaining depth. Thorough and disciplined attention to the three aspects of IPA would “*get close to the world of participants*” (Smith, 2017), produce relevant focused knowledge in answer to the central research question that kept the phenomenon of *learning* at the heart.

3.4.3 Selecting the best route to explore lived experience

The origins, motivations and aim of the study, to explore the nature and meaning of social workers’ lived experiences of learning, were key determinants in the selection of the best approach. IPA was firmly selected as an appropriate methodology for the study. The decision to choose IPA over other phenomenological approaches has been explained in relation to the genesis of the study and my background and researcher identity. Other qualitative approaches could have been used to explore learning in the workplace for social workers. A comparison of different methodologies and their implications for my study are summarised in Appendix 6.

At the original stages of my research the potential of Action Research cycles for improving workplace learning for social workers was considered. Action Research would have involved a cycle of testing and review with social workers. The appeal of this approach was in the functional use of doing research in practice and the position of the participants within the study in terms of their power and involvement. Through the early stages of both refining my research focus and early exploration of literature I became increasingly aware that it would be difficult to improve something through action research that was not understood or easy to articulate. As an insider-researcher I was concerned that I would be prematurely focusing and that participants might have expectations that were pressured by or aligned with topical policy at the time of the research. For example, improving learning about a specific social work practice issue, such as risk assessment. I continued to consider and revise my research focus and subsequent design throughout the reflexive and supervisory process. The turn away from Action Research was to give place to individual experiences and focus on the nature of learning to understand this more fully thus phenomenology emerged.

Grounded Theory could offer a helpful framework for exploring the processes of social workers’ learning in the workplace and where the research was not starting from a hypothesis for testing. My study did not set out to uncover social processes,

influences or impacts or develop theory. It was crucial for me to return to the nature and essence of learning as the first step based on the motivations for the research outlined in Chapter 1. Ethnography and Narrative approaches would also have offered routes into exploring experiences of social workers in an authentic practice context. These approaches have been employed regularly in social work studies, for example, Ferguson (2018) and Helm (2016). Ethnography offers an excellent opportunity to become close to the experience of social workers in the places that they work. There is also an opportunity to observe the details of that work. There is less opportunity to become close to the experience of the social worker in that context, as lived by them. There is little opportunity to observe the experience of *learning* as a specific focus unless it is clearly established what we mean by learning as my study sought to discover. The phenomenological interview would involve listening to a narrative, capturing participants' stories and engaging in a sense-making process about their learning in many ways aligned with a narrative approach to the enquiry. I felt that IPA offered the opportunity for retaining focus on richer description and detail within participants' accounts about learning that in turn could lead to a deeper analysis of this specific phenomenon under study.

Having considered other methodologies, I concluded that IPA positions the participants fully at the centre of their experiences and the meaning associated with these experiences would also be at the centre of the process. The specific focus for my research on "*personal meaning, sense-making in a particular context for people who share a particular experience*" (Smith, 2009, p. 45) led to IPA being selected as a natural fit with the research question, my interests and the intentions of the study.

3.5 Initial study - testing methods and procedures

3.5.1 Initial study

An initial study was designed to try out and evaluate aspects of the research methods to inform the design of the main study. The research instruments, interview approach, timings and schedule of questions were tested, checking if these were clear, understandable and would "*yield the kinds of data...sought*" (Fuller and Petch, 1995, p. 73). Follow-up interviews were also tested to explore if these would generate deeper description, insight, or sense-making by participants once they had a chance to look at the transcript of their initial interview.

The initial study was undertaken in January and February 2018 with three participants who met the sampling criteria, detailed in section 3.6.2. A total of six interviews were conducted, two interviews with each participant. The first interviews were transcribed verbatim and provided to participants prior to follow-up interviews that took place around two weeks later. Participants were invited to select a pseudonym for use in the study. The initial study enabled a thorough evaluation of the research instruments which will now be discussed.

3.5.2 Evaluation of research instruments

A semi-structured individual interview with a follow-up interview was undertaken (Smith *et al.*, 2009) with each participant, appropriate to IPA. The interview questions were circulated in advance and provided a clear outline for the interviews. At the start of the interview I clarified the purpose of the research and the information previously provided to participants. I was initially concerned that the questions sounded slightly abstract. Participants expressed their understanding of the questions at the outset of the process and I began to trust the interview schedule. I found very quickly that participants were able to describe in depth the journey of their experiences of learning, giving illustrative examples along the way. All three participants described their learning *to be* a social worker from the perspective of their respective chronological journeys learning in the workplace. This included descriptions from their student stages and although I wanted to focus on learning as a social worker post-qualifying and beyond the early career point, it appeared important to participants to contextualise their learning experiences with this start to their journey. Some of this description naturally included learning as a social worker within this. The unique descriptions provided by participants reassured me that the methods would generate rich data.

The use of short follow-up interviews in the initial study was helpful in exploring how these would work. Transcripts from the first interviews were provided to participants in advance of the follow-up interview and participants were invited to comment on their reflections since the interview. All three participants were keen to engage in the follow-up interviews and identified unexpected aspects of what they had shared and the examples they had used in their first interviews. One participant stated during the follow-up interview that the process had been a learning experience itself and had served as a space for professional reflection:

“I’ve actually found it quite a good experience as well, actually workers having that opportunity. I do wonder about workers getting that opportunity later on in their career to actually go back and reflect on what they think, because we talk about it all the time, but we don’t really provide those opportunities”

Extract 1: Kathleen

3.5.3 Evaluation of researcher approach

I was also keen to use the initial study to evaluate my style as an interviewer (Sarantakos, 1993) as well as how prompting or probing within the interview schedule would support the process or otherwise. The human exchange in the interview is essential for the IPA approach and an important area for reflecting on managing self and the process (Gray, 2014). Each of the interviews was very different, with my confidence increasing from the outset to trust the data collection methods. The questions allowed participants to describe whatever came to mind about learning as a social worker. Participants’ responses were lengthy, and I used prompts and clarifying questions to stay on track with the interview schedule. I encouraged elaboration, deeper description and highlighted any recurring points or ideas expressed that seemed important for the social worker.

Providing the questions in advance may have helped create a natural flow through ideas without the need to ask each question in turn. I had intended taking written notes in addition to audio recording. In each interview I only noted two or three points usually about physical gestures made by participants that reinforced what they were saying. I found that I was intent on actively listening to the accounts and picking up on some key examples or metaphors used by participants to describe or define their experiences. This was done through paraphrasing or clarifying questions to check out the social workers’ sense of meaning about their experiences. I was aware during the initial study of bearing witness to profound human experiences that involved the whole person in the process of learning.

3.5.4 Testing practical arrangements

I was apprehensive about the practical arrangements for the interviews and how participants would experience me in the role of interviewer. I had been concerned that participants would not be clear or content with the questions posed, or the nature of the research, but all three showed interest and confidence in the study. The opportunity to listen to the audio recordings allowed me to refine the

introductory statements in the interviews, developing clarity and trusting the questions. I had taken great care over the provision of information in advance and the negotiation of consent and anonymity.

Challenges that emerged during the initial study were not the ones I had anticipated. I had negotiated the venues for interviews with each participant so that they would be comfortable and to minimise any time required to participate. The first interview took place in the participant's main workplace. She had been keen to do the interview there, a room was booked, and she was sure she would not be interrupted. There was a lot of noise in the adjoining rooms where there was work taking place with children. I was concerned ethically that I might overhear or that the audio would record this noise. I was conscious of this and was clear that I would immediately delete the recording if this was the case and indeed stop the interview if overhearing confidential practice taking place. I was aware of the interview taking place within a busy work setting and the possibility of any ethical issues led me to arrange all the other interviews in alternative venues where I would have control over the practical issues away from direct practice settings.

3.5.5 Managing the process

In the first interview I had a 'Do Not Disturb' sign displayed. The participant had booked the room and was assured that there would be no interruptions. During the interview, there was a loud knock on the door. A worker was at the door with a child stating that they had the room booked. The participant was very firm in holding the boundaries of the situation in that she had booked the room and asserted that another one could be found. My immediate feelings shifted from being researcher to social worker, thinking they needed the room with the child. I have referred to this in the thesis as an example of the integrated reflexive process, as it enhanced my confidence in clarifying where suitable venues would be and prepared me for how this could be managed. This situation showed me that irrespective of the level of my preparation and attention to ethical issues in advance, there is a very dynamic process taking place within the interviews where unexpected issues can arise. Evaluation of the methods and my role as the researcher through the initial study informed the design, ethical and practical arrangements for the main study detailed below.

3.6 Data collection methods and procedures

3.6.1 A holistic process of exploring the phenomenon

The different stages of the research process, from generating, gathering, managing and analysing the data, are not fragmented elements, but each contributes an essential part of the whole as illustrated in Figure 5. Vagle (2018) describes phenomenological research as a craft. Showing the rigour of the process and commitment to the IPA methodology at each stage supports the “*trustworthiness*” and credibility of the research (Sarantakos, 1993, p. 80). Paley (2017) questions phenomenological research approaches where there is not a clear and specific way that these differ from other forms of qualitative research. Challenges of this type to IPA methodology have led to increasing articulation and defense of the approach and significant attention to the transparency and structure of the data collection and analysis phases (Smith, 2011). Yardley identifies “*sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, impact and importance*” as principles that can guide and ensure quality in qualitative research (Yardley, 2000, p. 215). I will outline how I have crafted the research methods and gave attention to the detail of each procedure to demonstrate how the rich data were generated and subsequently explored.

3.6.2 Sample strategy

Participants were sampled purposively in line with the IPA approach as “*information-rich cases*” (Gray, 2014, p. 217) that have “*insight into particular perspective on the phenomena*” (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p. 49). IPA promotes a purposive sample of participants with “*insight into a particular experience*” (Smith, 2009, p. 48) representing a “*perspective rather than a population*”. The criteria for inclusion were that participants were registered social workers with SSSC, had been qualified for more than two years and were working within local authority children and families services.

Social workers are employed in diverse settings and services after they have qualified. In deciding the inclusion criteria, I anticipated that participants may have worked in a range of settings, including third-sector, local authority, or private services in their career from which they might draw experiences during interviews. This was a factor in deciding that participants from a single site would be appropriate without this being restricted to reflecting on practice in the context of

children and families work alone. I considered that registered social workers could be included whether in a manager, practitioner, or strategic role within the service. Participants from any of these roles had the potential to offer rich descriptions of their experiences in line with the research questions if they identified as a social worker and continued to undertake direct social work tasks. The timespan from qualification was set to differentiate between the sample and the student, newly qualified or early career stages in recognition that the literature, in terms of practice and workplace learning for social workers, is sparser beyond these stages discussed in Chapter 2.

3.6.3 Sample size

Finlay (2011) suggests between three and six participants is appropriate for IPA. I intended to interview approximately twelve social workers and on more than one occasion. The size of the sample was influenced by making sure that I had sufficient rich data. Mason cites thirty-one as an appropriate mean sample size for doctoral projects with a lower level for phenomenological studies (Mason, 2010). Smith suggests quality rather than quantity as the primary consideration with between four and ten interviews for doctoral projects resulting in a small number of participants particularly if they are being interviewed more than once (Smith, 2009).

I continually monitored and reviewed the sample size with supervisors during the data collection stage. I was concerned that participants might drop out or withdraw prior to the follow-up interview due to work demands or other reasons and had generated a lot of initial responses from my request for participants. All those who took part in their initial interviews did, however, proceed. I decided it would be unethical to reject any of the interviews already undertaken in terms of any selection or deselection of the participants after they had agreed to take part in the study and offered their time. I interviewed sixteen social workers in total, each with a follow-up interview resulting in a total of thirty-two interviews. Dahlberg *et al.* (2008) reinforce that the exact number is not important in lifeworld research provided the reasons for the size are clear. While a small number of participants can be sufficient for IPA, a larger sample is not problematic. The sample size meant that there was a substantial quantity of data to manage and analyse within the study and ensured sufficient rich description. The sample size was

approximately thirteen percent of the qualified fieldwork social work population within the site where the research was carried out.

3.6.4 Site for the research

The data were collected in a children and families service in a local authority in Scotland. This site was appropriate as access could be ethically negotiated as insider-researcher and the site offered a suitable sample meeting the criteria set out in 3.6.2. I considered broader Scotland-wide recruitment and discussed this with social work representative organisations in Scotland at the design stage. Although a wider practice or geographic area for the research may have been possible, a small purposive sample within a localised area can provide a “*sufficient perspective*” with IPA (Brocki and Wearden, 2006, p. 85). The profile and characteristics of participants show that the sample draws a range of diverse social workers providing different perspectives into the research, detailed in section 3.6.5.

3.6.5 Profile and characteristics of participants

The research draws from the lived experiences of a range of practitioner voices at different points of their career beyond the early stages. A profile of participants is shown in Appendix 8 illustrating characteristics that were recorded at the time of interviews. The length of time since qualification was noted to ensure the study could differentiate from research involving early career social workers. Participants had an average length of fourteen years qualified practice with a range spanning three to forty across the sample. Length of time qualified or settings were not an intended specific focus of the interview schedule unless the participants discussed these elements of their learning as part of their responses. Where these aspects appeared a central part of their experience, this was incorporated into the analysis and findings.

Social workers are assessed in their qualifying programmes in Scotland, as discussed in Chapter 1, by a practice educator who in most cases holds a recognised qualification detailed in Appendix 1. Critical reflection on learning theories and experiences is an integral part of the process for practice educators who are undertaking these qualifications. It was important that not all participants were practice educators, as social workers who undertake this role may be more interested in, or skilled in, articulating ideas about learning than other social

workers, as this is the main focus of training for that role (SQA, 2016). A distinct area of literature already draws from the experiences of practice educators in relation to social work education and learning as discussed in Chapter 2. Within this research sample, five out of the sixteen participants identified as practice educators. The research was therefore able to focus on the experiences of participants as social workers rather than as practice educators.

The final characteristic of the sample is the scope and breadth of workplace settings that participants have worked in since qualifying. Social workers undertake a generic qualification in Scotland at the qualifying level and can work in any setting. A common but simplistic way of describing practice settings would be statutory children and families work, statutory criminal justice, statutory adult services, third sector or international practice contexts. At the time of interviews all participants were working within a statutory children and families practice context. The experiences drawn on by participants were from a broad range beyond their current work role with fourteen having previously worked in third sector, other statutory settings or independent services.

3.6.6 Consent

BERA (2018) highlights the need to consider consent for data collection, inclusion in published works and to ensure that participants are aware of the nature of the topics to be explored in the interviews. I discussed the nature of the research fully with participants who expressed interest in the study at the enquiry stage and again fully prior to interviews. It was also crucial to focus on consent throughout the data collection process and “*gain specific oral consent for unanticipated emerging sensitive issues*” (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p. 53). My intention was to review ongoing consent as a clear and integral part of all interviews. I also shared transcripts of the interviews with participants following their first interviews to offer the opportunity for them to reflect on these ahead of the follow-up interviews and offer any further insights. This was a clear and intended part of the design of the IPA methods to encourage in-depth description of individual learning experiences. I also specifically discussed the inclusion of verbatim data (Smith *et al.*, 2009) in written reports. Participants were offered full information about the content of the thesis, preliminary reports and wider dissemination as part of the negotiation of consent. Participant information (Appendix 4) and consent forms (Appendix 7) show the detail of negotiated consent as part of the research.

3.6.7 Individual interviews

Individual interviews are acknowledged as the most commonly used data collection method in IPA and are effective for “*eliciting...detailed response*” in qualitative research in general (Gray, 2014, p. 249). Interviews were conducted face to face and were audio recorded, with attention given to the practical arrangements such as location. A series of clustered open questions were used (Appendix 9), appropriate to the methodology that allowed for prompting and probing (Gray, 2014) to explore the depth of participants’ lived experiences.

IPA approaches to interviewing allow for deviation from the interview schedule, therefore it was important to manage flexibility throughout the process and avoid researcher bias (Gray, 2014). Bevan proposes questions for phenomenological interviews that serve to “*contextualise*” the experience, “*apprehend the phenomenon*” and “*clarify the phenomenon*” (Bevan, 2014, p. 139). The questions were designed to elicit rich data about the nature of the experiences as lived by the participants. The questions were also designed to uncover a range of sensory experiences such as sights, sounds, smells, taste, or touch, as part of the layers of description, acknowledging the physical and psychological elements of learning phenomena.

Follow-up interviews were carried out with the same participants who had undertaken a first interview. The follow-up interviews were designed to develop themes emerging from the first interviews and promote in-depth exploration of the participant accounts of their learning consistent with the IPA approach (Smith *et al.*, 2009). There was no additional schedule of questions for the follow-up interviews. The follow-up interviews began with an open question about what had been interesting or important to the participant, after reading their transcript, about their experiences of learning. This was followed by a discussion about how the participants made sense of their experiences. Participants shared their initial responses to reading their transcript then I highlighted aspects that seemed important to them to encourage dialogue. For example, if the participant had used metaphors or particular language to describe their experiences, I could show them the highlighted parts of the transcript. All participants were asked to choose a pseudonym that they would like to be known as within the research. I considered it important to use names for each participant at all stages of the research (rather than letters or numbers) as names are an important aspect of social work practice

and mirrored here in the research. Use of people's names is a central aspect of practice in social work with children, young people and adults, respecting individuals, their identity and promoting self-esteem. There were various reasons that were explained by participants for their choice of pseudonym. This was not requested but was stated by some of the participants. Several examples of the rationale for these pseudonyms are mentioned within Chapter 4, where these seemed important to the social workers. The next section will demonstrate commitment to the IPA approach and how the research interviews developed the crafting of the study as a foundation for analysis.

3.6.8 Developing the craft and remaining committed to IPA

In qualitative research validity and reliability can be demonstrated through “trustworthiness” in the research (Sarantakos, 1993, p. 80), showing the rigour of steps taken and commitment to the methodology at each stage, introduced earlier in this chapter. The following extracts highlight how the data were gathered with attention to the research focus, phenomenological approach and developing the style of interview designed to generate and capture rich description. These highlighted extracts are shown in images which follow to demonstrate how I crafted the interview approach, managed the interviews and remained committed to the IPA approach.

The image in Figure 6 shows an example of beginning the interviews with Chloe, where I communicated how data would be ethically recorded, stored and negotiated how any sensitive material could be managed with ongoing consent.

The screenshot shows a chat interface with a list of messages on the left and a detailed view of a specific message on the right. The messages are as follows:

- 1 **GF** That's the recorder on, these things pick up the sound really well. What I'm trying to do with the audio is that after I have transcribed the data which will be anonymous, obviously I will delete the recording
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 **CHLOE** mm hh
- 6 **GF** So that nobody else will hear the recording at all
- 7 **CHLOE** OK
- 8 **GF** emm [pause] I've explained in the background information about how I'm going to store the data and I will be taking great care over that and it's your choice if you tell anybody that you've been interviewed, I won't be sort of saying who has been involved
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13 **CHLOE** yeah
- 14 **GF** and obviously if there is anything sensitive that comes up and you think that actually, do you know what, I'm not so keen on that bit getting recorded just say
- 15
- 16
- 17 **C** yeah I will
- 18 **C** OK I've explained the bit about the study and the background

The detailed view on the right shows three messages from Gillian Ferguson:

- Gillian Ferguson**
Clarification of information about the use of the audio device and how this element of the data will be managed
- Gillian Ferguson**
Specific mention of the safeguarding of the data as inside researcher
- Gillian Ferguson**
Further assurance and clarification regarding the overall research study and my role with this – managing multiple roles
- Gillian Ferguson** 4 minutes ago
Further expression of the potential for sensitive information to come up in the description of lived experience as highlighted in participant information

At the bottom right of the chat interface, there are buttons for "Reply" and "Resolve".

Figure 6: Negotiating boundaries and ethics of interview

At the initial stages of the interview, I was talking more than the participant as seen in the left-hand side. On the right-hand side of Figure 6 my comments show my evaluation of the researcher approach to negotiate consent and managing sensitive material. Figure 7 and 8 also show clarification about my interest as a researcher to set a clear foundation, parameters and focus of the study and encourage participants not to be restricted by what they assume to be the answers that I want to hear. Figures 7 and 8 also show how I tried to foreground the idea about unique lived experience and “*giving voice*” to social workers (Larkin *et al.*, 2006).

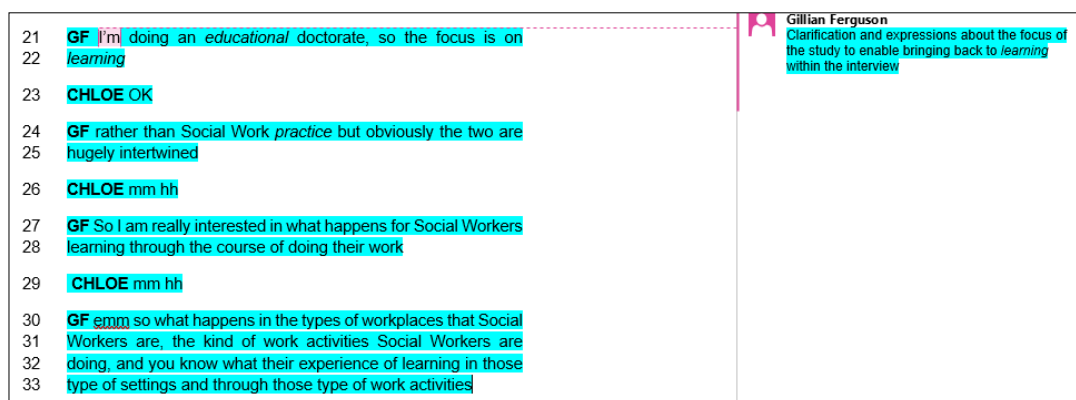


Figure 7: Clarifying the focus of the research

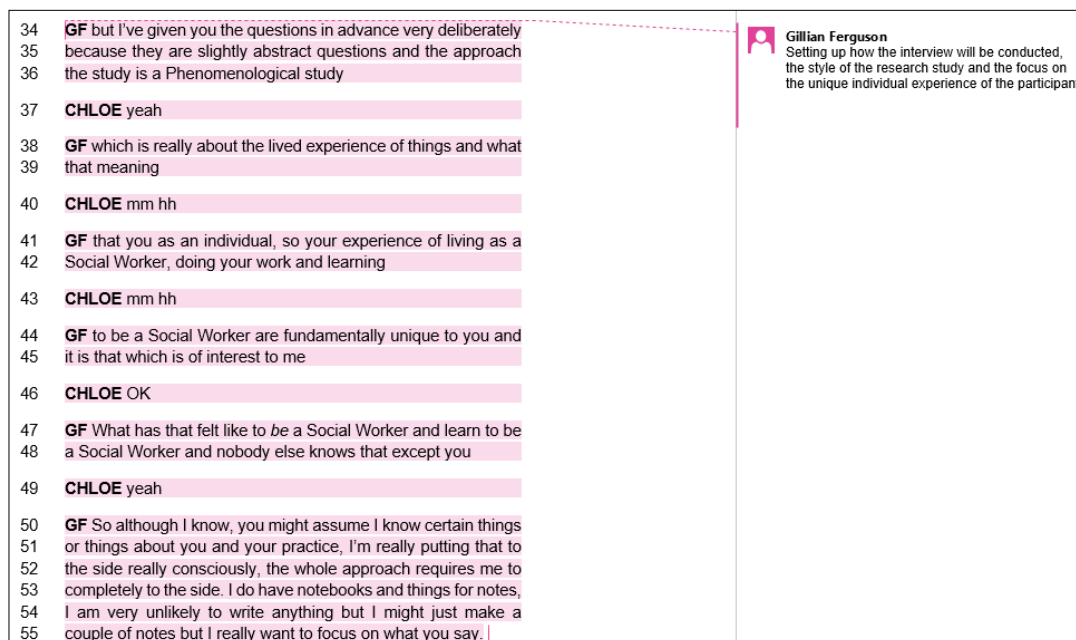


Figure 8: Attention to the structure and process of the interview

Figure 9 shows how general dialogue to start the interview allows the participant to choose where they want to start from with their individual descriptions. The contrast in level of interviewer input compared to setting up the interviews is shown with only minimal prompts at line 116.

<p>95 GF So in general [name] can you tell me anything about what it 96 was like learning to be a Social Worker in your career? ...at any 97 stage</p> <p>98 CHLOE I came to learn to become a Social Worker almost 99 through a route at work. So I had been working as a family 100 support worker, ehm and found that there were occasions I was 101 doing similar roles to those as a Social Worker and felt that I had 102 some of the skills to do that but I also needed to improve on 103 some of the skills and my knowledge, ehm and it was something 104 that I considered at that point to kind of pursue. It wasn't ever a 105 career that I thought I would be doing, I wanted to join the Police 106 Force and didn't because I couldn't drive [pause] ehm so I 107 probably fell into the Social Work, but kind of probably in 108 retrospect I didn't fall into it because I think I use a lot of life skills 109 myself to be a Social Worker. [pause] so I learnt a lot from other 110 people, people that I work with [pause] people that I respect 111 [pause] and I think that is probably where the best of my learning 112 has came from, ehm seeing practice that I'd want to copy and 113 seeing practice that I wouldn't want to copy, to shape me to be 114 kind of who I wanted to be but also [pause] seeing how clients, 115 to use that word, how they respond to different people.</p> <p>116 GF mm hh</p> <p>117 CHLOE ehm, so learning from managers and other Social 118 Workers and the support workers. So there was a lot of learning 119 through my previous roles within voluntary services at [redacted] 120 but also previous experience within the statutory setting. I then 121 applied to go on the [redacted] course and was successful 122 in that so did that course alongside working. I continued to learn 123 while I was working and on my placement as my studies were 124 ongoing and then obviously my studies I had two placements as</p>	<p>Gillian Ferguson Intro question to open up, deliberate starting point for the interview to see what participant starts with – beyond this point most of the text is participant response now that the interview is set up</p>
--	--

Figure 9: Contrast in who has the voice in the interview

Figure 10 below shows prompts at lines 147 and 152 to encourage a move to deeper description and detail.

<p>144 GF you describe a lot of different incidences of practice settings 145 that have, that you describe as the learning</p> <p>146 CHLOE uh huh [overlapping]</p> <p>147 GF that you describe as the learning ones there, from early on 148 as well as in that period of training. Any ones that are really 149 poignant from any of those examples that you can really 150 describe what they felt like?</p> <p>151 CHLOE In a practice setting?</p> <p>152 GF Any one that you've been thinking about, you mention 153 learning a lot from colleagues, managers and the placements... 154 anything that really sticks in your mind?</p> <p>155 CHLOE ehm, probably as a family support worker, which I was 156 for a while before qualifying, I was often a second worker on a 157 number of cases, and often got used as back up on cases and 158 got involved in a lot of Child Protection cases, not obviously as 159 lead worker but as a shadow or support, so I got to probably 160 experience a range of cases, ehm and be part of, be part of 161 things like serving Child Protection Orders and stuff and LAC 162 review meetings and Children's Hearings and seeing the 163 procedural aspects of that as a family support worker has 164 enabled me to use these skills a Social Worker.</p>	<p>Gillian Ferguson Examples of focus on moving to deepening the description</p>
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Figure 10: Deepening the description

Figure 11 highlights where I pick up on emotions at lines 232 and 234 and paraphrased or reflected back to the participant. In the interview, I used techniques to focus and refocus on learning to help participants, not only provide a description of their experiences but explore the nature of learning and how this related to them.


232	G and you mentioned sort of sadness and sorrow	 Gillian Ferguson Picking up on the emotional content and focusing on the learning
233	CHLOE mm hh	
234	GF it is a few times that you mention about that	
235	CHLOE mm hh	
236	GF anything else that sticks in your mind that sort of influenced your learning?	
237		
238	CHLOE ehm, I think because she had a real sense of helplessness, this woman and other people were making decisions for her, I like to be an ethical worker, like I think ethics are very important in my practice and ehm, I like, I suppose I would like to treat people that I work with how I've been treated, so I think it's important to treat people with respect and I don't like to feel disrespected	
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241		
242		
243		
244		
245	GF mm hh	
246	CHLOE but I think on those occasions, I think that could have been increased for this woman in these settings and maybe a sense of unfairness and that kind of really sticks in my throat a bit the unfairness and people being treated unfairly and people	
247		
248		
249		

Figure 11: Emotional content and focus on learning

It was important that this remained a study about social workers' *learning* rather than social work practice as part of an educational research focus. Figure 12 shows a continuing focus on deepening the description, exploring feelings and encouraging individual experience to be shared.


327	G you're in there, that's a complex learning experience you know compared to learning how to fill a shelf in a supermarket or learning in a different type of job, you know so learning to be a Social Worker through that type of experience – I mean what did that feel like, for you?	 Gillian Ferguson Developing the depth of description
328		
329		
330		
331		
332	C there was bits of times it was exhausting, there was bits of times it was totally draining, there was lots of feelings of conflict in terms about ehm, could I work with this boy?, could I not?, ehm challenging systems that were already in place, and that takes confidence because the agency were keen that this boy receive support and I suppose I almost had to take a stance that I didn't think this was ethically correct and as a learner and as a student on placement, you're expressing your view but you're also feeling that are you putting your own placement in jeopardy. You also feel that you're putting your learning opportunities at risk by questioning something that somebody else might think is ok. So there is a level of fear there as well, that yeah you might be doing something right for somebody else, is it right for you? because what would be the consequences for placements or future learning, so there was a lot in having to manage that on a daily basis, was difficult and quite tiring, and it was stressful [sighing] it was really stressful however it reached almost a successful end point, so, but it is a difficult, those complexities in learning do cause a lot of conflict within yourself, but also you are having to manage all the different systems around about	
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Figure 12: Deepening the description

Figure 13 then shows how I noticed and indicated physical changes expressed by the participant along with changes in her description suggesting the embodied experience.


388	arguments. So I think that's important and I quite like doing those wee bits, I like to have	 Gillian Ferguson Picking up on changes in how things are expressed physically
389		
390	GF because you are smiling and lighting up	

Figure 13: Visual cues and indicators of the experience

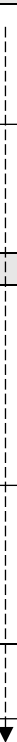
This disciplined approach to data collection through individual interviews generated a big volume of rich data. The next section will show how the data were practically managed, analysed and subsequent findings generated.

3.7 Data analysis methods and procedures

3.7.1 Approach to analysis

I have provided detail about the interviews and will now outline the process of analysis. Chenail, (1995, p. 2) suggests that providing details about what has gone on “*back-stage*” within the research is considered essential to demonstrate credibility. In IPA studies it is important to demonstrate that there has not been an over-simplifying of the data analysis process (Brocki and Wearden, 2006; Smith, 2011). Analytical rigour relates to the commitment of the researcher to being immersed in this process avoiding confirmation bias and paying attention to linguistics and rhetoric (van Manen, 2014). A step-by step process is identified by Smith (2009) that fits with the conception of the analysis process as an evolving craft (Vagle, 2018). Data were analysed using a detailed, inductive and iterative process appropriate to IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009), summarised below in Table 1. This process integrates my initial exploration and the structured approach as part of the sense-making, hermeneutic process.

Table 1: Summary of approach to data analysis

Research stage	Analysis process
Beginning to move into analysis 	Initial exploration
	Immersion in the data during data collection and preparation of transcripts
	Initial exploration and notes using own colour annotation
Developing findings for individual social workers	Structured IPA analysis
	Reading and re-reading individual transcripts
	Initial noting
	Developing emergent themes for each participant
	Moving to next case
Developing findings across the group	Developing master table of themes for whole group

I used this disciplined and multi-layered approach to explore the component parts of the experience and to see the experience as a whole. The analysis began at the transcription stage being immersed in the data and was followed by a formal and more systematic process. I will use an example of the process undertaken for the experience of *Kathleen* to show these stages in the next sections.

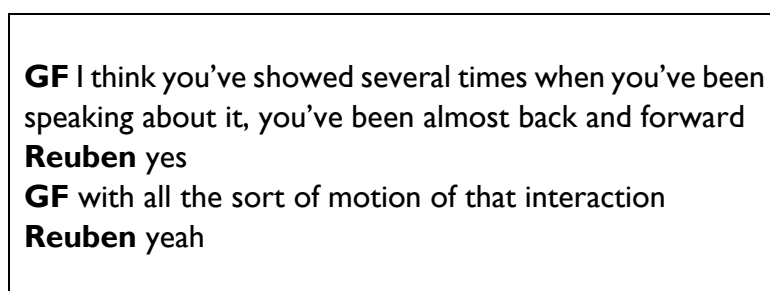
3.7.2 Initial exploration

As described earlier, the interviews were designed to yield rich description of individual lived experiences, to explore what the essence of these might be and how these might be understood by social workers. The style and structure of the interviews and the subsequent transcribing of these began the process of sense-making.

During each interview the listening process involved clarifying and checking out meaning. I mentally noted where listening to participants' accounts triggered my own memories or ideas about social work learning as part of the reflexive process detailed in section 3.3. Poland suggests that transcripts should be accurate, not "tidied up" and may help capture some of the "emotional content" of the interviews

(Poland, 1995, p. 302). Transcription of interviews verbatim is an essential aspect of IPA encouraging the researcher's immersion in the data. It was important that I did this myself to be as close to the data as possible in all the stages of the research. The nuances of the interview need to be accurately reflected given the specific interest in the whole of the described lived experience. How these descriptions are felt and conveyed by the body and IPA data must go beyond description itself.

The first interviews were audio recorded with very limited note taking. I was prepared to take notes but once interviews had started, the flow of the participants' descriptions of their learning, my listening and responses meant that the audio was the key record of the interviews. Where participants made interesting or significant gestures or expressions, I tried to capture this in the dialogue by mentioning and including them, within the paraphrase or summary clarification. Figure 14 is an image of an example from an interview that is noticing hand movements going back and forward which is then clear in the subsequent transcript.



GF I think you've showed several times when you've been speaking about it, you've been almost back and forward
Reuben yes
GF with all the sort of motion of that interaction
Reuben yeah

Figure 14: Inclusion of movement in the transcript

The preparation of an accurate transcript was hugely important in the overall research process. Transcripts were crafted in a sequence throughout the data collection and analysis stages as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Crafting the transcription

Research stage	Development of transcript for analysis
First interview	1 st drafted verbatim transcript from the first interview
	Transcript shared with participant in advance of the second interview
	2 nd draft of transcript prepared in advance of the second interview with basic annotated points of initial interest or for clarification
Second interview	Annotated copy also shared with/available to participant during the second interview
	Drafted verbatim transcript from the second interview prepared
	Revisit transcription from first and second interviews to highlight any points identified as important by participant during the second interview or links between interviews
	First and second interview draft transcripts combined as a whole
Re-listening to audio recording from 1st and 2nd interviews	Final transcript created from seeing the parts and the whole

During each stage of the above sequence I was immersed in the data ensuring that I captured the detail and nuances of the participant’s descriptions. The first draft transcription from initial interviews was a verbatim account of everything said by the interviewer and participant. Minimal punctuation was used and most of the text within the data is a flowing record of the spoken encounter with pauses acknowledged in the transcript. Names of workplaces, colleagues, teams or identifying facts were anonymised by blocking out. Occasionally laughter is acknowledged in the transcript with the annotation of [laughing] where this is a feature of the account. I then shared the transcript with the participant in advance of the follow-up second interview. I made notes on my own copy of points of initial interest or clarification to prepare for the follow-up interview and I openly shared these with participants. This was important to reinforce that the meaning participants ascribed to their experience remained the initial focus of the hermeneutic cycle.

A transcript from the follow-up interview was then drafted and refined with initial informal notes, points of interest, connections and areas clarified by the

participant. I then combined the transcripts for the first and follow-up interviews for each participant. When these were completed, I re-listened to the audio recordings to regain a sense of the participant's description and ensure everything of interest was noted for the analysis stage. The final transcription was therefore formed through the process illustrated in Table 2 and ready for developing the analysis. The data were checked to ensure anonymity in terms of identifying features of places, practices and people. The attention to the transcription process is not separate to the overall analysis but provided the foundation and initial reflective thinking about the experiences, the participant's sense of meaning and the generation of ideas for further review.

In order to prepare the transcripts, I was deeply immersed in hearing and thinking about the experiences and made informal notes at this stage. Figure 15 shows an image of some early highlights and scribbled notes within Kathleen's transcription prior to her pseudonym being chosen and added at the follow-up interview.

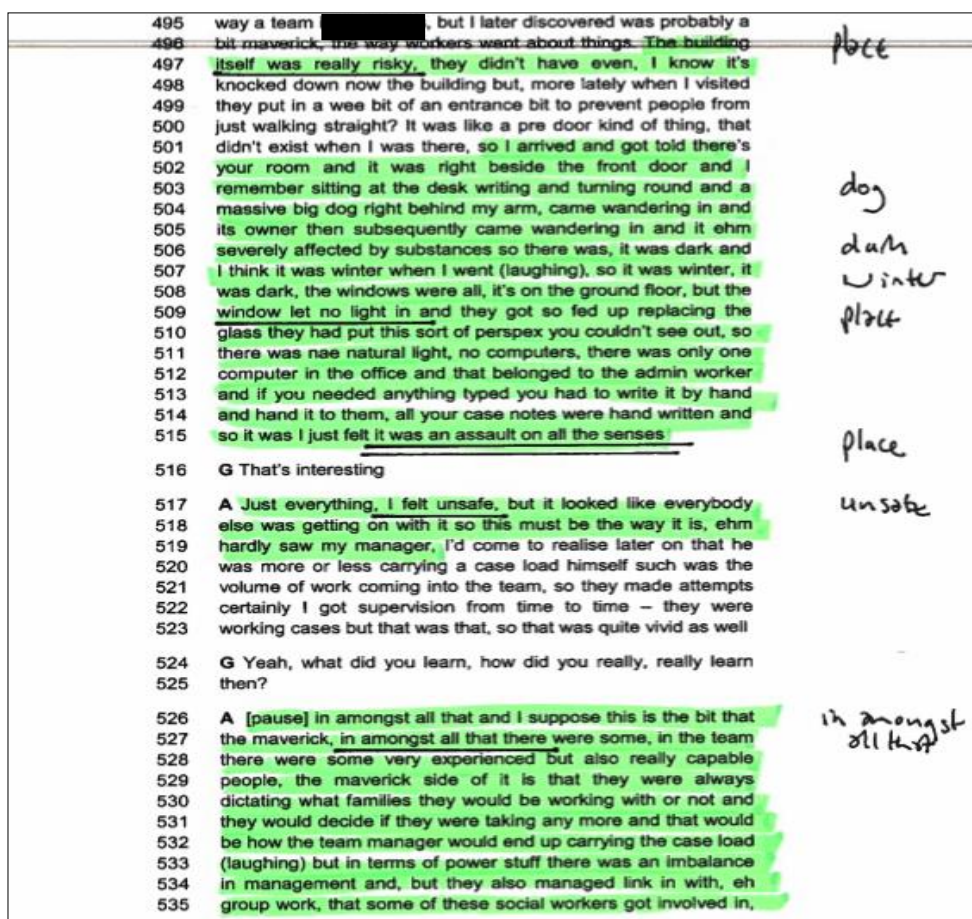


Figure 15: Early annotation and highlights at the transcription stage

I was aware during the individual interviews and while preparing the transcripts that various ideas were featuring in the dialogue. I developed a rudimentary initial

scheme to note this detail within the transcripts. This allowed me to consider the parts of the description before returning to explore the whole of the experience as part of the hermeneutic cycle and to identify areas of interest. I drafted the colour annotation in Figure 16 to help with noting specific parts of the participant's experiences and to offer a visual picture of what they contained. This was done as part of the overall exploration of the data and as another way of seeing what may be within the parts or the whole of the transcripts.

Thought	Where there is any articulation of thoughts or ideas about the learning or experience which seems interesting or has been highlighted by the participant.
Sense	Where there are particular sensory elements of the experience described by participants.
Emotion	Where there are emotions or feelings expressed as part of the description by participants.
Metaphor	Where there appears to be a metaphor used by the participant within the description.
Practice Task	Where a practice task is described as part of the experience by the participant.
Person	Where a person is discussed as part of the description. The relationship of the other person to the participant and their learning is of interest and noted too. The role of the other person is noted as is whether they are a person using the social work service or another social worker for example.
Place	Where a place or work setting appears to be an interesting part of the description by the participant.

Figure 16: Rudimentary colour annotation at the transcription stage

In Kathleen's interview the colour annotation helped me notice elements within the description, an extract is shown in Figure 17. On the right-hand side of the transcript there are notes using the colour annotation. The feeling of being unsafe is noted in green. The idea of isolation and risk in terms of the place as experienced is identified by Kathleen as part of the workplace. This description led to identified learning through the experience within this place noted later in the transcript. The left-hand side of the transcription were my ideas as I began to try and make sense of Kathleen's experience. At this stage I was not aware that these would remain crucial emergent themes after the next stage of structured analysis.

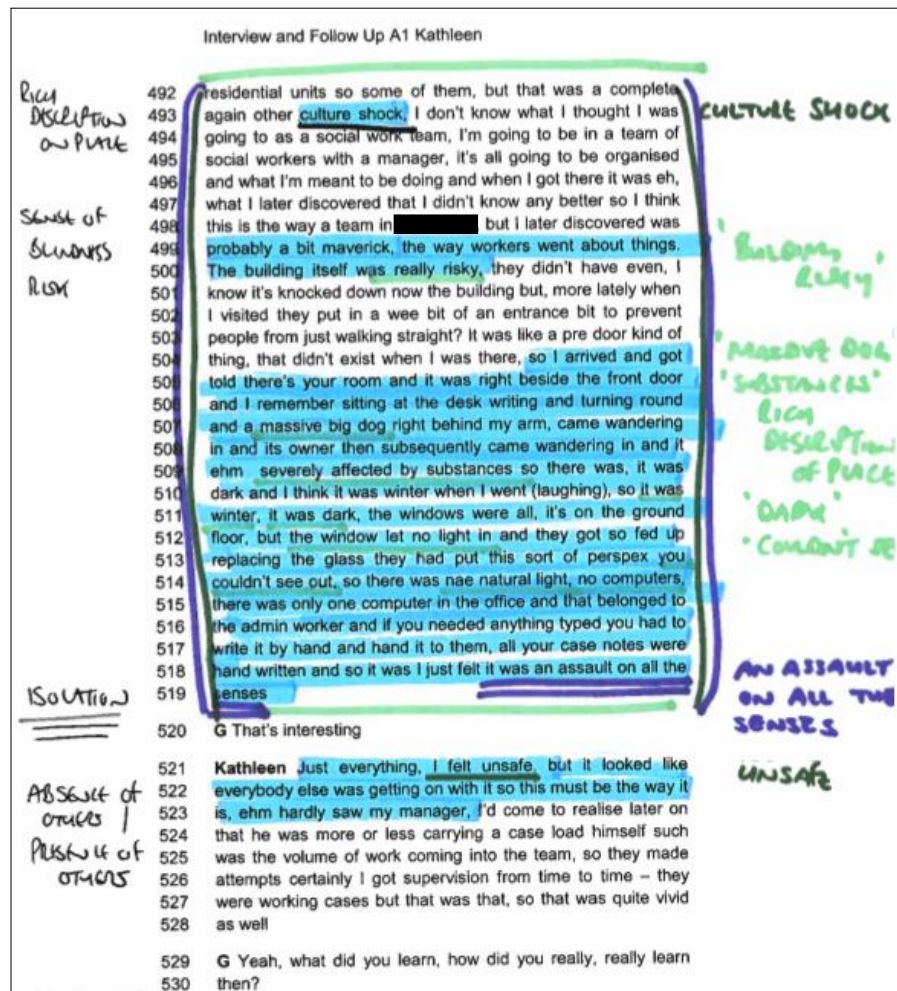


Figure 17: Extract showing colour annotation of early sense-making

I also used the opportunity to look visually at the totality of the described experience as shown in Figure 18, to move from the parts to the whole. Figure 18 shows the complete initial interview transcript of Kathleen after transcribing and noting points using the colours. The image shows where there are chunks of the experiences described and of interest. Patterns of colours in the right-hand column help show the way that ideas weave within the description.

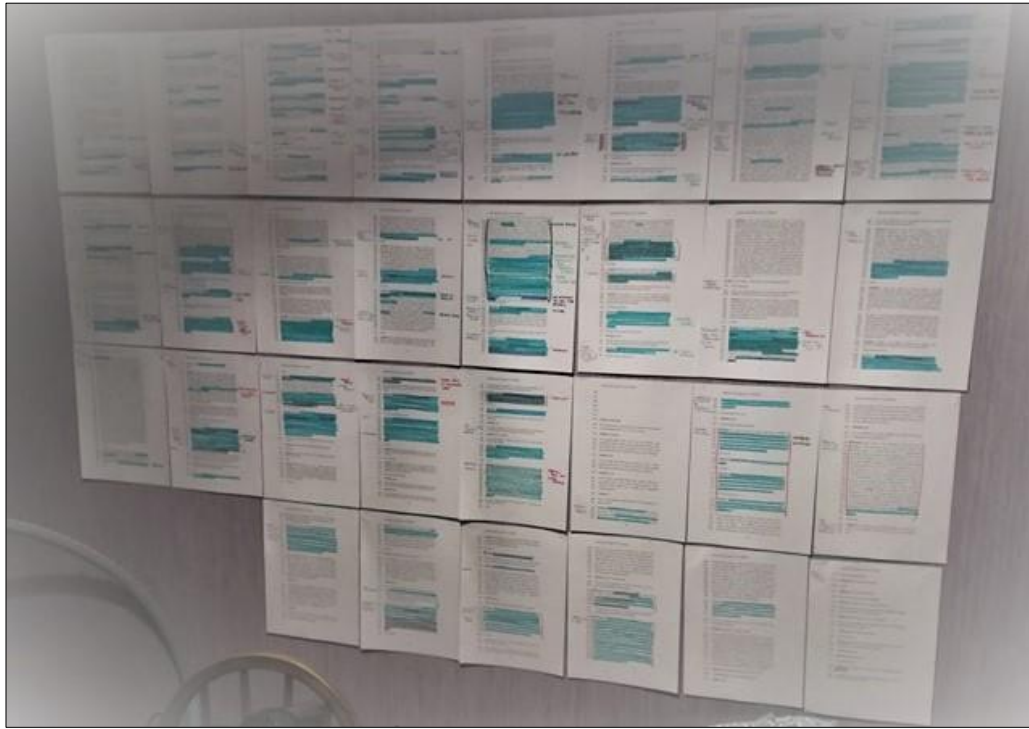


Figure 18: Seeing the whole of the Kathleen's interview

3.7.3 Structured IPA analysis

Once all interviews were completed and associated transcripts prepared and initial analysis completed, I began a formal process recommended for IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Each interview is considered as fully as possible before moving to another one. Returning to the individual transcript sections involved careful line by line reading and re-reading of the details. Notes were then made in the right-hand column of transcripts including, those that were descriptive or general; those that were linguistic (highlighted in blue on the text) or where metaphors were used to describe experience; and, comments that were more conceptual (underlined) about the ideas presented. This system for noting within IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009) is seen on the following extract of Kathleen's transcript in Figure 19 on the next two pages. I have used the section of transcript that corresponds with the earlier figures shown.

Emergent themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory notes Descriptive (plain text) Linguistic (highlighted) Conceptual (underlined)
<p>Sense of self in journey</p> <p>Culture shock</p> <p>The role of mavericks</p> <p>Sense of place</p> <p>Isolation</p> <p>An assault on all the senses</p> <p>Feeling blind</p> <p>Feeling and being unsafe</p> <p>Feeling unsafe</p> <p>Absence of others</p> <p>Presence of others</p> <p>The maverick</p>	<p>Kathleen So I went from that into an actual locality childcare team, in XXXXXXXX and oh hoh (laughing) so that was fun! I knew some of the workers from having the young people in the residential units so some of them, but that was a complete again other culture shock this is the way a team in , I don't know what I thought I was going to as a social work team, I'm going to be in a team of social workers with a manager, it's all going to be organised and what I'm meant to be doing and when I got there it was eh, what I later discovered that I didn't know any better so I think XXXXXXXXXX is, but I later discovered was probably a bit maverick, the way workers went about things. The building itself was really risky, they didn't have even, I know it's knocked down now the building but, more lately when I visited they put in a wee bit of an entrance bit to prevent people from just walking straight? It was like a pre door kind of thing, that didn't exist when I was there, so I arrived and got told there's your room and it was right beside the front door and I remember sitting at the desk writing and turning round and a massive big dog right behind my arm, came wandering in and its owner then subsequently came wandering in and it ehm severely affected by substances so there was, it was dark and I think it was winter when I went (laughing), so it was winter, it was dark, the windows were all, it's on the ground floor, but the window let no light in and they got so fed up replacing the glass they had put this sort of Perspex you couldn't see out, so there was nae natural light, no computers, there was only one computer in the office and that belonged to the admin worker and if you needed anything typed you had to write it by hand and hand it to them, all your case notes were hand written and so it was I just felt it was an assault on all the senses</p> <p>G That's interesting</p> <p>Kathleen Just everything, I felt unsafe, but it looked like everybody else was getting on with it so this must be the way it is, ehm hardly saw my manager, I'd</p>	<p><u>Journey</u></p> <p><u>Expectations and reality</u> <u>Culture shock</u></p> <p><u>Role of maverick role of dissenters?</u></p> <p>Risky places</p> <p>Elements of what comprises the place – dog – people-glass-door-substances -no computers-no natural light</p> <p><u>An assault on all the senses</u> <u>Feeling blind</u> <u>Embodied experiences?</u></p> <p>Other people not being there and the influence of this Feeling unsafe</p> <p>Interviewer trying to check the learning within the experience Interview focus and refocus on the learning aspects of the experience</p> <p>The role of the maverick in influencing learning</p>

Possibilities of practice	<p>come to realise later on that he was more or less carrying a case load himself such was the volume of work coming into the team, so they made attempts certainly I got supervision from time to time – they were working cases but that was that, so that was quite vivid as well</p> <p>G Yeah, what did you learn, how did you really, really learn then?</p> <p>Kathleen [pause] in amongst all that and I suppose this is the bit that the maverick, in amongst all that there were some, in the team there were some very experienced but also really capable people, the maverick side of it is that they were always dictating what families they would be working with or not and they would decide if they were taking any more and that would be how the team manager would end up carrying the case load (laughing) but in terms of power stuff there was an imbalance in management and, but they also managed link in with, eh group work, that some of these social workers got involved in, cos they were kind of dictating a little bit what they were doing and that was good and for them, but it wasn't necessarily good for the whole team and the manager, they weren't able to keep control of that. What it gave to me was, I got really good insight into the possibilities of some of the really complex actually work that can go on in a situation, in a setting that seems chaotic when actually if you really organised and plan ahead that you could actually achieve quite a lot of I suppose effective work, cos when I say it was overwhelming with the numbers of referrals, there were also cases getting closed</p> <p>G Yeah</p> <p>Kathleen Families were kind of getting through the crisis and moving on from that, so what else did I learn. I learned that the admin was the most important person in the office gateway to all kinds of things including resources and including giving you the heads up</p>	<p><u>Bending boundaries and role? To get things done?</u></p> <p><u>Learning point about complexity and possibilities of practice</u></p> <p><u>Chaotic place and situation</u></p> <p><u>Dynamics of power</u></p> <p>Learning that admin workers had crucial function – power and access</p>
Role of unexpected others		

Figure 19: Extract of Kathleen's transcript with detail

A challenge of this stage was to reduce the volume of data whilst maintaining complexity of the experience moving back towards the whole of the individual's experience. The emergent themes were identified to try and capture the essence of the individual's experience drawn from the exploratory notes and stay close to the language and ideas expressed in the transcript. These are noted on the left-hand column as shown in Figure 19. The result of this provided a list of themes for the individual in the chronological order that they are identified. The next stage was to cluster these emergent themes through considering patterns and connections and to develop superordinate themes for these clusters. This was done by noting all emergent themes on sticky note sheets and ordering them to form the clusters. Figure 20 shows the result of this initial clustering of emergent themes for Kathleen and identified superordinate themes in bold.

<p>Sense of self Readiness Sense of self in journey of being Being suitable and ready Reminded of own life Fitting in Motivation Journey Influence of early experiences You are still a social worker if you are a manager Learning about self</p> <p>Places Learning what social work is and what social workers were doing In somebody's house Preconceptions of place The workplace chaotic Context and complexity of people's lives</p> <p>Culture shock Feeling taken aback Trying to work out role Learning from experiences that were not enjoyed I don't know anything Feeling overwhelmed Feeling anxious Feeling responsible</p>	<p>What social work is Felt really big Sense of social work This is social work Perceptions of services and sectors Perceptions of social work It's us This is social work – not what expected Social work process Social worker role Social work profession Social work identity</p> <p>Complexity of task Not knowing where to start The ordinary as extraordinary Remembering people and their lives are unique Being realistic Influence of practice learning stage</p> <p>Learning through the body Isolation Being out on own Out on own Getting let out Feeling unsafe Feeling blind</p>	<p>Learning with others Learning in team Being able to ask others Expectations of others Learning with other Social Workers Learning from service users and families Role of unexpected others Importance of social workers being there Other people understanding the demands Learning with others – other professionals Feeling and seeing the experience of other professionals Absence or presence of others The maverick Challenging discussions Influence of colleague motivation</p> <p>Learning process Learning from surprises Learning by watching Thinking through cases Possibilities of practice Assumptions and underestimations Changing your thinking Importance of supervision Position of formal learning opportunities Own responsibility for learning Trying to carve out</p>
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Figure 20: Initial clustered themes and superordinate themes for Kathleen

The process of developing superordinate themes here was challenging as I was concerned not to lose detail and the nuances of the individual experience, or the context of the different elements of the experience. I therefore had a lot of subordinate themes sitting under each superordinate theme for Kathleen as shown. Clustering into superordinate themes was done via various strategies identified by Smith *et al.* (2009) and outlined here: *Abstraction* where themes that seemed alike were put together, for example, *isolation* and *being out on own* as

experienced by Kathleen, contributing to *Learning through the body*; *Subsumption* where an emergent theme is identified itself as a superordinate theme, because of its status in relation to the experience and bringing together a number of other related themes, for example, *Culture Shock* as experienced by Kathleen; *Polarisation* where any oppositional relationships between emergent themes were present, for example, the absence or presence of other people in an environment in the case of Kathleen; *Contextualisation* where there was a reason to connect elements or emergent themes in relation to the narrative or for example, specific events within the individual experience, for example, what social work is as experienced by Kathleen in relation to specific events that led to this learning point for her; and finally, *Numeration* where there was an indication through the frequency of emergent themes or ideas that this was important as part of the lived experience, for example, the subordinate themes of *being out on own* or *feeling isolated* in relation to Kathleen's experience of the workplace and learning process form a cluster.

Smith *et al.* suggest that IPA researchers can identify other means to develop superordinate themes and that this “*need not be prescriptive*” nor are approaches “*mutually exclusive*” (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p. 96) highlighting that researchers should select what fits for them in looking for patterns and connections between themes. Developing the superordinate themes was followed by checking back to the transcripts to see if these encapsulated the accounts of lived experience as expressed by participants. Specific details and quotes that represent these themes were also then noted, usually relating to the linguistic comments identified in the transcripts. These quotes helped show the individual and specific nature of the experience as it reveals itself albeit the overall superordinate theme may be shared with others. Smith *et al.* (2009) also suggest recording the quotes associated with superordinate themes in a spreadsheet for larger sample sizes to manage how these can be best utilised to represent their unique nuances but share higher order qualities.

I became more confident in developing these themes as I progressed because of understanding the part these seemed to play in the whole of the experiences as detailed in the interview transcripts. Immersion in the data at the interview and transcription stage helped me become very familiar with the depth, detail and uniqueness of each account. Refining Kathleen's emergent themes resulted in

reducing the number of subordinate themes without reducing the overall sense of their experience as shown in Figure 21.

<p>Sense of self Readiness and motivation Journey Parallel of own life Fitting in Learning about self</p>	<p>Learning through the body Isolation Being out on own Feeling unsafe Feeling blind Culture shock Feeling taken aback Feeling overwhelmed Feeling anxious Feeling responsible</p>	<p>Learning with others Learning in team Expectations of others Learning with other Social Workers Learning from service users and families Feeling and seeing the experience of other professionals Absence or presence of others The maverick Challenging discussions</p>
<p>Landscape and places In somebody's house Preconceptions of place Chaotic workplace Context and complexity of people's lives</p>	<p>Complexity of task The ordinary as extraordinary Remembering people and their lives are unique Being realistic What is social work?</p>	<p>Learning processes and elements Learning from surprises Learning by watching Opportunity to think Importance of supervision Position of formal learning opportunities Own responsibility for learning Learning from experiences that were not enjoyed</p>

Figure 21: Refined note of superordinate themes for Kathleen

The example of the process of refining themes in Figure 20 and 21 shows *Culture shock*, previously a superordinate theme, subsumed into 'Learning through the body' but retains several emergent themes associated with emotion. Themes related to looking for answers about *What social work is* (Figure 20), have been subsumed into *Complexity of task* with a slight alteration. The refined superordinate theme, *Complexity of task*, incorporates a revised subordinate theme in the form of a question, *What is social work?* (Figure 21), to include aspects of role, identity and perceptions that form Kathleen's experience. *Learning processes and elements* was changed from *Learning Process*, this theme

encapsulated the specific ways individuals have learned or described. *Places* was relabelled as *Landscape and places* to indicate the ideas of the landscape and context of practice beyond a physical place.

Although the themes here are shown in separate lists they interrelate in many ways and will be discussed in Chapter 4, which explores the findings. Visual representations of lived experience are also introduced in Chapter 4, which draw the superordinate and subordinate themes together. These visual diagrams highlight the essential components of lived experience and show the refined themes. In some cases, very early notes or hunches from interviews or the transcription stage showed clear emergent themes which were identified as subordinate themes at a later stage. This can be seen in relation to Kathleen's experience where *isolation* and *culture shock* are noted of interest at a very early stage as possible meanings associated with her experience.

The same process was undertaken for all the other participants, a lengthy process, but an essential component of a rigorous IPA study. It was important to complete the process for each individual, to look at their experience with fresh eyes and stay committed to the idiographic aims of IPA before moving to the next case. I considered using digital methods for managing and analysing the data in my research. I specifically explored using NVIVO and QUIRKOS (Qualitative Data Analysis Software programmes) to manage the data. NVIVO offers an opportunity to integrate notes throughout the analysis process, QUIRKOS generates visual clusters of themes. I ruled out the use of digital methods relatively quickly as I found it easier to manage the nature and volume of the data by hand. Becoming immersed in the transcriptions and exploring these in paper format was a helpful aspect of the initial exploration process as can be seen in Figures 15, 17 and 18, prior to formal analysis where notes were recorded on computer-based transcripts as seen in Figure 19.

Moving from the parts to the whole for each individual, and the parts to the whole across the participants, has been a focused, embedded endeavour within the analysis process. The previous sections outline how this has been embedded from the different stages of the research, moving from the parts to the whole for individuals, returning repeatedly to the data to generate the themes. The themes draw directly from the text, description and meaning. This hermeneutic circle was dynamic and felt like a swirling whirlpool rather than a clear circular review of the

text, as what counts as an important part of the whole oscillates during the process. Attention to each word, in every sentence, these miniscule nuances, within the context of the interview has been part of the analysis.

3.7.4 Making sense of the parts and the whole for the group

Moving beyond the individual accounts to explore these as parts of the whole for the group was a similar lengthy and immersive endeavour as a researcher. I was concerned not to lose the individual accounts, the nuances and details of experiences. The volume of data, and the broad range of individual subordinate and superordinate themes meant that this was a daunting task. I returned to the literature to begin this process for the group and used a systematic approach identified by Smith et al. (2009) for examining patterns and generating themes across the corpus of a large IPA sample. To move from the parts to the whole and generate meaning that could represent the group involved a similar series of detailed steps as undertaken to generate themes for individuals.

A messy, physical and active process of clustering was used to explore every individual theme using sticky notes. Initial clustering into groups was done using the strategies detailed earlier in the chapter, *Subsumption*, *Abstraction*, *Contextualisation*, *Numeration* and *Polarisation*. These strategies involve the researcher's interpretative role fully in the analysis process. This involved really thinking back to the data that had been part of the whole in which this theme represented an aspect of the structure and texture of the individual. Themes which may have sounded the same for one individual may have been experienced in very different ways. I did not want to over-simplify or lose the nuances of this in the process. Using *Abstraction*, individual themes that appeared alike such as the chronological or biographical trajectory of the social worker, or learning to use and manage self, could be clustered together, noting the convergences and divergences across the group. *Subsumption* was a key strategy to draw relevant, related themes together such as different ways in which the structure and texture of individual lived experience involved the body senses or emotions.

Contextualisation, where there was a clear reason for connecting emerging group themes, could only be done by understanding the depth and detail of the parts to bring them to the whole. An example of a theme generated by contextualisation for the group would be *Practices and conceptions of learning*. This connected very different thinking practices or ways that social workers had articulated their

learning, often as a small but crucial part of their account, and where this had resulted in being a theme for that social worker. A clear example of *Polarisation* in the clustering process was the divergent ways that social workers had described the creation of either a new self, or an integration of selves as part of their experience. *Numeration* led to initial clustering of numerous different individual themes where there was apparent similarity, such as related to learning through direct work with people using services albeit hugely divergent specific cases had been described. These are brief examples of a lengthy and immersive process of analysis to generate themes across the group. The final use of a web model to encapsulate each individual, and thereafter to do so for the group is a vital reminder of the complex relationship of the themes to each other as part of the whole.

A full table of the eventual refined themes for the group is provided in Appendix 10. An extract of the detail of the refined theme *Journey of the self* for the group is shown for illustration in Table 3. The left-hand column shows the refined superordinate themes in bold, with the associated subordinate themes underneath, also shown in bold. The other listed concepts underneath each bold theme, are concepts that were generated by the process of clustering and refinement, moving from the parts to the whole that led to the final refined themes for the group.

Table 3: Extract from organised refined themes for group

Refined superordinate themes for the group in bold with the associated subordinate themes for the group indented in bold	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny	
Journey of the self	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Readiness and motivation		x	x		x	x			x						x		
Sense of experience or novice								x									
Vocation												x					
What was there before				x						x				x			
Age			x											x		x	
Realising it is serious stuff				x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Power and authority				x			x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		
Realising it is serious stuff													x				
Using humour but it is not funny															x		
Responsibility						x	x	x				x	x			x	
Fit		x	x		x	x					x			x		x	
being a stranger						x								x			
Being honest and ethical															x		
Being human in practice															x		
Felt human			x								x						
Felt right			x			x										x	
Seen as self			x														
Fitting in		x			x	x					x					x	
Learning to use and manage self		x		x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x		
Constantly adapting		x															
Learning about own limits								x				x					
Learning about self		x			x			x				x			x		
Learning to use self to help people							x										
Managing self and self-regulation		x		x		x			x		x		x	x			
Impact on life	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x
Being tested														x			
Building resilience								x									
Impact on personal life		x					x	x								x	
Parallel of own life	x				x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x
Protecting /caring for self								x									
Self as a target		x															
The complex intrapersonal process						x											
Whole life			x							x							
Becoming	x			x	x		x	x		x	x	x			x	x	
Conflict in identity																x	
Creating a new self	x										x	x					
Integration of selves								x		x						x	
Trying to avoid becoming something															x		

Table 3 and the full details in Appendix 10, also maps which social workers had themes which had been part of the clustering for that resulting theme during the process. The right-hand columns show the position of each participant and whether their experience can be associated with these refined group themes. The way in which each individual is associated with the theme is detailed through the crosses shown. Original, individual themes as they presented for individuals will not necessarily appear where it might be expected as the process of clustering will have considered the specifics of what this meant for each individual and this having fed into the interpretative process to generate the final refined themes shown in the table. Important elements within the clusters are listed in the non-bold text, these helped remind me what had contributed to the emergence of the theme during this process. This table and the other detail in Appendix 10 are a summary of the final stage, developing from the abstract to the concrete, or from the messy to the organised stage of theme generation for the group. The discussion about what these themes mean is presented as part of the findings in Chapter 4.

Group superordinate themes that were initially identified are shown in Table 4, then refined from that original list. This was done by looking at the group experiences and considering whether any themes help understand or illuminate the overall sense or essence of what the social worker experiences were. Smith *et al.* (2009) suggest this sometimes leads to a reconfiguring or relabelling of themes. For example, this process led me to reframe and relabel the emergent theme of *Emotional context* to *Learning through the body* as this encapsulated the subsumed emotional experience as well as other visceral or sensory experiences without losing the importance of these within the individual accounts.

Table 4: Identifying and refining superordinate themes for the corpus

Superordinate themes initially identified across the group of participants	Refined superordinate themes across the group of participants	Rationale for changes made or relabelling
self in context power and authority responsibility complexity of landscape and place	Journey of the self	Journey concept includes ideas and themes about routes into social work, motivation, personal history and parallels with personal life. This also includes themes related to learning about the self, self-awareness or changes for the self and identity – a dynamic process therefore encapsulated by this term. Ideas about power, authority and responsibility are subsumed here to form this superordinate theme.
complexity of task seeing things as they really are looking for answers	Navigating landscape and place	Shifting from the static concept of place, this relabelling allows ideas about landscape, place and context as the working environment of the social workers to be encapsulated in the superordinate theme. <i>Contrast and conflict</i> and <i>seeing things as they really are</i> subsumed here as aspects of context. The use of the term <i>navigating</i> allows the conception of trying to find a way within this complex environment.
contrast and conflict emotional context learning through others	Navigating tasks	Shifting from the static concept of task and complexity of task, this has been relabelled to represent the complexity, dynamic and unknown nature of the work tasks in this superordinate theme. Looking for answers is subsumed here as this relates to trying to work out what to do or what the task even is.
learning through the body	Learning through the body	The emotional context, experiences, as well as other sensory or visceral themes are included here.
complexity of learning process	Learning through others	This remains as initially identified.
learning by chance	Learning routes, paths and signs	This encapsulates the complexity of the learning process to include identified themes around the ways that participants learned, and the indications of specific things learned.
	Learning by chance	This remains as initially identified as a potent theme.

The diligent and detailed approach to analysis means that I had confidence that any changes here supported the shared higher-order themes. Within the

spreadsheet I also recorded all the individual subordinate themes from participants to explore how these featured within the group. Seeing this visually helped me get a sense of recurrence across themes for participants and the nuances within these shared higher-order themes.

Table 5 shows an illustrative sample from my working spreadsheet with the individual subordinate themes for all participants plotted for the superordinate theme *Journey of self*. This shows the challenge of remaining committed to the individual experiences and drawing ideas together as they might present for the group. Smith (2009) suggests that recurrence of between thirty and fifty percent is a possible measure for retaining a theme for the group. In generating themes, it is important that the analysis of the data is not a quantitative exercise. I determined the themes through understanding how and where these have presented for individuals and the importance they have had as an essence of the lived experience as a whole. Any theme is essential as part of what a person has described that helps other people step inside their world. Determining whether the phenomenon would still be the same if an element was deleted or changed, or if it would lose its fundamental meaning (van Manen, 1990) continued to guide the hermeneutic and interpretative aspects of my analysis at this stage. The subordinate themes, for each superordinate group theme, were refined as the final part of analysis. It was essential to check these as identified for the individuals to avoid losing the important nuances in determining the final detail and articulation of social workers' experiences.

Within the example shown in Table 5, it is possible to see that several themes have featured for several participants such as *Fitting in*, *Managing self* and *Parallel with own life*. These have been experienced very differently by each person along with the ways that they have related to their other themes, but the sense of personal and unique fit is shared. For further illustration, the themes of *Creating a new self* and *Integration of selves* are identified less frequently but, for the participants that have experienced these in all the cases noted, this has been the most central essence of their journey of learning as a social worker. It is crucial that the experiences do not become fragmented into their component parts without representing the meaning that emerged for individuals.

Table 5: Example of creation of superordinate group theme before final refinement

Refined superordinate theme	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
Journey of the self	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
readiness and motivation		x	x		x	x			x						x	
parallel of own life	x				x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x
fitting in		x			x	x					x					x
learning about self		x			x			x				x			x	
age			x											x		x
felt right			x			x										x
seen as self			x													
felt human			x								x					
whole life			x							x						
managing self/self-regulation		x		x		x			x		x		x	x		
power and authority				x			x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
responsibility						x	x	x				x	x			x
realising it is serious stuff													x			
vocation												x				
learning about own limits								x				x				
what was there before				x						x				x		
trying to avoid becoming something															x	
using humour but it is not funny															x	
being human in practice															x	
being honest and ethical															x	
being a stranger						x								x		
being tested														x		
self as a target		x														
Impact on personal life		x					x	x								x
constantly adapting		x														
creating a new self	x										x	x				
protecting /caring for self								x								
integration of selves								x		x						x
sense of experience or novice								x								
building resilience								x								
conflict in identity																x
learning to use self to help people							x									
the complex intrapersonal process						x										
Becoming							x	x								

Within the process as a researcher I fluctuated between being lost or frozen. I experienced fear of loss and letting go of the individual experiences until the emergence of the whole that felt right for the group.

“It is just so engulfing, the parts are too many and the whole too big, it is as if a cosmos of experience that I am trying to make sense of. Van Manen mentions that, themes are the stars that make up the universes of meaning that we live through, this really helped me become more comfortable with the enormity of the whole and its relationship to the parts, this also gave me confidence in the themes as representing the parts. When the themes eventually felt right, I knew they were true to the participants’ accounts.”

Research diary extract 1

The findings in Chapter 4 and discussion in Chapter 5 will present the final themes as refined through this analysis process and show the essence and interplay of themes. This chapter has detailed the methods and procedures used in my research that have generated findings about the lived experiences of social workers learning in the workplace. Chapter 4 will now present and discuss the findings for individual social workers before moving to consider the themes generated for the group.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction to the lived experiences of social workers

The research set out to explore the lived experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace, *in, through* and *at* work. The IPA approach and methods used successfully gained in-depth and rich descriptions of participants' experiences of learning *to be* and learning *as* a social worker in the workplace context. This chapter presents the findings arising from the analysis process described in Chapter 3 and demonstrates my commitment to showing individual experiences whilst also offering insights to the identified themes across the group.

Balancing commitment to individual experiences and the nuances of these, while also showing patterns across the group, was a challenge for both the analysis process and presentation of the findings. I have selected to present individual experiences through introducing each of the sixteen social workers in turn and encapsulating their themes in a visual web diagram. The identified superordinate and subordinate themes form an essential part of the social worker's experience. Removing any one of these themes would result in the phenomenon of learning not being what it is. The individual webs therefore include superordinate and subordinate themes encapsulated in a diagram that represents each social worker's experience. The webs reveal how this experience has multiple unique patterns and threads between them. Extracts from transcripts are also included to illustrate the experiences of learning for the different social workers through their own voices. The chapter then describes superordinate and subordinate themes that were identified for the group as a whole. The web analogy is further developed to illustrate and represent the complexity of social workers' lived experiences as presented for the group.

4.2 Introducing sixteen social workers

Sixteen social workers were interviewed as described in Chapter 3, section 3.6. The social workers are represented here in different coloured icons with their selected pseudonyms, shown in Figure 22. The respective colours of these icons are used within the individual webs to signify the different social workers, acknowledging the diversity and uniqueness of their individual experiences.



Figure 22: Social worker icons and pseudonyms

4.3 Themes for the individual social workers

The social workers provided deep and rich descriptions of their experiences of learning and each account was unique and very personal. Each individual superordinate theme was developed from subordinate themes that were a complex and essential part of the social worker’s experience. These themes weave together to form the structure of the lived experience for each social worker as a whole. The social workers have different numbers of themes identified, for example, Boab has four superordinate and nineteen subordinate themes which form his experience. Makine has many more themes which were generated. This does not indicate differences in the complexity or importance of any social worker’s experience, simply, this represents the themes generated for each individual through the process detailed in Chapter 3.

The meaning, weight and importance of each theme for an individual or the part it played in their whole experience cannot be understood from a simple presentation or list. In order to portray the complexity and richness of their accounts I have chosen to present their experiences through a visual representational web of their experiences recognising the intricate patterns and connections of different threads within their themes. Verbatim extracts are also included to highlight the nature of some of the themes with accompanying discussion. Some of the extracts use minimal punctuation and are not altered from the transcripts as they capture the pace and flow of the speech from individual interviews. It is also important to

acknowledge that some of the extracts contain descriptions of very difficult work experiences and these can trigger a strong emotional response or reaction in those who read them. Some extracts are long, as these convey the essence of the lived experience clearly, using the social worker's own voice. The webs provide a visual reminder that each theme is part of the whole human experience.

Each social worker's web is represented in turn without comparison to others as part of the commitment to idiography, understanding and demonstrating the detail of individual experiences. A discussion will follow in relation to how themes were considered for the group once individual accounts have been given their place. Within the discussion, superordinate themes are in upper case and italicised, while subordinate themes are in lower case and italicised where these are used within sentences to differentiate these.

4.3.1 Boab "When Bowie created Ziggy Stardust"

Boab's experience is summarised in the web shown in Figure 23 which includes four superordinate themes and multiple layers of subordinate themes that weave together to form his whole experience. Boab selected to use this pseudonym and carefully spelled out this Scottish version of the name Bob during his interview. This web illustrates how Boab learned to navigate the landscape of practice and ambiguous tasks of social work.

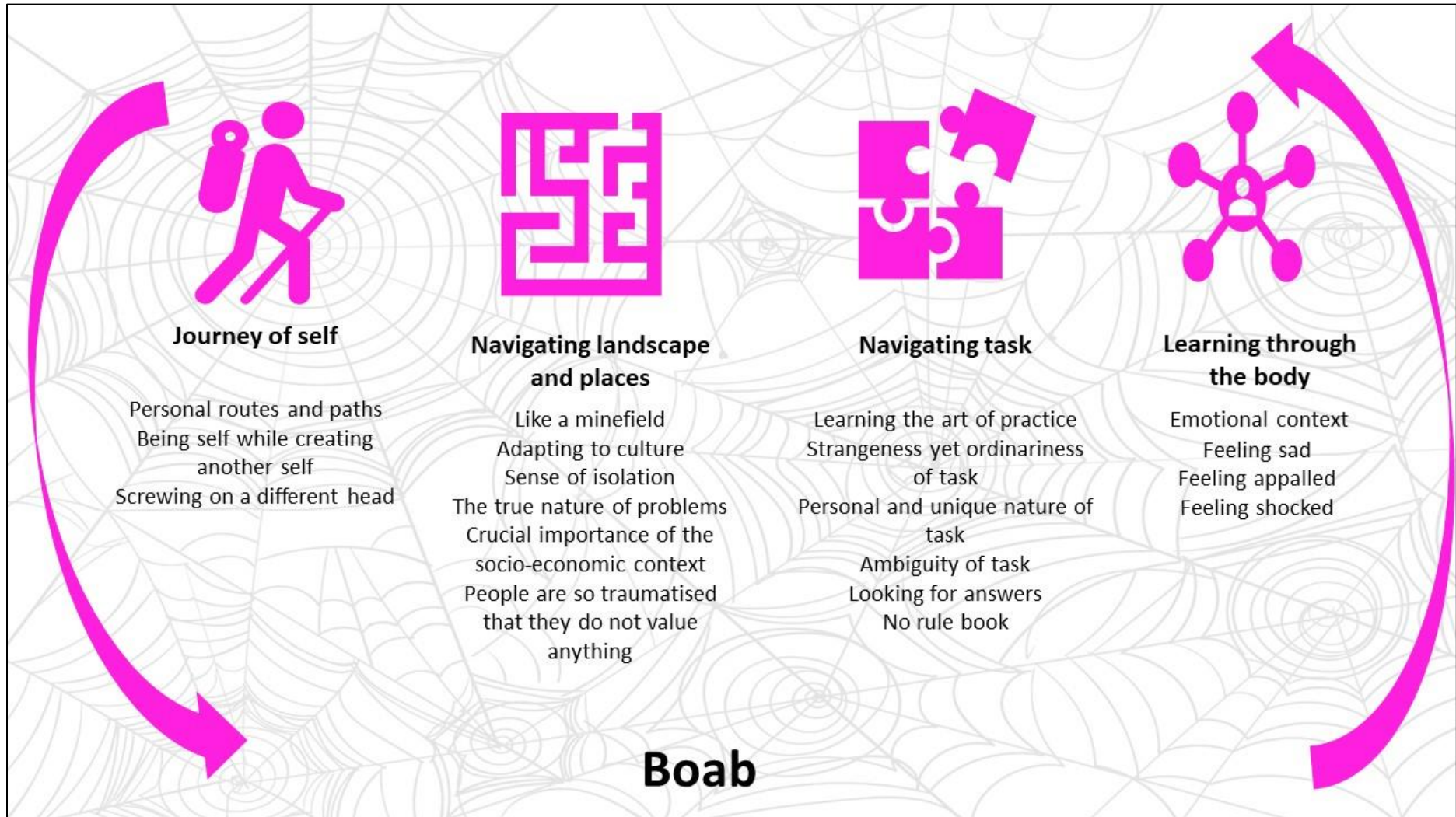


Figure 23: Boab lived experience

Boab describes his journey of learning as situated within the context of his life, motivation and values. He passionately emphasises the impact of learning about the socio-political reality of people's lives and the nature of the problems they are facing as part of his experience. Learning as a social worker is characterised by Boab using a striking metaphor of creating a new self to find his way within an alien landscape, linked with intense and often difficult emotions.

Boab describes trying to work out what to do and how he experiences a lack of articulation by others about what the social work role and intervention is. For Boab this means his learning is characterised by "*looking for answers, without a rule book*". Boab's learning journey throughout a lengthy career has often sought answers about the purpose and nature of social work where there are numerous rules and procedures, yet no rule book. He describes developing his art of practice:

"Yes the art of practice for me, there's not a rule book you know we have all got these practice guidelines and things like that but when it comes down to the minutiae there is not a yes or a right answer for lots of things that we do sometimes if we do the same thing twice some people might say that one was right and that one wasn't right sometimes you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't"

Extract 2: Boab

The idea of responsibility and seriousness of the role and task has featured strongly as part of Boab's learning.

"it means a lot to me it's an incredibly privileged important job to undertake when you're going into somebody's private space and we don't get situations that everything is rosy in the garden there are always difficulties that need to be addressed and that in itself is a privilege to be able to do that and I take it very, very seriously"

Extract 3: Boab

The idea of the creation of a new self and constantly adapting was developed through the initial interview and confirmed in the follow-up meeting. Boab uses the metaphor of his learning as being like when the musician David Bowie created an iconic persona called Ziggy Stardust (Cooke, 2020). Boab notably states that the character of Ziggy Stardust did not last long, highlighting the

intensity of being a social worker within a landscape that is difficult to negotiate and navigate:

"I think in order to communicate as a social worker in this line of work you need to really kind of maybe use Ziggy Stardust as a kind of analogy – well I think of Ziggy Stardust when David Bowie created Ziggy Stardust it was about assuming someone else, now you can never escape yourself but certainly you do assume different characters for different people that you work with.

Going back to the Ziggy Stardust character this role that you absorb yourself within a culture that is pre-existing you know so the culture when I started working was fixed and was there, albeit it was transient, moving and it continues to move and what have you but I think you need to adapt to the culture when it comes to written reports. "What is this sheriff expecting?" so there is a lot of other people's reports and your reports you think what kind of thing are you putting in there, so you are learning a lot from other people as well as maintaining your own views and opinions and I think that can be quite hard.

You've got judges and sheriffs, you know, so you've got a whole swathe of different professionals and people that you work with so that the way that I talk to the children's hearing and then present a case to a children's hearing is different than when I go around and do an unannounced visit to a service user's family.

Yeah, the Ziggy Stardust analogy and all that screwing on a different head I think it is a good analogy in the sense of recreating yourself and I think you know there is a similarity there in various areas that you go into in social work, you know, that you need to be able to wear different hats for different audiences – and he only lasted 19 months."

Extract 4: Boab

The power of this metaphor helps Boab articulate his meaning about learning to be a social worker in context of workplace tasks and landscape. Learning through the work tasks is also described in relation to learning from people's lives within this complex landscape:

"I learned that some people are so damaged that they can't see the trees for the wood in a sense nothing is of any value to them. You know I remember a young guy who is now dead that we looked after and I went on shift

on Christmas day. The Christmas dinner was laid out and all that and I thought, 'this is a job', and I'm coming in and getting a Christmas dinner and thought this is brilliant. This one laddie got all his Christmas presents and I remember vividly, he got one of those portable CD players at the time and he just took it and rammed it against the wall and it just smashed into loads of pieces. It's that learning bit that - there is nothing of any value when somebody has been so damaged and I've thought, 'how do you actually get to people'."

Extract 5: Boab

This is one example of the significance Boab associates with learning directly through the people he is working with. In this case learning about the trauma experienced by the young person, the impact of this on their life and their values. *Navigating landscape and places* and *Navigating task* are both characterised by Boab being confronted with *the true nature of problems* and his visceral experience of this. Learning from other workers is also a major feature, learning from both good and poor practice. This is alongside a passionate sense of moral and ethical practice rooted in understanding the socio-political context of life that is weaved through Boab's experience of learning. Boab's experience of intense emotions in *Learning through the body* involves *feeling appalled*:

"I went out with this very experienced worker and I remember, they went out to this house and physically opened up this young lassie's mouth to determine whether they had been using heroin.

It made me feel terrible absolutely terrible. How could somebody actually do that to somebody, you know there is surely a better mechanism to try and extrapolate information than physically opening somebody's mouth.

You kind of learn from other people on the job on a daily basis"

Extract 6: Boab

The extracts provide some examples of Boab's rich description of learning to be and learning as a social worker shown in his web. The threads within and across the elements of his experience are closely connected to his personal self, values and sense of vocation. Learning directly through practice is a clear and prominent feature of Boab's experience.

4.3.2 Carol “I was unlucky”

Carol’s experience is summarised in the web in Figure 24 which includes nine superordinate themes and multiple layers of subordinate themes that weave together to form her whole experience. This illustrates how Carol learned the *Complexity of task*, with multiple intense emotions. A further central aspect of Carol’s experience is that some of her most significant learning happened by chance. Carol’s journey of learning is situated within the context of her life including its serious impact on her personal life. Learning as a social worker is characterised and described in terms of learning about self, learning to use self and being a reflective practitioner.

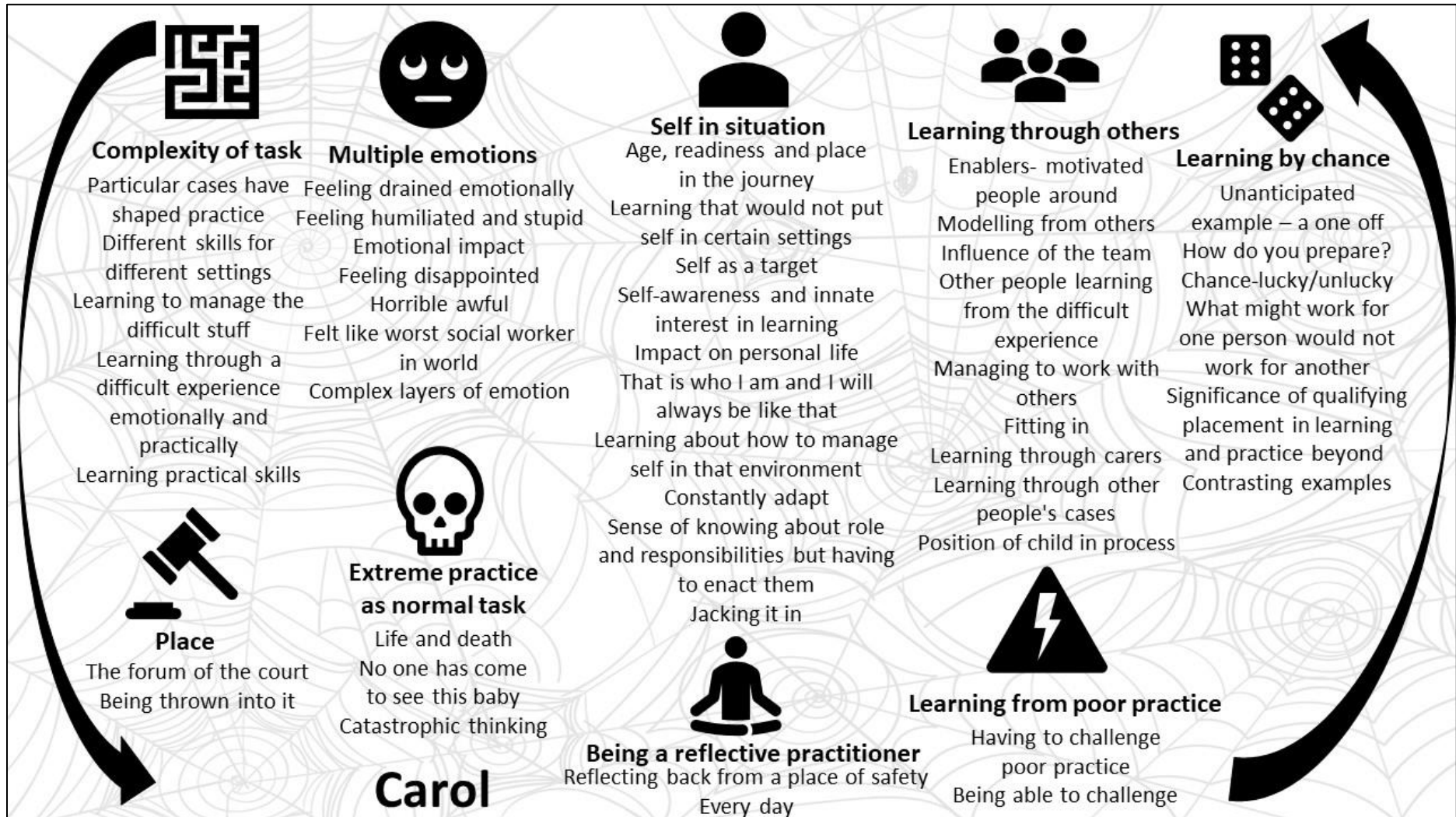


Figure 24: Carol lived experience

Particular cases have shaped Carol's practice and extracts from her interviews highlight how working within the forum of the court led to significant learning about self and task through a very difficult emotional experience.

"There have been particular cases that have had a huge impact on my practice particularly when I've had to go to court and it was, it was horrible. It was awful.

I've just felt like I was the worst social worker in the world because I was cross examined on the stand but, looking back, if that happened to me now, it probably, it would still have impact on me but I would I suppose just try and remember that it's a different forum, you know, solicitors, that's their job, out of the court room they don't even give me a second thought."

Extract 7: Carol

The use of language such as *awful* and *horrible* conveys Carol's sense of her experience of learning in this workplace setting. The emotional and very personal detail is also highlighted by Carol in her description of navigating the task and place:

"I felt actually quite humiliated, I felt really stupid I suppose they did their job properly, the solicitor made me doubt my own assessment, I suppose the type of person I was I can't really hide my reactions. I suppose he played on that, he knew that I was getting a bit [intake of breath] but I didn't know that actually at any point the witness can take a break, they can say to the sheriff, or, whoever's speaking to them, I just need five minutes. You're allowed to do that and instead of actually focusing on the fact that yes, we did have more than enough evidence for that and in the end, the outcome, was what we asked for but I thought about, I actually thought about jacking it all in."

Extract 8: Carol

Carol associates this learning experience with *being unlucky* with the chance element of being in this place having been allocated this particular case. The legacy and impact are still present for Carol who highlights her experience of being a target:

"At the time it felt like it was me and my practice but actually, I was unlucky in being that worker to that case at that stage. They focused on a couple of detailed records I'd written and me being the person I am in court, I was saying, well that was my first time writing them so, maybe, looking back now if I wrote it again, I'd

write it different. I shouldn't have said that. I should have just been almost a bit arrogant.

I don't ever want to be in court again. I know it might happen. It can happen in any social work case but I thought I didn't want to set myself up to fail. I knew that, they were just trying to get to whoever they could but I suppose it was and I even said that in court, because I was an easy target."

Extract 9: Carol

Extract 10 shows Carol physically and emotionally making sense of her work task and role. The impact on personal life was also identified as part of her learning as a social worker. The main cases described within her accounts of learning from practice show some of extraordinary experiences that she has navigated and made sense of. Her practice has often literally involved life and death scenarios generating the theme *Extreme practice as normal task*. Experiencing ethical challenges has characterised a difficult learning journey:

"I can't believe I'm saying this happened, they cut up the clothes of a lady who had learning disabilities because they were too revealing and they didn't want her to wear them. They were her clothes you know and I thought I can't ignore that.

I think it's always stuck in my mind because it just goes against what you think practitioners are doing day to day it was huge so I just said and I think she knew by my face she went you're going to report me and I said I'm going to have to challenge your practice and I'm going to raise it because that's not acceptable and just even now I can't believe someone would think that was ok.

I must have known my responsibilities as well. I knew that that was absolutely not ok, this was clearly not ok."

Extract 10: Carol

Having a conscious awareness of being a reflective practitioner was an essential component of Carol's continual learning as a social worker and her articulation of what her experience of learning means:

"I think it means to be adaptable, because the worse thing for me is to be fixed in my practice. I'd hate that to happen.

There are so many different bits to it but I think for me the biggies are being a reflective practitioner. You've got to constantly adapt and change your practice because legislation changes, policy changes."

Extract 11: Carol

Learning through other people, including the significance of early learning experiences in university placements has been influential for Carol. These early experiences have also been down to chance. Learning through work for Carol is described as through others within a team, noting that learning experiences do not easily lead to certainty about future practice:

"Learning in work, I think the team need to be up for learning as well and your manager. I think currently I'm really lucky because the nature of our job, we can maybe plan more in terms of discussing cases, or I mean we had a foster carer die a couple of weeks ago and you know we were able just as a team to reflect, just on, how we were feeling. You know my manager was really good in saying, 'this has just been like the worst week ever and do you know what, just, you know, take your time this week'. We all had to chip in and deal with that and manage the kids and so you know I think that learning means, I suppose being able to speak about it in the first place but then how do we learn from that, and how do we then manage that in the future?"

Extract 12: Carol

4.3.3 Reuben "Like being on the moon"

Reuben's experience is summarised in the web shown as Figure 25. Reuben draws from experiences before qualifying as a social worker as significant and influential in his lengthy career. Reuben elected to begin his description at the beginning of what he sees as his learning journey, a parallel with the trajectory of his life alongside becoming a social worker. These experiences are linked clearly to his motivation, values, a sense of finding his way and fitting in within his work.

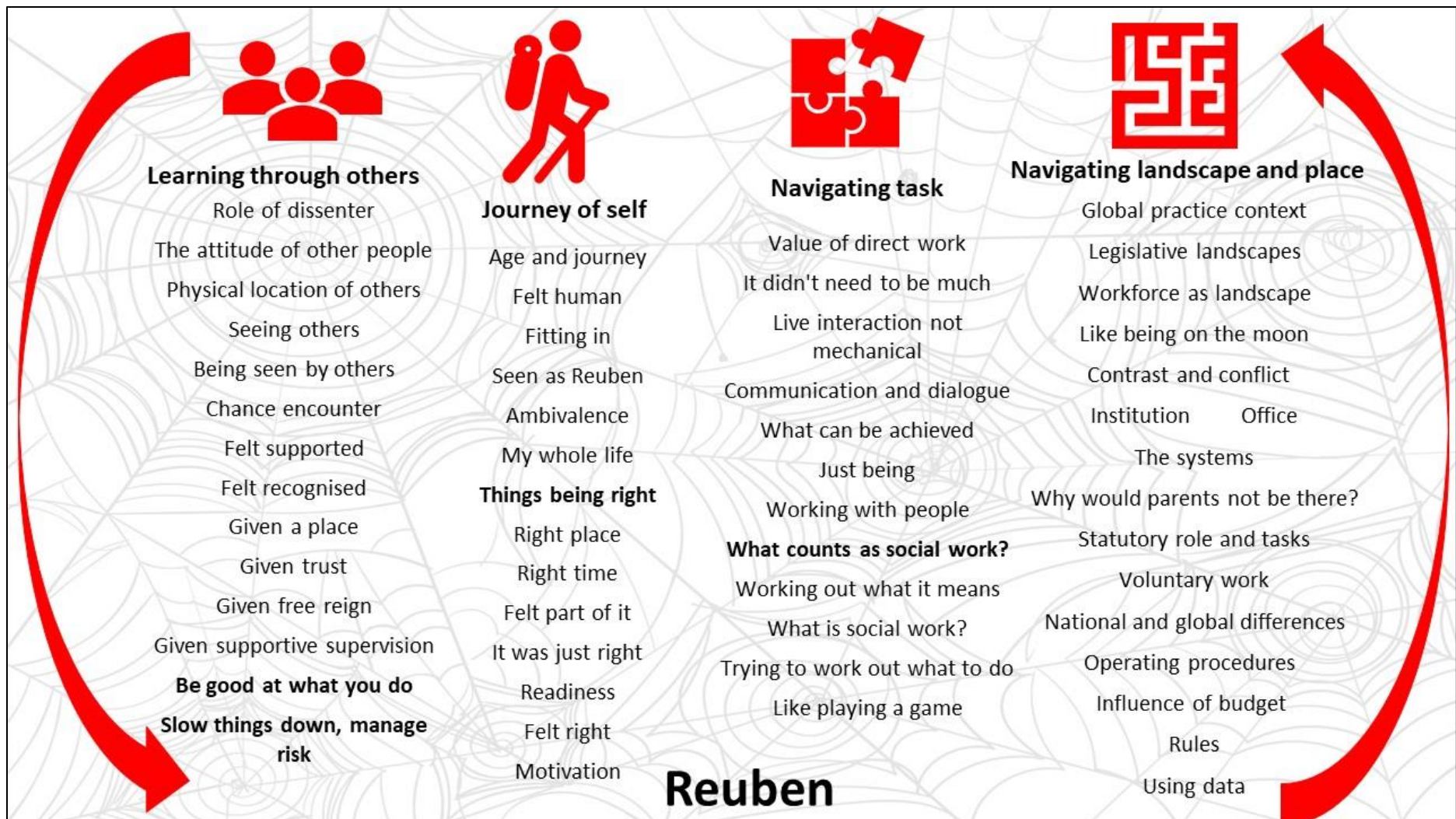


Figure 25: Reuben lived experience

His journey of self as a developing professional is explored through contrasting workplace learning experiences where he *felt alien* and *felt human* linked with significant learning about *things being right*. These aspects of experience are connected within the theme *Journey of self with things being right* shown in bold within this in the diagram. The learning associated with these experiences indicated the importance of fit for Reuben as a person in order to do meaningful work that is valued highly by him.

Reuben's experience wrestles with *what counts as social work?* this forming part of the superordinate theme *Navigating task*. The *value of direct work* and the possibilities of practice are a feature of how Reuben describes learning through tasks, learning through interaction about what can be achieved. The importance of direct work with people weaves through the range of learning experiences as Reuben provides descriptions of navigating workplaces with contrasting geographic and practice landscapes. The extract below shows the embodied experience of learning through the senses as Reuben navigated task and place, learning through interaction with a young person:

"At very short notice I was asked to just come and be with her and somebody who was one of the workers there made play dough and I sat with that girl for about two hours just passing the play dough between us, and the stickiness of this, it was quite calming for both of us actually and it was also, you know, it didn't need to be much.

I mean the smells and objects associated with that experience were all about just being in a kind of quite bright room with nothing special in the room except desks and stuff to play with but the play dough and the calmness, you know doing the job, which was to make sure nothing bad happened over the next two hours, it was almost zen-like, quite good.

I suppose one of the dilemmas of being a social worker is that you are working within a framework, if you're in a statutory sector where it's about rules, assessment, it's about quite formal processes, it's often about conflict as well and sometimes those rules and the presenting problems and issues and challenges and all that kind of stuff draw you away from the person.

I felt that in that place you know it wasn't just mechanical, it was total dialogue if you like, she couldn't speak you know but there was just you know a sort of interaction, a live interaction that was important and I that one of my views of social work in every context is

that it's about good communication, it's about dialogue, it's about not losing the person no matter what formal process you are engaged in."

Extract 13: Reuben

Learning through practice within contrasting geographic and practice settings contributed to Reuben's learning and his sense of fit or otherwise:

"Everybody was accessible and probably because it was a small department, more or less all in the same building – so you did see your director, you did see your head of children's services and that kind of stuff and there was that kind of human context to it as well. So, you felt human, felt that I was part of it. You know if you had a hard time there would be somebody there just to say, 'what was that like then?' You know, take a bit of time, sort of debrief a wee bit formally and informally you know and that was an expected part of the role as well.

They treated you like a person rather than a commodity or you know someone who performed a function that was useful. So I suppose you were seen not just as 'The Social Worker', you were seen as Reuben, and again people knew enough about me to show an interest without being intrusive, you know I found that was good, it was just right."

Extract 14: Reuben

In contrast to this sense of fit, another setting is described very differently showing how Reuben described learning in a different country as he is *Navigating landscape and place*:

"I was thinking this is a bit alien. It made me think about how much I was able to be achieved for those kids without doing a hell of a lot of paperwork and a lot of other stuff. The value of direct work is significant, so I suppose I learned that from doing social work in a different way, in a different country

The context was alien it was like being on the moon but on the other hand the direct work with kids was really, really productive and really, really rewarding I saw amazing changes in quite a short period of time in how their lives were going.. I certainly learned a fair bit. That was quite a learning experience really, you know. Is that social work?"

Extract 15: Reuben

Learning through others weaves through most aspects of Reuben's experiences from within very different settings across his career. This includes the *role of the*

dissenter in his early experiences and the attitudes of other people. The influence of many experiences from early in Reuben's career continue to shape his approach to work and what he identifies as significant learning points. He identifies specific learning points within the work examples through working alongside other social work colleagues who have influenced his career. A chance encounter with a colleague led to one of his most significant learning points as he tried to manage the different demands of the system in which he was working:

"If it's not life or limb, don't say I'm not interested, I don't care, but say I'm going to take my time over this with you and we're going to work out what to do next which I thought was good advice, so it has always stuck with me. Slow things down, do things in a planned way, manage the risk and you know if it is life or limb, act"

Extract 16: Reuben

The learning point was a profound part of Reuben's experience hence the position of this as part of the theme *Learning through others*, forming a subordinate theme within this. This mantra continues to guide Reuben's practice.

4.3.4 Chloe "Just need to get the middle ground"

Chloe's lived experience is characterised by learning through other people, learning to navigate tasks within diverse settings and her ethical drive guiding her learning process, within highly emotive practice examples. Her lived experience of learning as a social worker is summarised in the web shown as Figure 26. She uses several metaphors to describe her navigating herself within the role and practice tasks which form the subordinate themes of *Navigating landscape and place*.

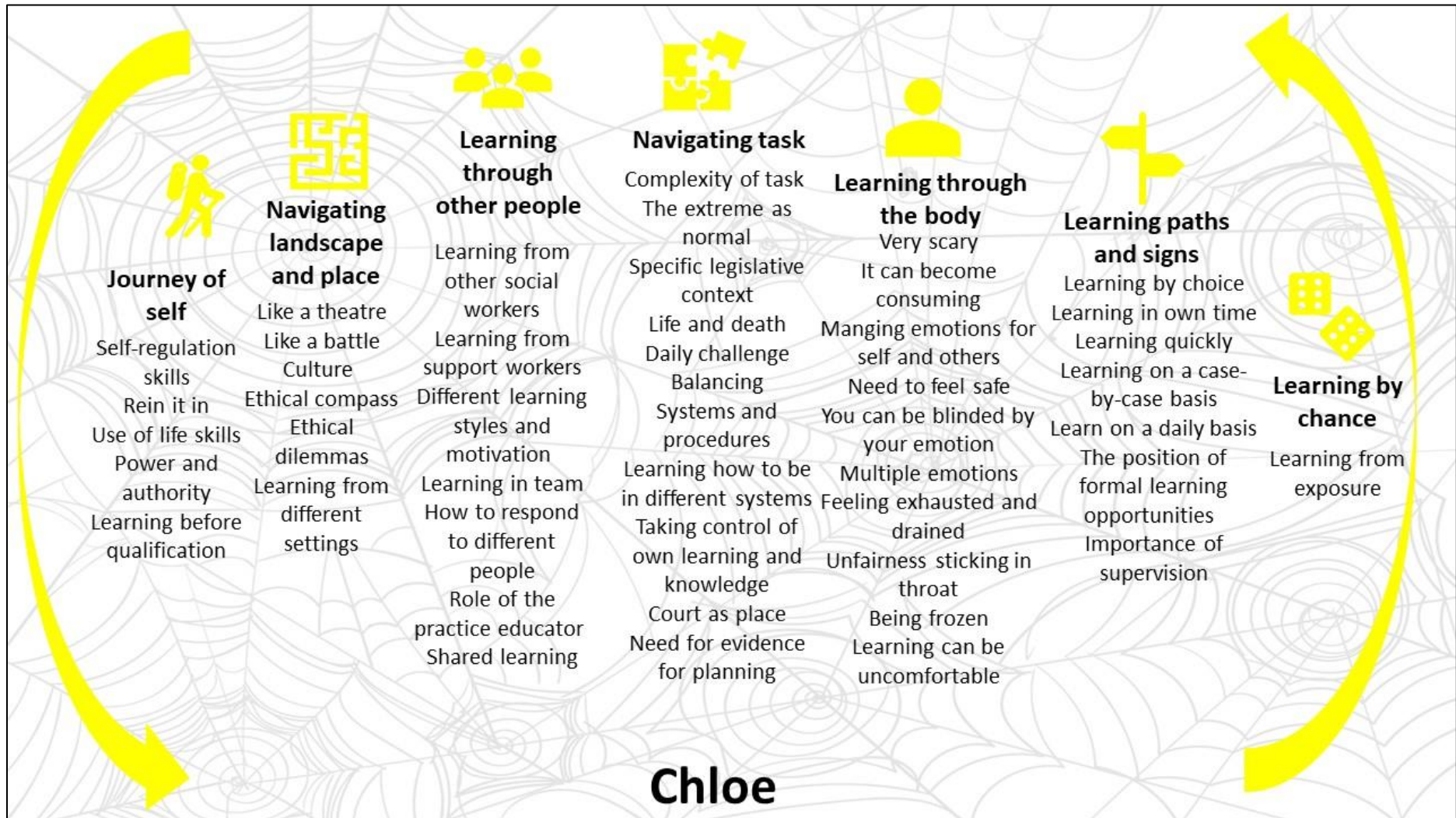


Figure 26: Chloe lived experience

Chloe's ethical compass within the landscape of social work practice has been a core element of her journey as a person:

"A sense of unfairness and that kind of thing really sticks in my throat a bit, the unfairness and people being treated unfairly and people having rights and it does kind of grind on me a bit when I can see that is not happening and I think that's an important part of learning - being able to have opportunities and forums to develop your confidence to speak out when you perceive that to be happening."

Extract 17: Chloe

Learning through working with others and through different places also characterise her experience. Different styles and levels of motivation have influenced Chloe's practice and the shaping of her *Journey of self. Learning through other people* has generated learning about the processes, culture and practices of social work even when Chloe has been in roles prior to her own qualifying training:

"The family support role was massive learning. I was surrounded by people who were keen to learn and I was surrounded by a team of people who wanted to learn and there was a culture of being able to explore alternative views or alternative thoughts and challenge those views."

I think, if you are in a culture where you are not allowed to either be creative or have a view that is perhaps different than department processes or procedures or what has always gone on before that. That can stifle creativity and then I think you don't get the opportunity to maybe practice social work."

You almost kind of become like a robot. For example, permanence. This is what you have to do. A friend of mine calls it 'the bus', and you almost get on that bus and you have to go to the destination because that is what the processes tell you."

Extract 18: Chloe

Following from the idea of "getting on the bus" as metaphor for practice, Chloe also uses the metaphor of *theatre* to describe her learning as a social worker negotiating and navigating tasks, places and roles:

"It is juggling all those different bits of your day to day role and position. I gave an example of children's hearing systems and it being as theatre, everybody has their roles to play and where do you fit into that and almost what lines do you kind of have to learn to get through that maybe hour, to an hour and a half, of a hearing. Sometimes just having

those in your back pocket and thinking, in this situation, this is what I have to do. You can only do it by practice and experience. Learning how to be in different settings, so maybe a different persona working with a child and a different persona being in the hearing system.”

Extract 19: Chloe

Chloe uses the terms of *battle* within her description showing a sense of being on high alert, facing challenges and being under threat. Battle mode has triggered learning about managing self and self-regulation for Chloe:

“It’s also having to learn that you sometimes need to rein it in, because if you don’t, there’s probably times that you can appear too confident or too cheeky or disrespectful. I suppose I probably had to learn that over my period of time as a social worker, about sometimes just getting middle ground, you might just need to get the middle ground, but not compromising in terms of the legislation or ethics and stuff, but sometimes knowing when to stop.

That’s been a bit of learning, being able to rein it in. I struggle with it and I am better at it than I used to be but that’s a whole skill that you have to learn. Back to the battle metaphor. Knowing which battles are worth fighting and which aren’t and almost sometimes having to make peace with the battles that you don’t take on.”

Extract 20: Chloe

Different workplaces are woven through Chloe’s experience of learning as a social worker. These different places lead to complex challenges involving the nature of the task and the legislative system and the associated skills required to negotiate and navigate this unpredictable landscape. The forum of court is an arena within the landscape of practice for Chloe that generated significant *Learning through the body*, through emotional and physical discomfort:

“It was very scary, not a good experience not a good experience at all. It unsettles you. It made me question myself as a practitioner. It made me question my role and could I have done anything different at that point in time. It made me think that, at times, it made me think that maybe I shouldn’t do this job, made me question the processes within the service.

It was a very uncomfortable place to be. Uncomfortable with my own practice. Uncomfortable that other people would have seen those aspects of practice and I think I touched on earlier, that I like to feel confident in what I am doing, present well and I was worried that I probably didn’t appear like that

to other people now. I suppose my practice was open to, very much, to scrutiny.

It was a really difficult place to be for a while and also it felt, probably, quite difficult for the child as well involved. So having to manage the emotions for myself but manage almost all the emotions of the different players in it as well, because there was a lot of mutual support going on with different people that were involved. It was a really difficult experience and one that I wouldn't want ever to repeat but, in retrospect, lots of learning from that and I suppose the learning from it is that learning can be uncomfortable and that certainly was uncomfortable."

Extract 21: Chloe

Chloe's conceptions of workplace learning for herself as a social worker involve a high commitment to self-directed study, *learning quickly* and *learning on a case by case basis*. Although formal learning opportunities are mentioned as being important, such as post-graduate study, Chloe stresses the integration of learning through work as the main path to her learning.

4.3.5 Maisie "Not a normal job"

Maisie's learning experiences have involved strong elements of learning through her body about the complexity of the social work role and task. Maisie is passionate about learning through many pathways including, direct work, formal training and continuing academic study. She describes distinct workplaces where this learning has occurred, notably family homes, a sheriff's house, police cells and a residential school. Figure 27 shows Maisie's superordinate and subordinate themes that include her intense, sensory experience of *Learning through the body* when navigating diverse places, *different worlds* and multiple tasks.

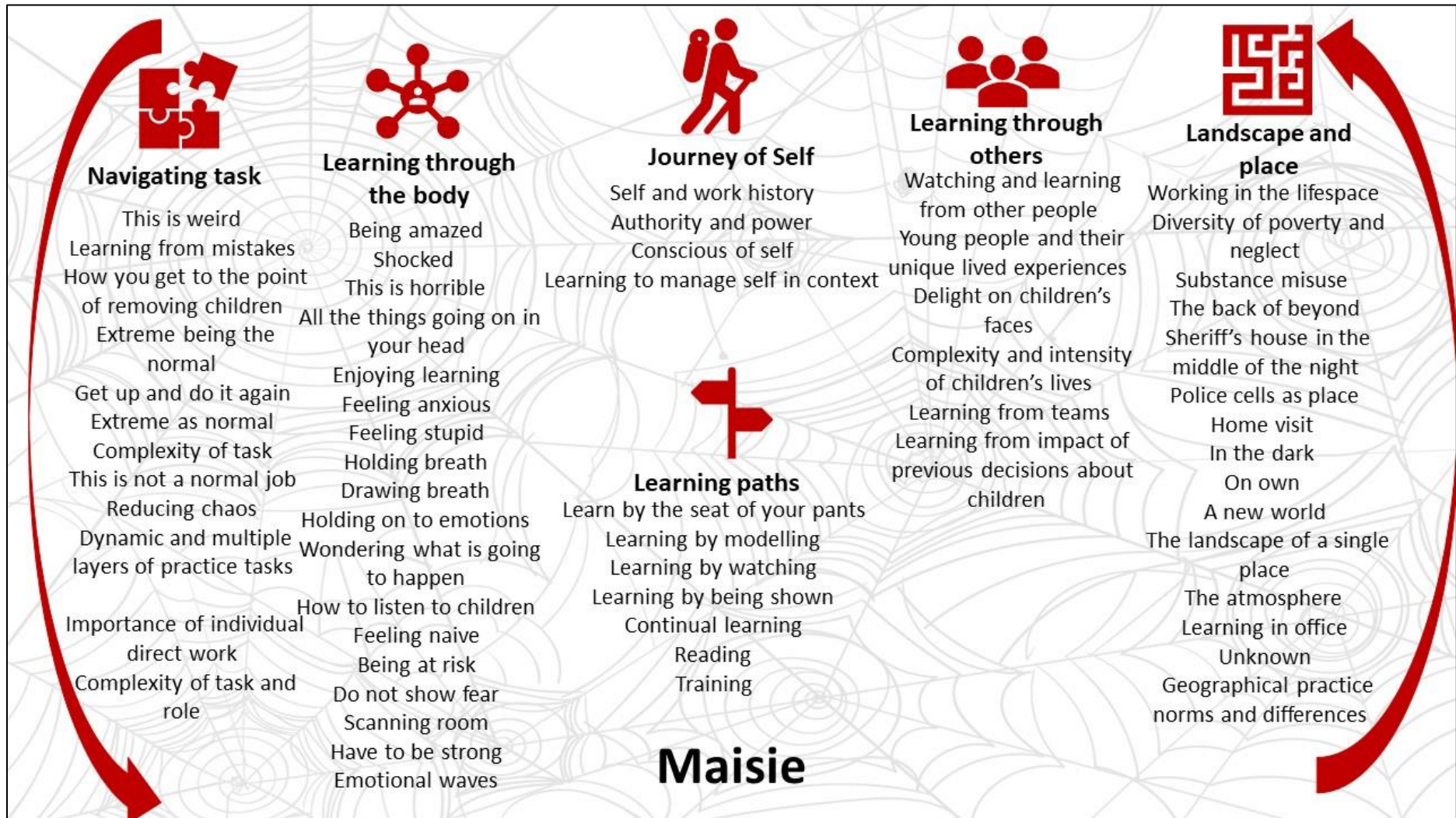


Figure 27: Maisie lived experience

Power and authority are important components of the learning experiences, including Maisie's own role and the role of others. The complexity of practice and the extremes are part of the work that Maisie describes as "*not a normal job*", with each place having many aspects and each task many parts, within an uncertain sequence. Contrasting examples were described by Maisie with one used to encapsulate many of the elements of the learning experience shown in Figure 27. The extract below involves trying to secure a Child Protection Order (CPO) out of ordinary working hours at the home of a sheriff and is presented here as Maisie's articulation of an important learning example. The physical and emotional experience of place is described, navigating place and task:

"I'm driving up to a massive house, brand new lovely mansion, up dark roads, in the middle of the countryside, in the dark, to get a sheriff to sign this CPO. It was just that sense of, 'this is weird', it's kind of a crazy existence where you're driving to the back of beyond, to get this signature, in this massive house. The guy has got a big old oak table desk, you know, he is living in the lap of luxury, he comes down in his slippers, you know from upstairs, he has just finished work and I am arriving in his private house and I am like, please sign it, please sign it, please sign it, please feel it is enough to actually remove these children and it is a very weird experience.

I'm not comfortable, but you go 'this is all doable, this is totally fine, it's ok', you know and you are telling yourself in your head, he is just a man, yes he has a lot of authority and yes he is going to change the life of this family and yes he is going to, but I seriously want you to listen. I want you to make this fine, so it was that feeling of fear, intimidation, but in a nice way, in the sense that this man might make it all right."

Extract 22: Maisie

Developing the description, Maisie discussed more of the sensory elements of the learning experience and the contrasts in place and people's lives:

"There was all this sensory stuff, like the carpet, the shoes he was wearing, take your shoes off at the door, tip toeing. I felt inside, I was tip toeing, hoping that everything would go alright and physically taking your shoes off because of this beautiful carpet. It was just a strange way that we work together and also use the systems and how, you know, the difference in people's lifestyles as well. I mean, it is stark contrast, you know, somebody that has the power to put somebody in jail or in prison or sign the paper to say, you know, 'this child can be removed'.

In the other experience, where I am intimidated by a violent man, this time I am intimidated by this other man who is very powerful but at the same time, I know he has the power to make it all better. It's like, 'this is going to be fine', the comfy carpets, you walk through into the study and it's full of stuff but he's got his family photographs and I'm thinking 'this is all very personal'. I don't think I should be in his house, having signed the paper, yes we can go and we can find these children a home but at the same time, I am thinking 'this is only the start of this journey'."

Extract 23: Maisie

The detail of the multiple aspects of Maisie's task and her experience of this then follow:

"We've got so much more work to do, so ok you're going to print off all the papers, you're going to send them down to the children's hearing. Once this is signed, it was like back to the office, six sets of notes or five sets of notes or whatever. One for the file, one for the social worker, one for the foster carer, one for the children's hearing, one for the court system. Everybody needs to have the same information and make sure this is going to fit tight. We're thinking, we've got to settle these children. We know that these two children are going to this place and that place. We've got social workers doing all the delivery of the notes. I was just like [draws breath] this is just a machine [pause] it's an absolute machine to just make this all work whilst removing children from their own home."

Extract 24: Maisie

Maisie's learning experience concludes with intense detail and the verbatim extract is not punctuated showing the pace and flow of her account of the work task, drawing in emotion of self and others:

"So my last job of the day and this was about 9 o'clock at night was to go down to the police and serve the papers on the parents through the prison doors I'm standing downstairs in the bottom and I'd never been there before ok now I have to tell them they're in their vulnerable state I'm feeling for them and I've to open this little door and talk to them I'm with the police officer and I've to talk to them and their children have been removed to foster care which they never wanted to happen one was in one cell and next door was the husband and so it was like open this little shutter speak to them they are in a white suit kind of stopped from hurting themselves and they're crying and all this and I am thinking this is not normal this is not a normal job."

Extract 25: Maisie

Maisie refers to a different example in Extract 23 which was also described in rich detail and involved extreme and intense emotions *Learning through the body*.

Maisie describes the notion of *all the things going on in your head, feeling anxious, feeling stupid, holding breath, drawing breath* as rich elements of her learning experiences. Learning to manage self and “*not show fear*” are a specific learning point, learned in action through practice in a home visit. These aspects of her learning form subordinate themes as shown in Figure 27.

The paths to learning in these workplaces identified by Maisie, have involved *learning by modelling, learning by watching* and *learning by being shown*. This positions the role of others in Maisie’s learning in specific ways. Learning directly through children is also an important subordinate theme for Maisie in *Learning through others*. This has involved learning by seeing children, really listening to them and developing authentic empathy for understanding their unique lived experience.

4.3.6 Stuart “No instruction manual”

Stuart’s experience of learning is most closely associated with his personal life, values, motivation and trajectory from an earlier career in something that had less “*fit*” for him. He describes his deep desire for continual life-long and life-wide learning beyond the job role that is very connected to his values about education and his ethical commitment to social justice. His experience is shown in the web Figure 28.

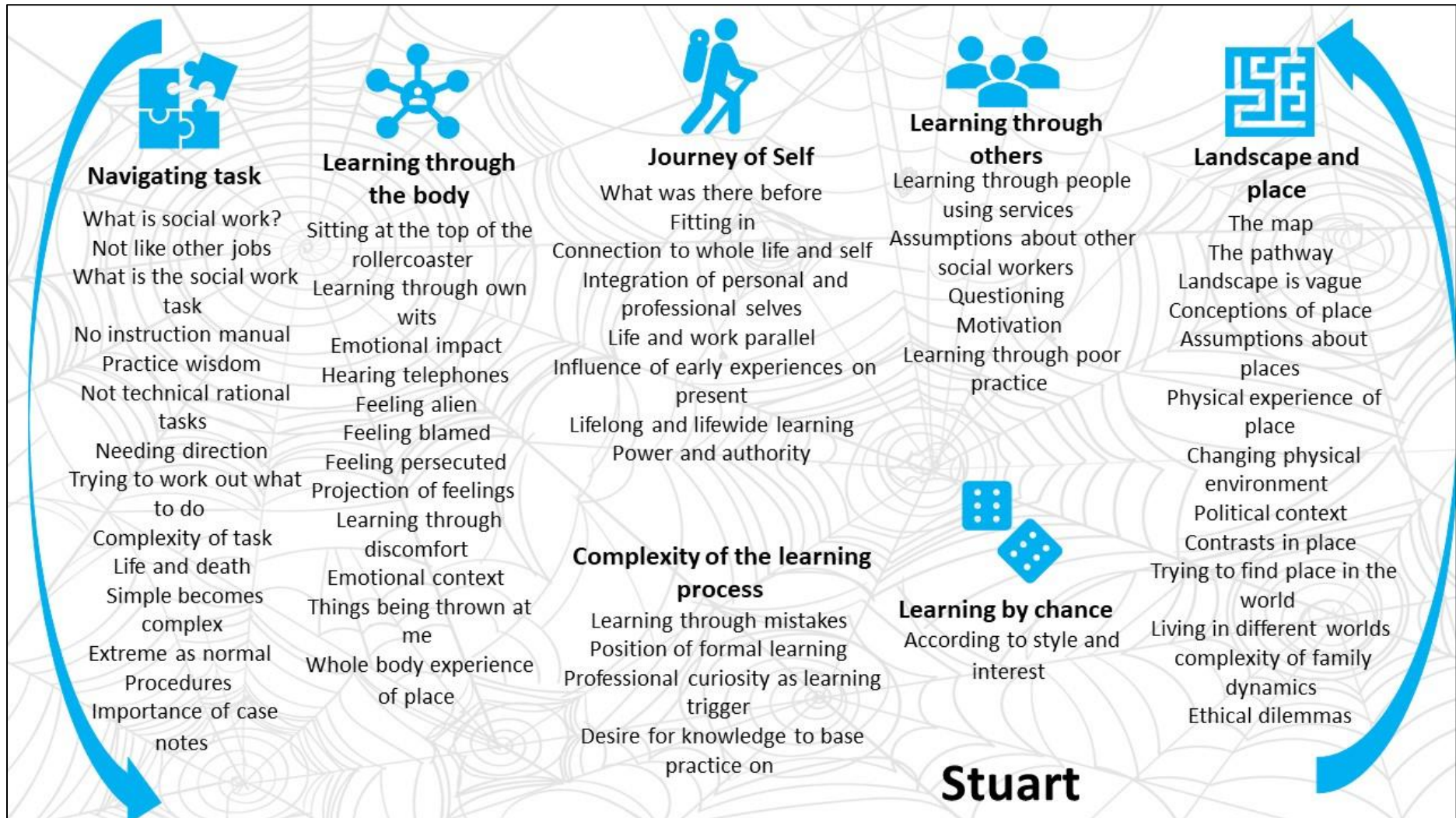


Figure 28: Stuart lived experience

Stuart has no separation between his personal and professional selves, with one being a clear expansion of the other, set within context of all that he has lived and grown through:

"I can't really comment on that without sort of talking about why I kind of got there and what was there before going into social work, that's probably my starting point, really represented a significant investment in me financially, emotionally in terms of my identity in terms of my choosing a career path that was more true to my real self, the self that I wanted to be in order to satisfy my grandfather's wishes for me.

Regardless of where I have been working, I've been doing a job, that I think, has been where I think I fit in and that fits in with my own sense of myself as an individual.

I think the learning is about somebody as an individual and the social work is just a kind of a part of that."

Extract 26: Stuart

His interest in learning means that he may have learned things that others have not, it is by chance that he has sought out learning opportunities to develop his understanding of and practice in social work:

"There are folks that are keen to acquire knowledge and other folk that are content to rest on their laurels and that is just I suppose is not for me."

Extract 27: Stuart

His practice in different geographic locations provided insight into his experience of place in his learning, having strong emotional responses linked to assumptions about place. There being no rule book is in stark contrast with a previous career where there were clear manuals for tasks:

"It was the complete opposite of as a surveyor we had this book, I kind of felt like I was going from something that was a completely rigorous, methodical way of working it felt like to me a bit like being a lawyer without any legislation or something.

This was the complete opposite of what I was doing as a surveyor where it was clear what the meeting was, it was very clear what the presenting problem was or the solution that we were trying to get to and it was very clear afterwards who was required to do what or not and I was sitting in this meeting and folk were just talking about all sorts of things and worrying about this or folk sitting there saying nothing

and at the end the meeting finished and they arranged the next date and I was thinking what on earth was that about that was a shambles.”

Extract 28: Stuart

His learning has been focused on trying to understand what social work is at both the conceptual and procedural level. He describes feeling as if *sitting at the top of the rollercoaster* in terms of social work being something has chosen to do, yet the whole-body experience of learning and doing are characterised by anxiety, excitement and uncertainty:

“I could see people themselves in their own world were working methodically but I couldn’t work out what it was that they were doing or seemed to be able to explain to me how that was.

I’m really interested in not just what we do and how we do it but how we do what we do and why we are doing what we do. I think it is very easy to become a competent practitioner in social work by learning from others, you know folk have tried it that way and it worked, but not really understanding why they are doing it. The senior social worker, he used to be talking about a case, he would always ask what the social work task is.”

Extract 29: Stuart

In learning as a social worker, the ambiguity of the task is a key part of Stuart’s detailed description:

“I think that as part of my learning journey, social work as it was being presented to me was a bit directionless, or a bit unclear, or a bit vague and I used to get a wee bit kind of irritated, probably still do, actually, when I would maybe hear an example of someone saying, we are supporting the family but when you start to dig deeper, what does that mean, what is being provided, what is the aim, how will you know when they have been supported enough and never feeling like you got answers to the questions and I think that permeated for me the whole of social work certainly as I had experienced it directly.”

Extract 30: Stuart

4.3.7 Stephen “It’s real people and real emotions”

Stephen’s sense of self within the role of social worker has been driven by moral and ethical values. His experience is characterised by many elements that centre on a deeply personal learning cycle and clear learning points articulated through

complex practice examples as shown in Figure 29. He has learned from early experiences of places about respect for other people and the idea that they will make positive choices if given the right conditions. This is a message carried through practice many years later.

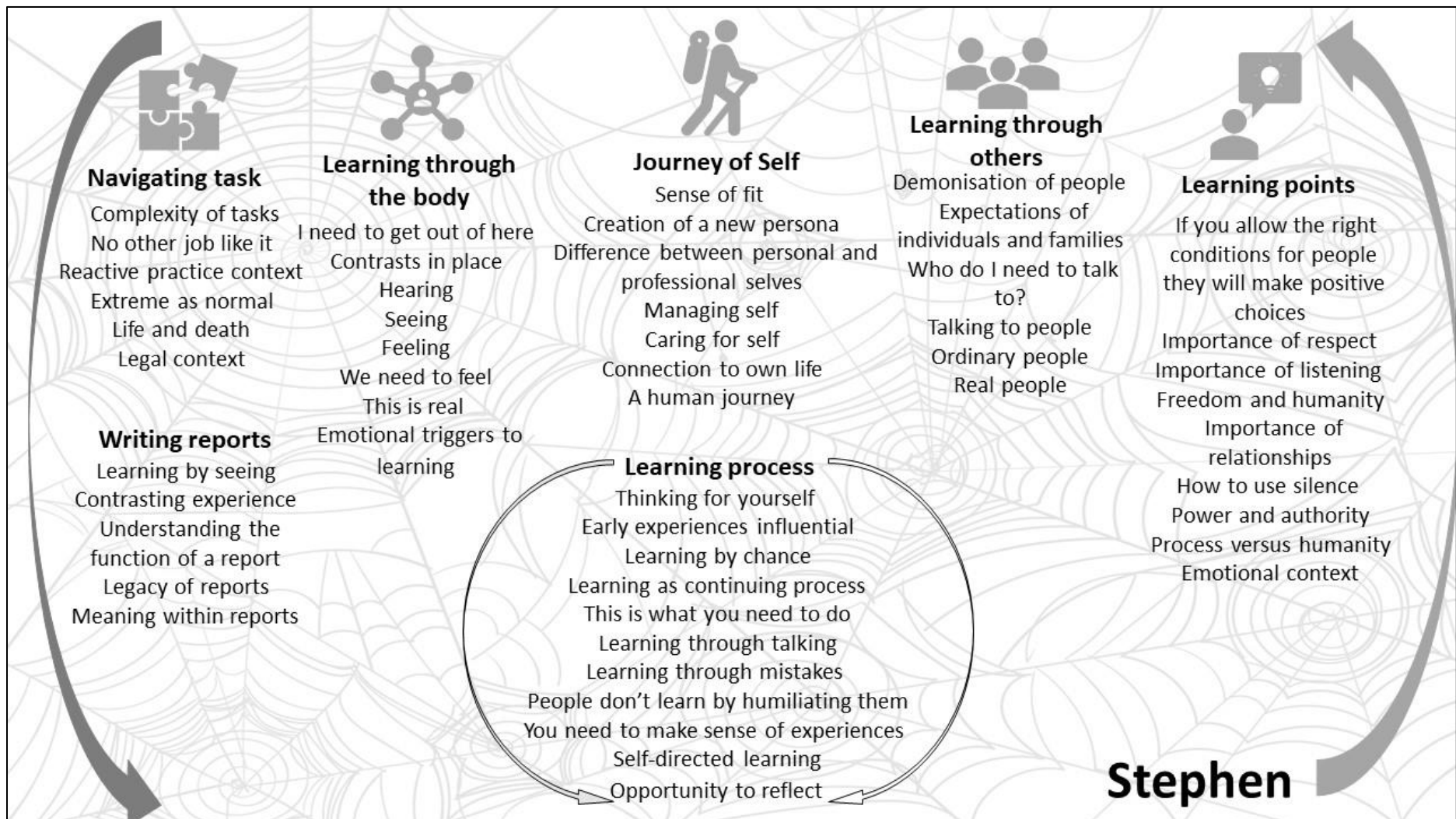


Figure 29: Stephen lived experience

One physical experience of learning was when Stephen chose to visit a special unit in a Scottish prison, where part of his learning was being locked into a cell to experience the conditions. This significant learning experience was accidental in that Stephen and other colleagues just decided to approach the prison to visit many years ago:

"I can still remember that first 5 minutes oh my god I need to get out of here. I couldn't begin to describe how claustrophobic this was, fifteen minutes in an 8 x 12 cell, knowing that someone was going to come and unlock the door and it was a horrendous experience.

If what you do is give people some control back and you allow them to make positive choices well that is exactly what they will do. You had real live people, who three or four years before were looking at being locked up for the rest of their lives, who were actually moving towards getting out of prison, who were creative, who were giving something back and that really stuck with me over the years."

Extract 31: Stephen

The learning points within other areas of Stephen's journey feature a strong commitment to fairness and learning through work with people who are experiencing social work intervention:

"In relation to accommodating a baby from hospital, I remember being so caught up in the 'have I got all the right bits of paper signed', that I forgot, when we actually left the hospital, I never said anything to them about 'have you got somebody that can come here and be with you' and of course the moment is lost. It crossed my mind momentarily in the car park and there were two of us. I was like 'do you want to just take the baby and I'm going to just nip back', because that is gone then. Bad enough that you don't say it in the first place but then to come back and say I had a bit of an afterthought..."

Extract 32: Stephen

His learning is articulated, and the description deepened, as he described his embodied emotional experience in this extract navigating the social work task:

"Leaving the hospital room, the mum, she didn't actually get my leg but she threw herself off the bed towards us like she was trying to grab at our legs and the noise, I was going to say the tears, I don't know what it was. It was kind of something fairly primal that she let out and when we were going home that night, thinking, actually recognising what I

should have, well maybe not should have, but maybe hoped to have known before. That bit about whatever justification we have for what we are doing, that doesn't take away the pain that people feel and you need to allow people the opportunity, to recognise with them, to actually say in a way that is meaningful to them, that you understand. It is real people we are dealing with here and real emotions."

Extract 33: Stephen

The learning experience is hugely connected to learning through the people he is working with and managing expectations and procedures:

"Yes, we are powerful and yes we are going to have to do things that aren't going to be right for the parents and brothers and sisters but we have to recognise that they are still parents. They might be bad parents but they still have some of the emotional attachments. It is still their children and they still grieve and more so when you're going to a hospital when a woman has just given birth. No matter what your justification is, she is going to grieve in exactly the same way as if somebody had just come and taken her baby, you know snatched her baby out of the hospital [pause]."

In terms of learning I hope from that time that at the very least people feel like we have given people the opportunity to do and say whatever they need to say for that moment rather than getting caught up in 'let's make sure we've got every bit of paperwork right' and that we've you know done all the stuff on the computers that we need to do. My experience since then has been, if you allow people the opportunity to say what they have got to say, to shout at you, whatever they need to do, getting them to sign a bit of paper is a piece of cake, you know or they will not sign it and you'll just have to deal with it and the chances are that if you hadn't listened to them they wouldn't have signed it either."

Extract 34: Stephen

In order to learn to be a social worker Stephen describes how he created a different version of himself:

"I'll go to hearings. I will go to court but I hate standing up in front of crowds of people and I said I don't think I can do this. He started off by saying, 'so you are really nervous and really don't feel you can do this but what would an ideal social worker be able to do', and I said 'be able to stand up and do justice to the work', and he said, 'right ok what would that perfect social worker be called', and I said 'Steve'."

Extract 35: Stephen

Managing the emotional context of practice was recurrent in descriptions of Stephen's learning experiences.

"I do think emotion drives the learning. I don't think it always has to do that but certainly, that's what you would hope people take from it because you have to make sense of it somehow and if you don't make sense of it you are either going to repeat the same things, that with reflection, you could have done differently, or you are going to burn out because you couldn't live, spending 5 days a week, tearing yourself apart because things didn't go the way you hoped they would and you left people feeling less than they should have."

Extract 36: Stephen

The element of chance was striking in Stephen's experience, this related to where he had been on qualifying placements, his choices, own motivation for learning and the teams he had thereafter been part of:

"It's such a lottery isn't it because I could have had 3 different placements and I've no doubt there would have been some learning from them but you kind of land on that, but it is completely by chance. I think we are kind of training people to do this job but if we don't know what the job actually is how can we do that?"

Extract 37: Stephen

Learning to write reports was stressed by Stephen as central within the navigation of tasks and identified as a subordinate theme of its own:

"But it is such an important part of our job and it is such a skill to be able to write reports that they actually do what they're supposed to do and I think that I don't know if you can teach somebody how to do it.

If you write a report for a hearing they are often incredibly negative and when I read them, I say, 'is there nothing positive about this family?' because if I had never met them and you had never spoken and that is the report, I would think 'oh my god'.

My experience of families is that very, very, rarely would you meet someone that you would not have something positive to say about them. I think the other bit is about the narrative, we tend to, and I am probably as guilty of telling a story with lots of information but not enough analysis, of what does this actually say to us.

You could have this whole table covered with volumes of information about a family but if there isn't some place, somewhere that somebody has sat down and said, 'what does it all mean?'

Extract 38: Stephen

Stephen refers to learning explicitly throughout his description of practice. He approaches this with the strong moral belief that workers need a chance if they are to learn, in the same way that he believes families and individuals do.

"We will get things wrong from time to time and there is no getting away from that. We can have as many processes as we like, so yeah, I suppose supporting people with the guidance that they need and protecting them enough to allow them to make mistakes without destroying them for it."

Extract 26: Stephen

4.3.8 Maple "Going in, in your own body"

In summary, Maple's experience of learning has elements that mesh her embodied experience, confrontation with real life and navigating very difficult tasks together. The visual encapsulation Figure 30 shows the layers of these themes for Maple.

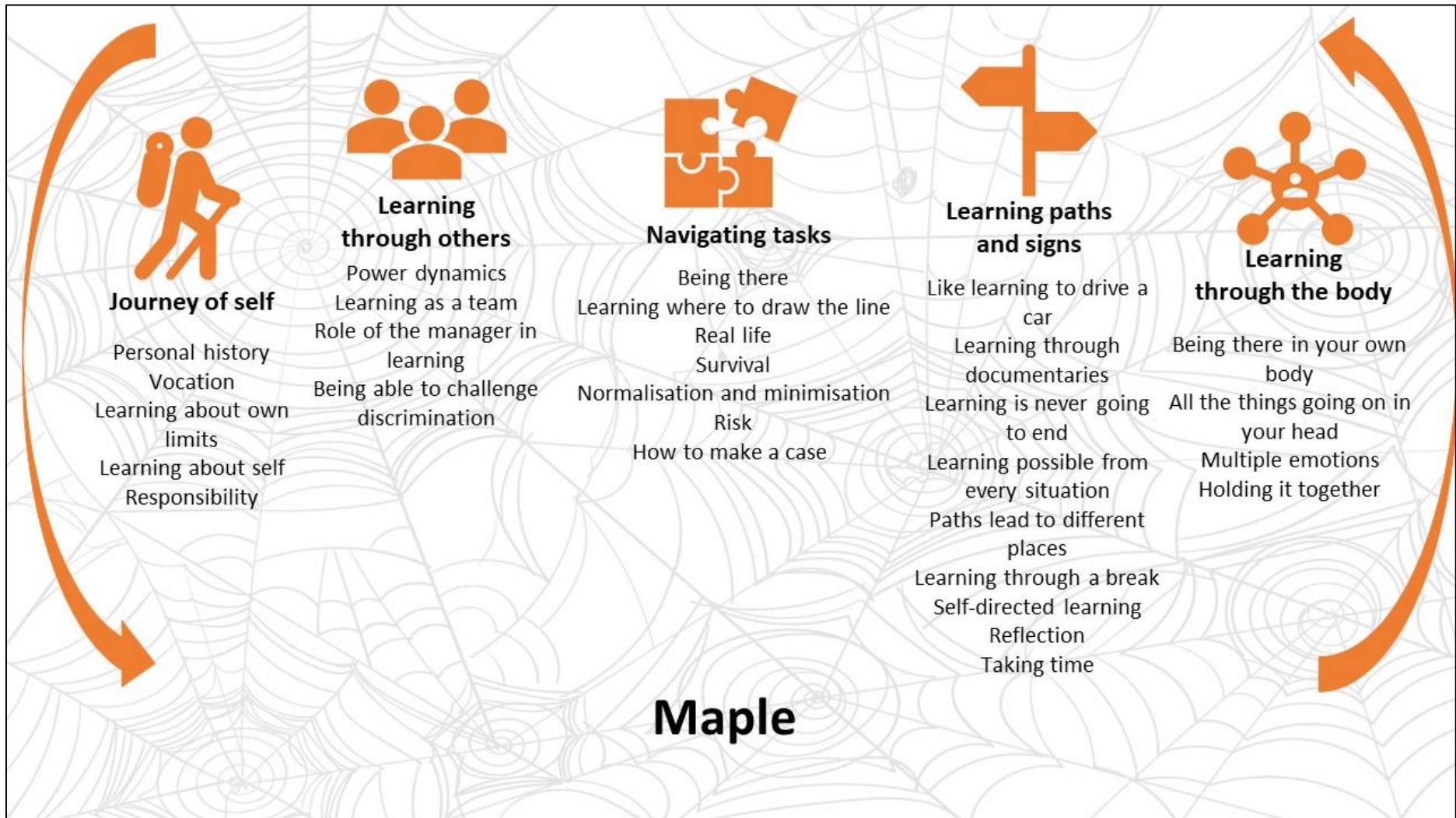


Figure 30: Maple lived experience

The following extract provides an example of how these elements are combined in Maple's learning experience, drawing in the sensory and embodied parts of her experience:

“What stuck out for me is the stark reality ... actually seeing real life and working with real live people that are in these situations with either no money or huge substance misuse problems, or you know, no food or don't know where they are staying and when I used to go out on visits, I was just walking into these houses fresh and thinking, ‘oh my god this living environment is horrendous’, and I always remember the smell of heroin as well, and thinking, ‘oh god’, almost kind of burning rubber and it was something totally unbeknown to me.

I learned that's what it was and the signs [pause] that did stick out in my mind and I think for me my thresholds as a worker now are completely different from what they were when I first started and I think you need to be mindful of that as well that you don't become, almost a bit numb and normalised to what you see on an everyday basis?, because you don't want to minimise it, you still want to recognise it as being significant and just because you see it every day doesn't mean that that's ok.”

Extract 39: Maple

The home visit setting and Maple's experience of this as the workplace is developed in her description as she articulates her learning through the body. Learning about the intensity of the job, through the body, in a family home was a feature in extract 40. This led to learning about role and risk, contributing to Maple's articulation that “*this is not an ordinary job*”, where the extraordinary is often the expected or normal:

“One flat that I was in [pause] really made me aware of the dangers of lone working, of being in the houses on your own and this was a really prevalent substance misuser, really domestically violent to their partner, there was a young child, I think she was just about, just under two at the time, she would be bouncing off the walls, just totally erratic behaviour.

I was very aware of my surroundings, like how would I get out of that flat and what would I do if he was to come in and maybe stand at the door, where would I position myself in that room and make an escape if I needed to.

Because you're mindful that you're just going in, in your own body, you might have a housing officer that's going out with an alarm and CCTV [closed circuit television] or something on them, or a body suit or whatever, you know you're very much exposed and kind of almost raw going into these almost everyday situations, so we're not police and we don't have loads of back up, we've got a mobile phone and our own feet to run out the door, kind of thing, but yeah I think having those experiences kind of made you aware of risks going into the daily role"

Extract 40: Maple

Maple sets this experience in the context of her life trajectory and personal history learning through work, a lengthy break from work and within the workplace landscape with colleagues. There have been different paths and triggers to Maple's learning that are articulated as a combination of formal and informal experiences with others in a team. She uses the metaphor of *learning to drive* to describe her learning on the job:

"I think it is very much like driving a car and when you're in the job role that's when you learn to do it and you're always learning more but for me learning you know it's informal, it's formal, it's open door policy, it's who your team manager is, they all do things differently like even your supervision can be different from other team managers or the kind of ethos of the team or the kind of thresholds of the team or how the team interacts.

I think, you know, I very much learned from people that are older than me or more experienced than me and I'll go to them if I have any questions but I do a lot of reading in my own time, I'm a total fanatic about documentaries, like I watch some of the most random documentaries ever you know documentaries about prisons or documentaries about adoption or about like there's so much stuff on and I always watch these things but you learn loads from it."

Extract 41: Maple

4.3.9 Kathleen "It's us"

Kathleen's experience is summarised in the web shown as Figure 31 which includes six superordinate themes and multiple layers of subordinate themes that weave together to form her whole experience.

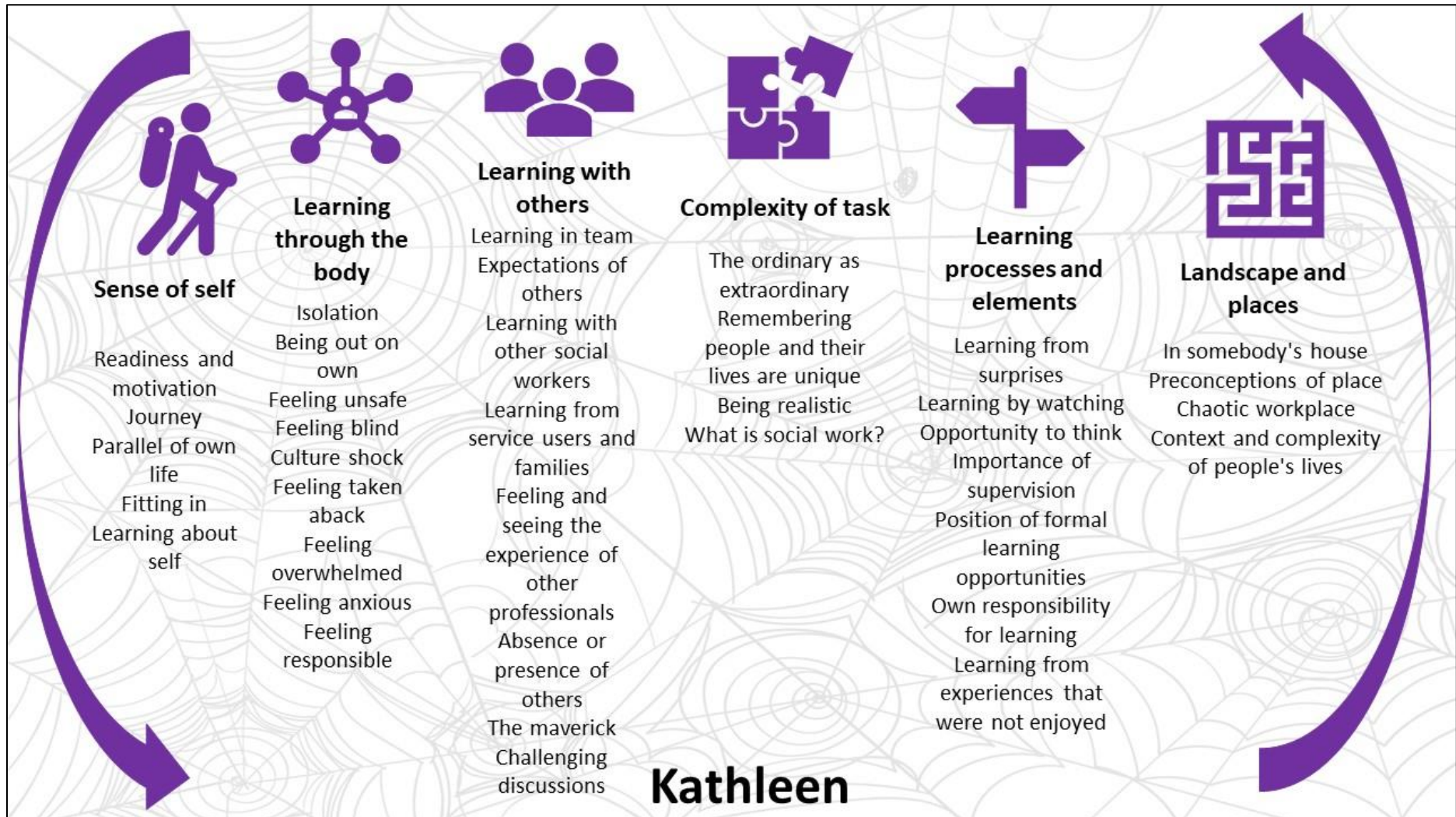


Figure 31: Kathleen lived experience

Kathleen situates her experience of learning as a social worker in the context of her life trajectory with awareness of herself firmly within the experience of undertaking the social work role and learning how to do so. Her *Sense of self* as a superordinate theme is closely linked with the experience of learning through the body senses and emotions. The complexity of task and navigation of places are also a strong feature of Kathleen's experience of learning in, through and at work.

The following extracts show some of the ways these elements were experienced by her. In the first extract Kathleen discusses elements of place, emotion, task and purpose within a striking learning experience that fundamentally shaped her understanding of what social work is and her respect for people using social work services. The experience involves Kathleen being physically and emotionally immersed within the work in a home visit as a young social worker, on her own. The extract also shows the centrality of people using services as a crucial influence on Kathleen's learning and development as a social worker:

"This was actually real and a real person's life, I think what was a wee bit overwhelming was the ordinariness of the family, I think people talk about social work and even though, in my own head I understood social work is involved with people for all sorts of reasons, and mostly for good reasons, I was still a bit taken aback I think that is why I mentioned it was like going into my mum and dad's house and you suddenly thought, 'oh wait a minute – this is social work', you know, it's not about just all the problems and all these other sorts of issues and families that are maybe living not hugely different from me? This is me, this is peoples' lives and so it was quite a powerful message, quite early on, to kind of just be put in that situation."

Extract 42: Kathleen

Kathleen reflects on how this continues to shape her approach decades later in terms of the learning points from her experience:

"I sometimes hear myself saying things in meetings even now, the idea that we don't forget, it sounds clichéd, that people are people [pause] we get caught up with, we get immersed in all these problems and it all starts getting defined by that and we're speaking about mum this and dad that – and who is this person?"

I do think that experience had an influence on me, even later on in my work trying to hold on to that, you know every family's got a story, you know the uniqueness of their life,

and it's us, you know, we're all a step away from situations, whether it's drug and alcohol or mental health, you know, it's us."

Extract 43: Kathleen

In a different example from practice Kathleen describes the physical and psychological isolation of the workplace and the sensory experience of learning through this experience. The extract highlights the feelings of being unsafe in the workplace as a site for practice and for learning:

"The building itself was really risky, I arrived and got told there's your room and it was right beside the front door and I remember sitting at the desk writing and turning round and a massive big dog right behind my arm, came wandering in and its owner then subsequently came wandering in, affected by substances so, it was winter, it was dark, the windows were all, it's on the ground floor, but the window let no light in and they got fed up replacing the glass they had put this sort of Perspex you couldn't see out, so there was no natural light, no computers, there was only one computer, all your case notes were hand written so it was, I just felt it was an assault on all the senses."

Extract 44: Kathleen

This workplace landscape contrasts with the home visit, although Kathleen is isolated in a different way. Kathleen develops her description and confirms through the follow-up interview that some of her most significant learning has come "*from the places that I least enjoyed*". The *culture shock* experienced in practice encounters remained a trigger for learning throughout her career in particular that "*you do make assumptions, you do make underestimations*". Part of the summary meaning that Kathleen associates with learning to be a social worker, is that this requires "*genuinely being open to changing your thinking.*"

Learning with others is another superordinate theme that is drawn from several threads within Kathleen's experience. In addition to learning directly from the experience of people using social work services, her learning is associated with "*seeing and hearing other professionals*" and directly through other social workers including "*the maverick*" who helps her learn about navigating the procedures:

"I think it was important that I was around other social workers in that team, I know now that now there is a lot of integration and different set ups and everything, but at that time it was, they were all social workers and social work

assistants, but it was very much a social work team and I did appreciate that.”

Extract 45: Kathleen

4.3.10 Sophie “The subconscious professional development when you are working a case”

Sophie has learned through a complex process of *Navigating task, Learning through the body* and finding her way through the workspaces and places as shown in Figure 32. She has tried to find a way through practice, learning what is expected and what is required within the processes, while experiencing intense and contrasting emotions. Her sense of continual learning is woven through the complexity of task and role. Working within a multi-agency context is central in Sophie’s expectations of herself in practice, where learning about the rhetoric and reality of this has come through contrasting experiences.

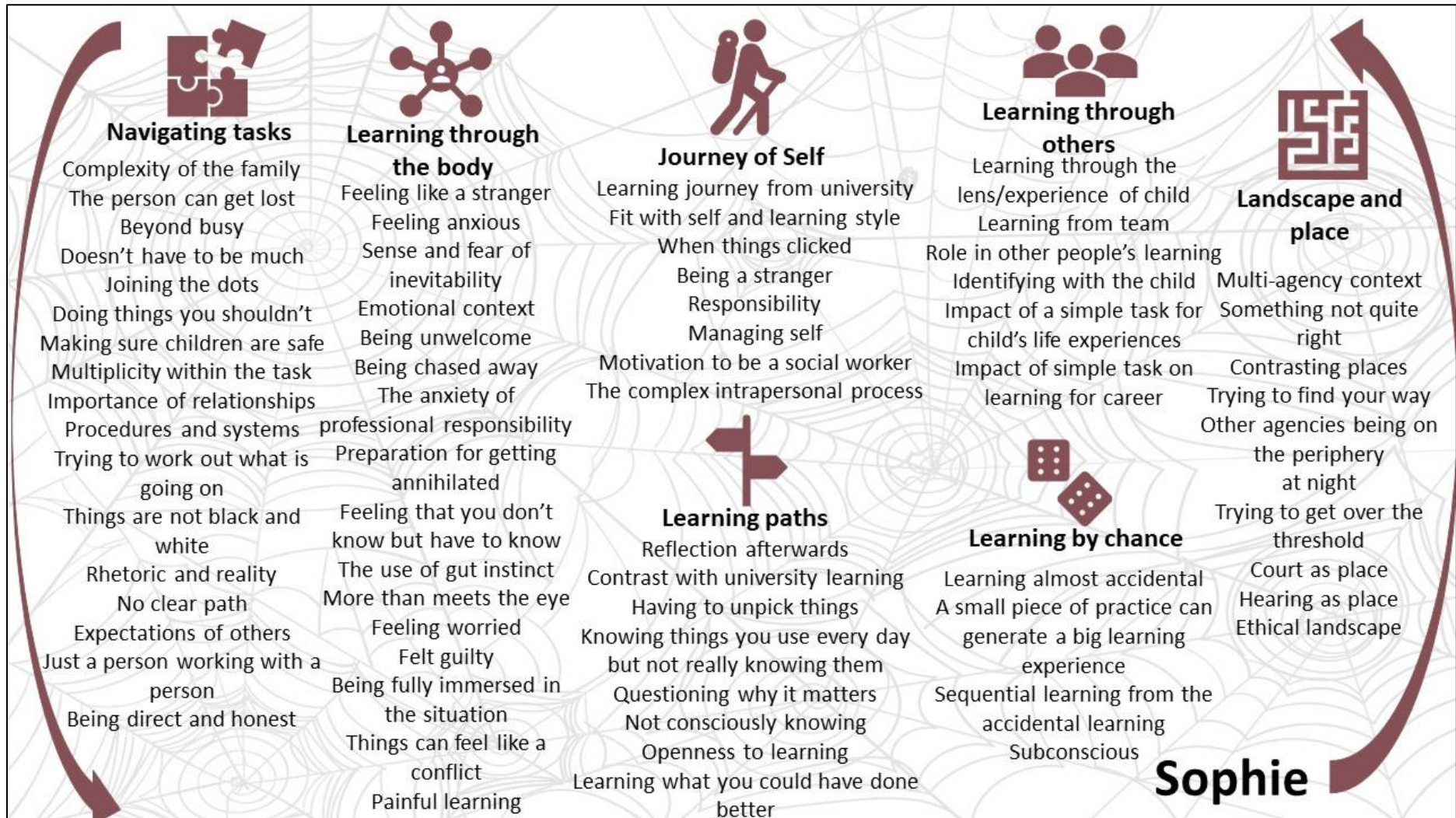


Figure 32: Sophie lived experience

In terms of multi-agency practice and learning through others, Sophie learned about the importance of partnership approaches alongside a feeling of sole responsibility at times:

“The children were placed on the Child Protection Register so there needed to be quite a robust multi-agency plan and for me that was ideal at that point to be able to see how that could work because I was the Lead Professional so it was me that was making sure that was as tight as it could be and I think that there was a Core Group and I remember sitting with the professionals and the mum was there as well. I think a lot of the time, the expectation is that the social worker will obviously be the case-holder for the children. You should be visiting them and making sure they’re ok. I think that the massive thing for me at that point in terms of the learning, was how crucial the multi-agency plan can be because I think it probably depends on the individuals you’re working with as well but everybody really signed up to want to really to support this family

It is something that you learn about being a social worker and how important it is you learn these words are always spoken about you know and expectably in terms of GIRFEC [Getting it Right For Every Child] and things it is huge but I think until you see it working well in practice you really get why it is so important I think once I have seen something I can kind of join the dots much better so I said that is obviously a really critical part in terms of my own learning that whole multi agency approach can be lost in cases sometimes where there is crisis work.”

Extract 46: Sophie

Sophie is consciously aware of being, and feeling like, a stranger to the children she is working with and she is also surprised that they share very difficult experiences:

“I was quite taken aback actually at some of the stuff that he was able to share because I still was a relative stranger to him, you’re thinking, this little boy doesn’t know me at all.

Well you do go in as, as a stranger initially because they don’t know who you are, they know you from social work but that’s all they know and I suppose it’s how crucial it is then to build that relationship so that it is just a person working with a person you know to try and support and move plans on.”

Extract 47: Sophie

Sophie has a clear articulation of her learning within the daily life of her social work practice. She is aware of there being tacit knowledge that has developed and intuitive practice that is not always conscious. She returns to these issues at various stages of her description and confirms them in the follow up interview:

“It is that kind of subconscious bit that you’re always kind of developing ways to do things in practice anyway and that then shapes what underpins your practice moving forward. I think you learn a lot when cases maybe don’t go so well either it is the subconscious professional development that you do when you are working a case.

I think if you don’t have the time to think back on why you have done things or why things have worked you can just keep running with it and you would just go into the next thing without maybe understanding why that worked well or why the outcome was better than another time. I think having feelings and the emotional side of these things and then being able to reflect on why you felt that way and what triggered that, I think that then really kind of promotes your learning to be able to take that forward.”

Extract 48: Sophie

4.3.11 Sylvia “In the smoking shelter”

Sylvia’s experience involves the elements of chance in some of her most significant learning. Learning with and through colleagues, how to navigate complex tasks has been a process that Sylvia considers has happened from “*situations as they came up*”. The physical and psychological impact of practice on the body is also part of Sylvia’s learning journey illustrated in Figure 33.

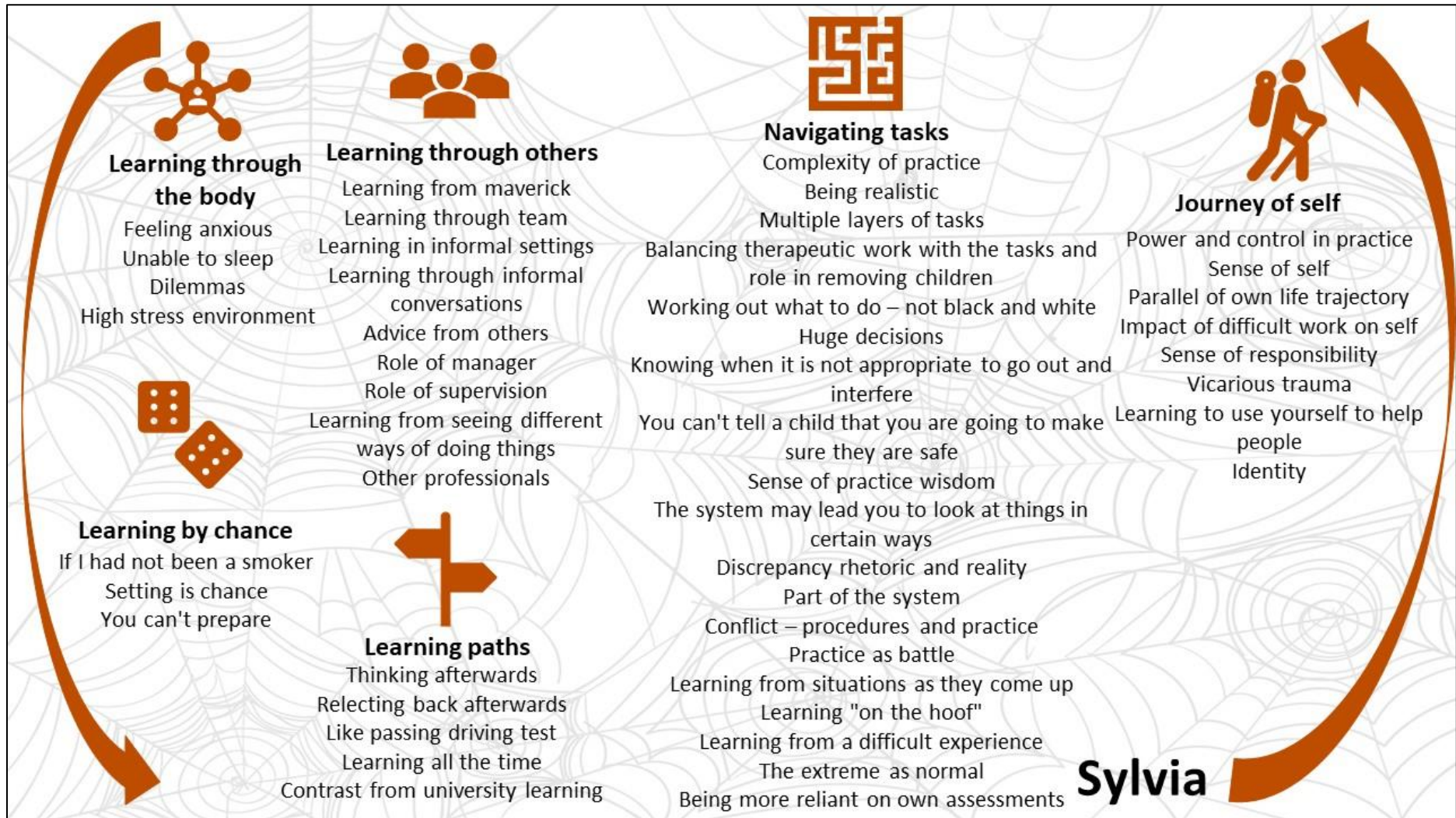


Figure 33: Sylvia lived experience

The idea of chance learning for Sophie is related to the setting of qualifying placements, subsequent employment, practice settings and other almost random elements. For example, conversations that took place in the smoking shelter at one workplace had generated some of Sylvia's most important learning. In the follow-up interview Sylvia reflected on what would have happened if she had not been a smoker. The idea of chance and these learning conversations are closely linked with *learning through others* and through the type of tasks allocated:

"In the smoking shelter at XXXXX I learnt an awful lot. I think you just learn on the hoof don't you, learn from other people, I would get a lot of my advice from XXX and XXX who were having a fag at the same time and I was saying I don't know what to do with this one and they would say well have you tried this, have you tried that, have you looked at it that way.

I think it was people taking a break or taking a step away from the work they were doing and I suppose because you don't have any computers or that there, you're just standing there.

I think it shows that a lot of my learning has come from other people which is a lot to do with chance. which is what teams you were put in and that kind of thing. I learned a lot from people, other social workers, and different situations as they came up."

Extract 49: Sylvia

Other elements of chance were considered by Sylvia including the significance of placements prior to qualifying. She identifies that it was chance where she was placed which then led on to the route and opportunities to learn that followed. Sylvia also details the absolute contrast between university education and subsequent employment. Learning through direct practice has enabled Sylvia's learning about the reality of situations:

"Massive decisions — you know you're not making them on your own obviously, but you know, you are part of the system that is making these huge decisions about how people's lives are going. I think that responsibility, that is a huge kind of learning curve when you're becoming a social worker it's fine to talk about that kind of thing in the classroom but to be actually going out and doing that [pause] it's not the black and white, there are grey areas. People who abuse their wives can still be charming, nice people, who look like they have good relationships with their children and on the other hand they have taken the batteries

out of the remote control so that the kids will moan at mum yeah it's not black and white."

Extract 50: Sylvia

The conception of being unable to prepare for the social work task is part of the aspects of practice considered by Sylvia:

"When you are becoming a social worker you can read as much as you want but until it becomes actually the point where you're having to do these things — and I think for me it was something as massive as telling a child they are away to move and doing all the practicalities and the emotions of doing that, I don't think anybody can prepare or help you do that. I remember when something was going, on somebody would say 'right I'll do your paperwork, I'll do that bit I'll sort out the LAC [Looked After Children] parts, you go on'. I think if you are in a good team, that will sort out the procedural part of it and allow you to work with the children and the focus on the emotional part of it."

Extract 51: Sylvia

The role of others is also considered in relation to the *learning from* in Sylvia's learning and shaping her approach:

"I worked with an older social worker for a time, I learned an awful lot from him that I carry even now. He was a wee bit non-conventional I think as a social worker, not as process led as some other folk. I've had really good experiences as well of learning to be the kind of social worker that I wanted to be."

Extract 52: Sylvia

A sense of developing trust in her own practice came through Sylvia's description and her articulation of learning through work. Learning through intense and difficult emotional experiences, working out what to do and understanding the enormity and ambiguity of the task, eventually led to a sense of intuitive wisdom.

4.3.12 Caroline "Like a ball with two bits that intertwine"

Caroline's personal life is central to her as she works within complex and difficult work. Living with a job that can involve "everything and anything" daily has been a challenge. Caroline identifies her learning as a social worker in terms of trying to integrate her personal and professional identities, "like a ball with two bits that intertwine". Her lived experience is summarised in Figure 34 and highlights her wrestle with felt responsibility, the impact on self and the complexity of both role and task.

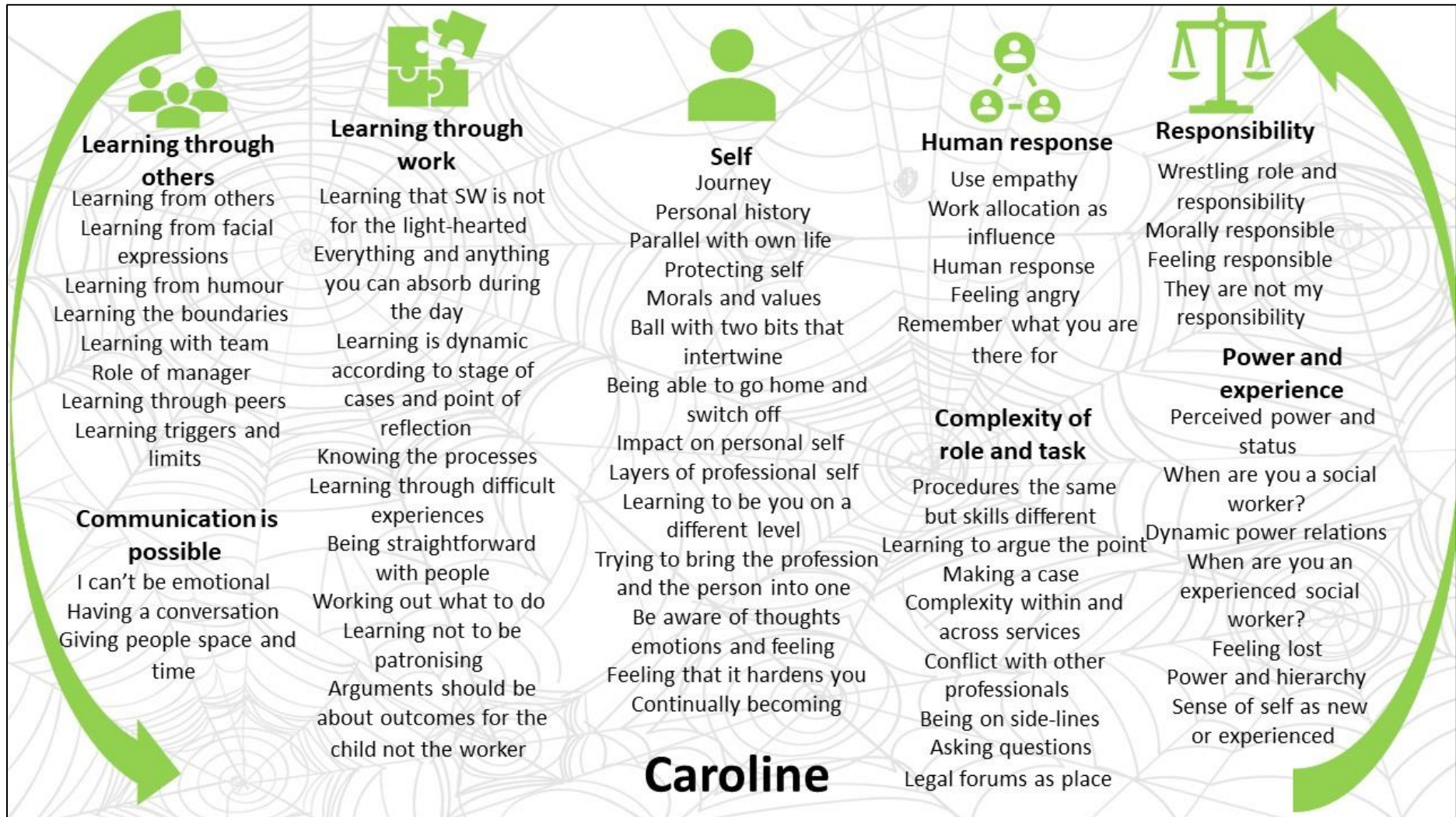


Figure 34: Caroline lived experience

Caroline described the process of her *learning to be* and *learning as* a social worker using gestures with her hands to demonstrate trying to fit her personal and professional selves together. She elaborated on this idea and reflected again in her follow-up interview on this complex experience:

"I suppose like a ball with two bits that intertwine I think that's the big learning thing, being able to not take that home and have that personal life, being able to put that hat down and then enjoy yourself but that's very difficult to do as well. That merging of your person and having that layer, I think that bit is the battle and now, it's trying to separate them so I suppose that's when, coming together as a social worker with your morals and values every day, but being able to separate them in cases like this to protect yourself.

I think maybe it's trying to bring the profession and the person into one. There are layers of your professional self when you are together. I feel I've maybe got a little bit better, just about being more me than social worker if that makes sense, sometimes I think learning to be a social worker is learning to be you but on a different level."

Extract 53: Caroline

Caroline also wrestles with the sense of responsibility of her practice as a social worker, summing up that her key learning point is that "*social work is not for the light-hearted*" and that "*it hardens you to a point*". The responsibility and impact of learning through intense and extreme emotions has featured throughout Caroline's description of her experience:

"I suppose that's been the two levels of social worker, myself, which is the natural need to make this relationship with the child and protect her and then my professional role having to be, well actually that's not my job, that's x, y and z's job to do because she's in a kinship placement and that's absolutely fine but it's been difficult.

I think that there is always that push and pull and what is your responsibility and being able to say 'no that is down to someone else' or X Y and Z because I do think we take on quite a lot and maybe more than we should at times.

I was even thinking about it in the car today. I'm not responsible. I'm very much aware of that, it's not my job to raise the child but it's my job to protect the child from any harm."

Extract 54: Caroline

Caroline's other wrestle is with the sense of when she has become a social worker. She experiences a sense of being a novice, questioning the point that she will feel like a social worker. She also reflects on the fact that she was trying to work this out as she spoke in the interviews and her description reveals the contradiction she feels:

"It's going back to that bit, 'when do you become a social worker?' I think that it's being here and your years but I think there is a bit of a feeling that being confident enough, go home and switch off. I think that's part of learning to be a social worker and maybe once you get that, that means you're a social worker but I don't know.

I think maybe your experience is not measured in years within the culture I suppose of social work. I still think that I'm a baby social worker in that sense, you learn but you never learn enough and there is always somebody there who has had that experience or knows that. I think you need to have a lot of years a lot of wisdom, I suppose, and experience behind before you may or maybe that's just how I feel so I would need to do that before I feel like an experienced social worker [pause] because I don't know if ever I'll get there."

Extract 55: Caroline

Caroline suggests that what is learned that might work in one setting may not help in another. Learning is a process that does not end:

"I think that there is always an ongoing thing just learning about people, always something new. You think you know, but you don't. You might see a situation and think 'oh I know I've done that before' but there might be another spanner in the works somewhere. The procedure is maybe the same but your skills may have to be completely different for these people. I think it is just remembering what you are there for."

Extract 56: Caroline

4.3.13 Jade "This is really serious stuff"

Jade's experience is strongly characterised by her awakening to the responsibility and seriousness of the tasks. This is closely related to conceptions of power and authority in the role of the social worker. She experiences the systems of practice as influential and has learned to understand and try to navigate these as part of the tasks and landscape. Her experience is summarised in the web shown in Figure 35.

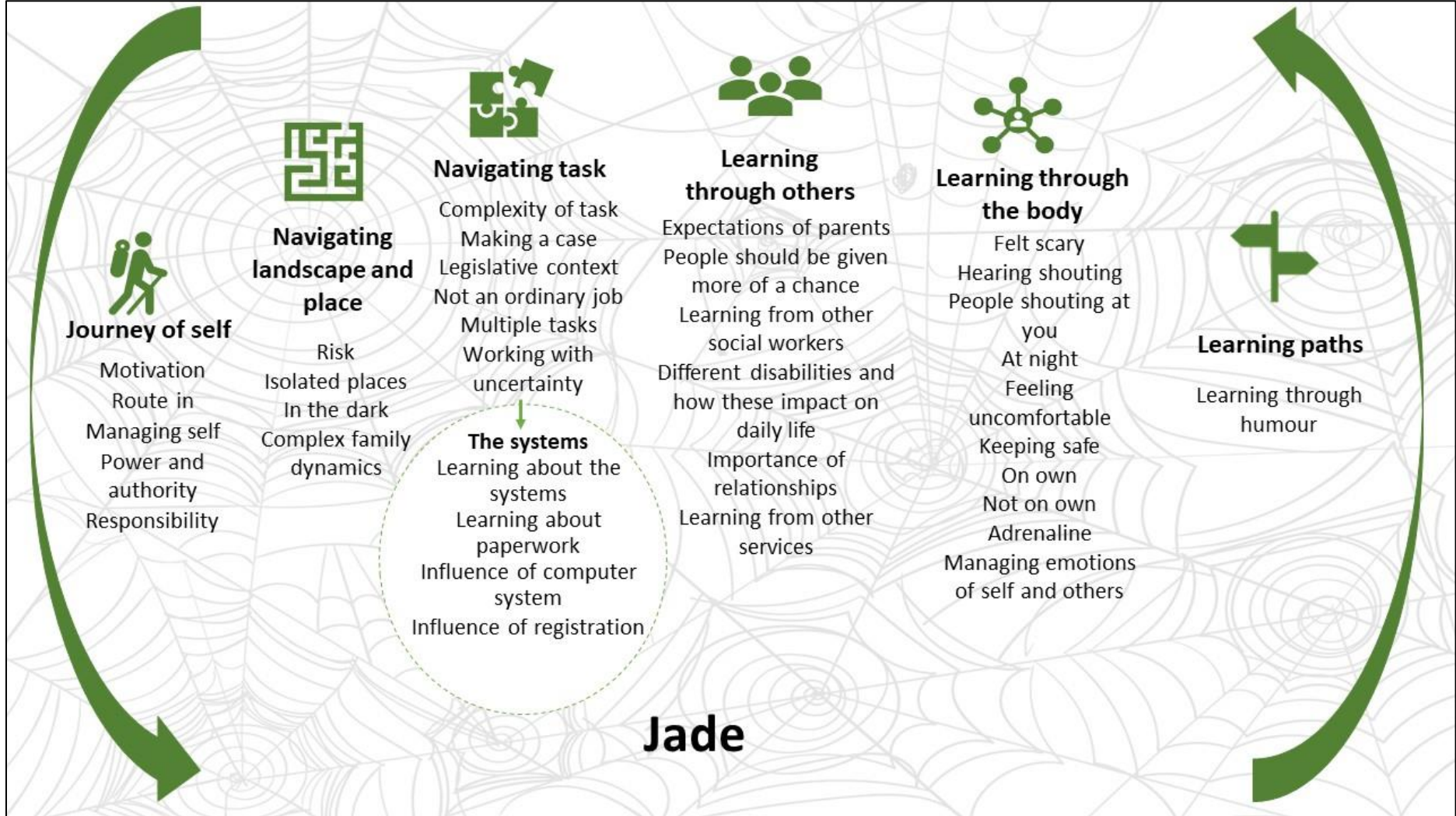


Figure 35: Jade lived experience

The conceptions of power and the powerful system were experienced early in Jade's career, contrasting with her perceptions before qualifying as a social worker. Jade's experience draws on differences she saw between her previous role in social services and her professional role after training to be a social worker. These aspects of learning and identity continue to characterise her experience:

"I think it is more perceived power, or power that you could use wrongly if you wanted to if you were that way inclined and to keep remembering that bit when you are building relationships with young people and their families about trying to balance that up [pause]

because taking someone's parental responsibilities away from them that kinda hit me as a bit of a wake-up call, a bit of an oh shit moment like this is really serious stuff.

The impact that could have, not just on the parents but the wider family and the whole ripple effect and the evidence you need to have to justify that."

Extract 57: Jade

Different aspects of *the systems* are a large part of *Navigating task* for Jade. The *influence of the computer system* and other processes is a major feature of the practice environment and landscape for learning. This is related to the sense of power and powerless felt by Jade, where the influence of the practical computer system has a daily impact on the process and outputs of her practice:

"I think you learn loads about all the different systems, how you get a young person accommodated, how you get finance for that placement and loads of different things. That can become quite stressful at times, that. Somebody yesterday just lost a report and you know if you're spending half a day, or a day, doing a report and it just disappears 'cause the system cannae save it then it's not fit for purpose?"

I think people get really stressed about it 'cause you can sit, I've sat for like half a day doing a report and then the system's crashed and it's not saved? Whereas if it was a XXXX document then IT would be able to get it back but if it's on the XXXX system thing, then you've lost it and you've just got to do it again and things like that become, really, really frustrating, 'cause you can write the report again but it's never gonna be the same report."

Extract 58: Jade

The home as a primary site for work and therefore for learning has been an important part of Jade's experiences. The physical and emotional experience of being out to visit a young person, at night, on her own is strong example of Jade trying to navigate place and task:

"There's some houses that the police won't go out to. They won't go out on their own. They'll only go out in twos but sometimes social workers are expected to visit. I was up in XXXXX at seven or eight o'clock at night trying to manage this situation and he was going absolutely crazy. The young person was going absolutely crazy. He threatened to set fire to the house, he was blaming me, he was phoning the police, the police were coming up and he was going nuts at the police, nuts at me, blaming me. I'd only had the case about three weeks before that. That was really, really difficult and quite upsetting. you know what I mean. In other settings I've worked in, you know, you've got a team of people behind you but I was there myself, so there wasn't that back up there.

I was on my own and it was really difficult, eh? The mother was out kicking my car. I was trying to get into my car to get away from it 'cause I'd phoned the manager and said 'look, what do I do?' and she was going, 'get the fuck out of there basically and leave the police to manage it 'cause it's not a situation for us to manage', eh? it was more a police situation, given the levels of aggression that this guy was displaying, eh?

The adrenaline was pumping through me then you need somebody to be so blunt as that, as well as that permission just to walk away from it. You feel that you are doing the wrong thing walking away."

Extract 59: Jade

The experience of risk and the ambiguity of task are described as difficult to manage. Jade considers the role as almost conflict resolution within the complex, dangerous dynamics and highlights the importance to her of permission to walk away:

"You're gabbling about later at night trying to find a placement for somebody. You end up having to put them with family members and the family members aren't very happy about that and there's a lot of, like, U.N [United Nations] peace negotiating role sometimes going on as well, when you're trying to sort of salvage placements or maintain placements.

I think you get a lot of families ranting and raving down the phone at you and having to manage aggressive and threatening behaviour down the phone, or to your face. Having to manage that and keep yourself safe and keep other people safe as well. I think you need somebody to tell you that."

Extract 60: Jade

4.3.14 Karl "I don't think I've ever stopped learning"

Karl's learning experience is characterised by her negotiating her way through emotional and ethical dilemmas, learning through her direct encounters with people as a social worker. Karl identifies as female and selected to use the traditionally male name as her pseudonym in tribute to the German philosopher Karl Marx (1818 –1883). A striking learning point she identifies is that you need to be straightforward and honest with people. This has stayed with her in practice over a career spanning several decades. The importance of relationships within practice is also crucial. Karl's experience of learning, shown in Figure 36 is described through several detailed examples of practice where literal life and death are part of the scenarios.

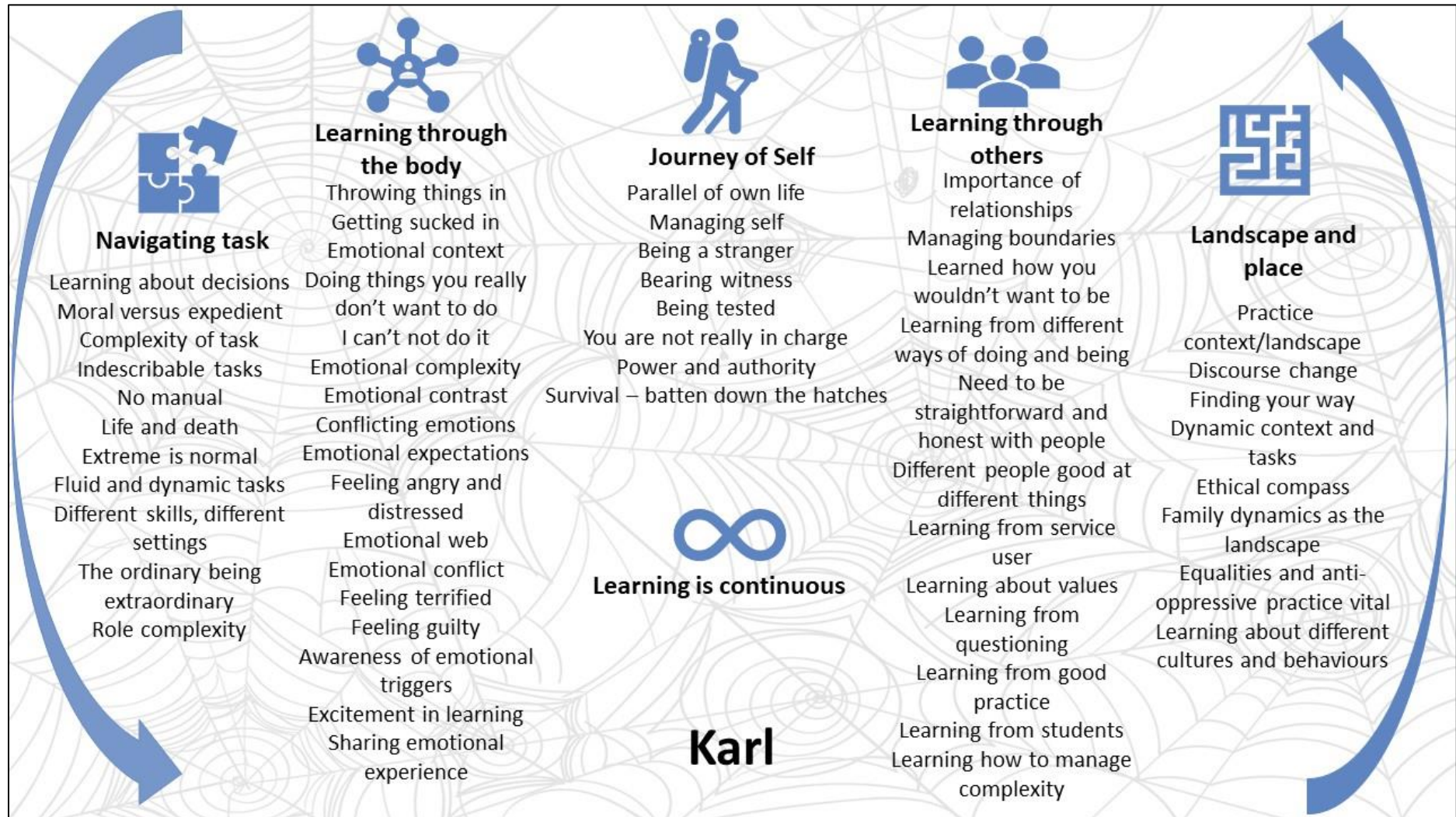


Figure 36: Karl lived experience

Karl has a career in social work spanning four decades, she describes a continual cycle of learning every day through work practice, colleagues and her reflective process:

"I don't think I've ever stopped learning. I wouldn't say, hand on heart, that every day I go home and say 'oh this is what I've learned today' but I mean I have just constantly been learning things. It's not just because of changes in practice, it's just that, you know, if you've come into contact with people, different ideas, different experiences, you learn from that and could be learning about how to do things that you think are a better way of doing it or how not to do things. I think probably I've learned those in pretty equal measures."

Extract 61: Karl

Experiences of life and death characterised the learning experiences described by Karl, including work with a woman delivering a child who had died in utero and work with a boy whose father had murdered his mother. The extraordinary and extreme as part of everyday tasks was identified as a theme within the lived experience. The extraordinary and highly emotive tasks are part of the landscape of practice for Karl. Her awareness of her own feelings and the emotions of the families she is working with are important as part of her learning:

"I was interviewing a wee boy just hours after he'd witnessed his mum being murdered you know and then the whole aftermath of that, making the arrangements for him and his wee brother to be cared for, getting family, so that sticks in your mind a lot because that emotion of that wee boy, you know, he didn't know at that time, he didn't really know she was dead and then the reactions of the family, so I suppose I did learn again about relationships and the different way we see things.

I think it's an attempt to take that huge complexity. that's so difficult to understand, 'cause it's as complex as everybody that you put into it. You know it's greater than the sum of its parts, really, that complexity."

Extract 62: Karl

Karl also reflected on power and authority, closely related to the importance of honesty and relationships driven by personal and professional values. The power and authority assumed to be associated with the social work role is negotiated within relationships and situations:

"You've almost got as much authority with people as they allow you to have. I think, it's about the relationships you've got with people."

Extract 63: Karl

The importance of relationships is woven through all of Karl's description, closely associated with fundamental motivation and a drive for equality and social justice. Karl describes almost being "sucked into" a family, an all-encompassing physical metaphor for the intensity of the task and role:

"how they absorb you into that, you know, you're almost, almost sucked into their family and in some ways, as if they're thinking, maybe I'd had the same experiences as them."

Extract 64: Karl

The complexity of the dynamics of working with families is also a clear component of the learning experience:

"You're talking to a family and things are going really smoothly and things are on track and then you'll say something that'll trigger a reaction in them and suddenly you're dealing with a whole different ball game. A bit more clicking in to the complexity of relationships, you know, that we're working with one person will be a certain thing, you put another family member in and that changes the dynamic and then you put another worker in and that changes the dynamic again, so I suppose in some ways, it was really good and exciting to think that you, you know I was beginning to understand that."

Extract 65: Karl

The ambiguity of task also features in Karl's learning experience and her continual reflection on what she is expected to do or be seen to be doing:

"I used to say to people, it'd be really good to be something like a joiner or plumber or something, that people look at your work and go 'that's a really good job you've done there', and they can see it. In social work, it's seldom, it's never as clear cut as that is it?"

Extract 66: Karl

Underpinning Karl's experience is a drive to be clear and honest; she describes learning through practice about the importance of being "straightforward" with people:

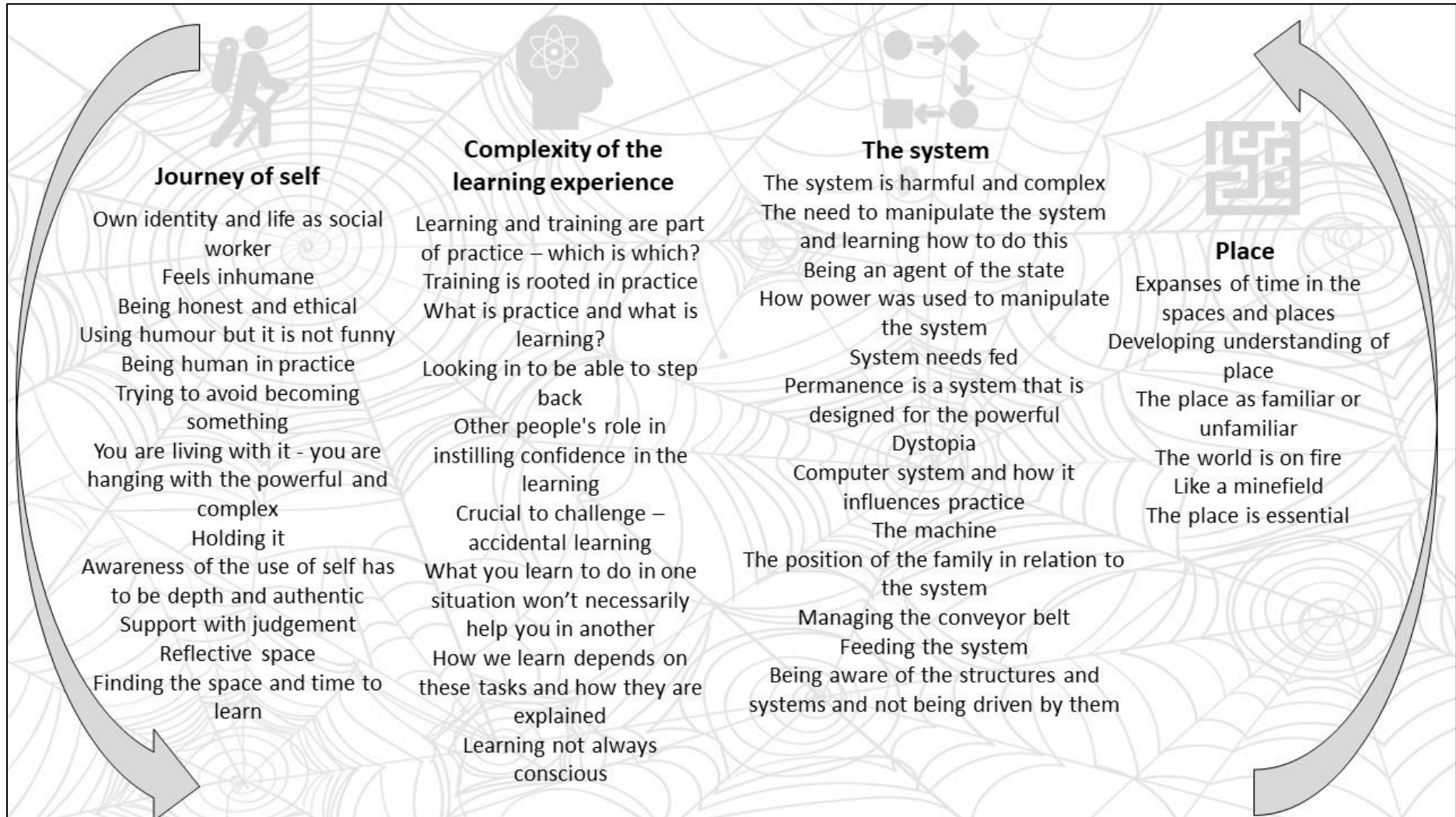
"He said to me, 'ken you're too fucking honest to be a social worker', and that really has always stuck with me because I

thought that this child had years of social workers in and out of his life, and that was his perception, that social workers were, and I think he meant, not honest, not straight up with people.”

Extract 67: Karl

4.3.15 Makine “A constant duality being pulled in different directions”

Makine’s learning experiences were most strongly characterised by a constant attempt to balance ethical and moral practice with the demands of the system. These ideas weave through the range of ideas described by Makine and a struggle to learn within this landscape. Makine selected this pseudonym identifying that this was in tribute to the Russian-born, French novelist, Andrei Makine (b.1957). Within his interviews he regularly returned to the point that it was hard to separate training or learning from practice, demonstrating the integral relationship between the two. The visual representation, Figure 37, is shown over two pages as it has many elements which formed part of the complex web of Makine’s lived experience, with each element an important aspect of his learning. Removing any of these subordinate themes contained in the web would remove a part of what Makine regarded as an essential component of his lived experience.



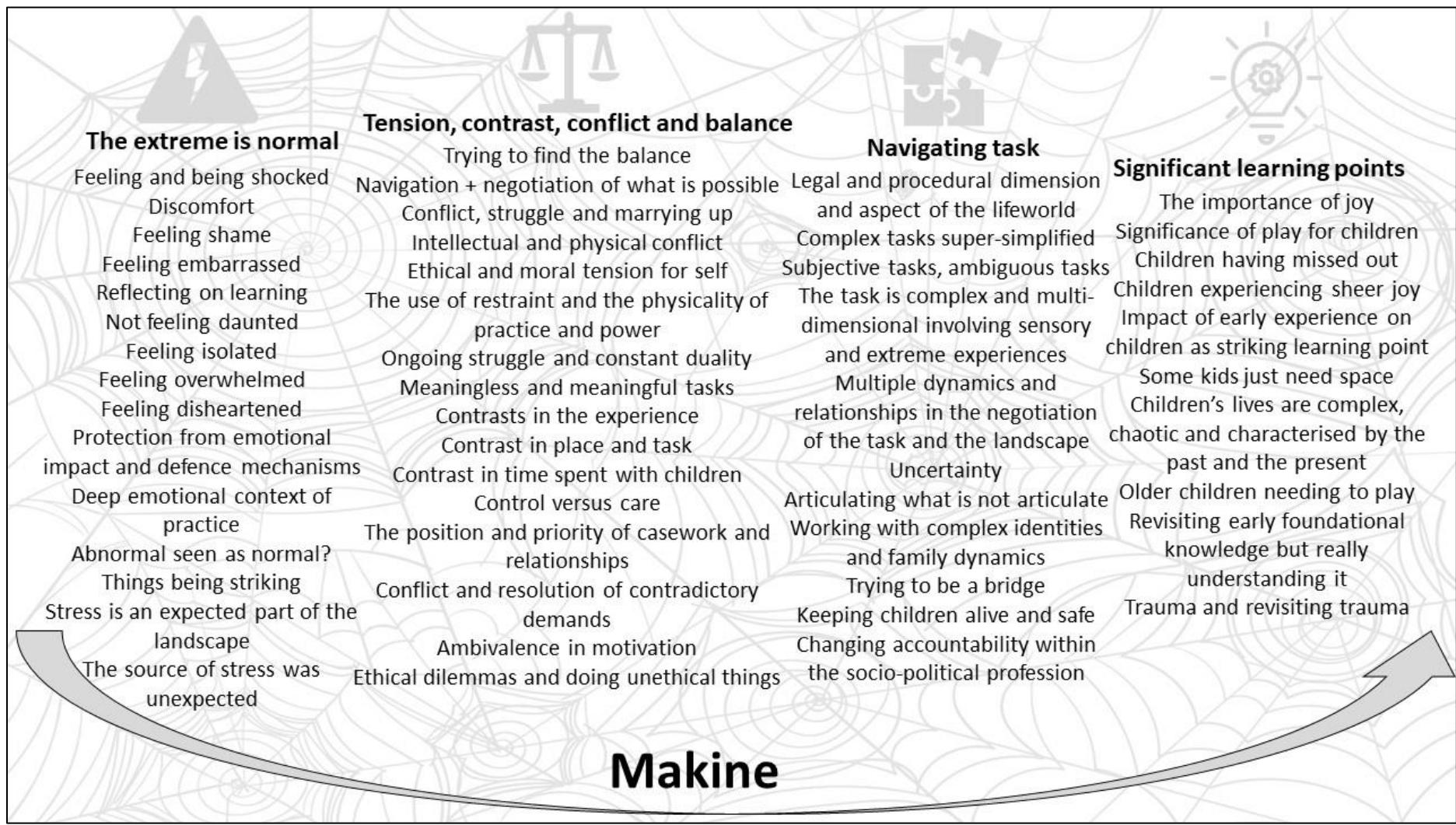


Figure 37: Makine lived experience

The lived experience of trying to learn how to balance the duality of the role and task are returned to within Makine's examples:

"I got caught up in the whole conflict between training to be a social worker which is around the codes of practice and the legal bits and then, you have the systems that we operate within and how I kind of struggled with that, just in terms of engaging with the people you are working with, in order to have relationships, in order to effect change and then, how those two don't necessarily marry up. Then we are more constrained by those systems or those systems are kind of tighter than what is expected, rather than our involvement with families. It is almost like a constant duality, just being pulled in different directions, trying to marry that tension, work out that tension between the two."

Extract 68: Makine

The framework for social work practice as experienced by Makine is one where the formal processes in his view conflict with the essence of building relationships and being with people. He describes this contrast and conflict in relation to work in statutory settings:

"When you come into statutory work, it's almost like a flight from social work. I suppose one of the dilemmas of being a social worker is that if you are working within a framework, if you're in a statutory sector, where it's about rules, it's about assessment, it's about quite formal processes, it's about conflict as well, and sometimes those rules, and the presenting problems, issues and challenges, all that kind of stuff draw you away from the person.

It is trying to find the balance, because you work within an organisation and a structure, I always just found a tension about. I love doing the job, and I don't like doing the job, because I don't like the framework and the rest of the kind of conflict.

In order to kind of affect change, you need to get alongside people and have relationships, have a certain level of empathy and all these kind of bits but all of that is in conflict with a lot of the systems, in terms of timescales and what is in the best interests of the children in moving things more quickly, and all that."

Extract 69: Makine

The tension for Makine in trying to balance the duality he describes also stems from the role conflict between being an agent of the state and developing empathic practice:

"I was very conscious that a lot of what we were doing was almost a kind of social policing"

Extract 70: Makine

The idea of *the machine* is developed significantly within Makine's description of his experience of learning to navigate the landscape of social work. The metaphor of the machine characterised the detail of his description and ultimately adds to his sense of being pulled in different ways that do not always balance up:

"You always feel like you're pulled back all the time to a terminal. Our workflow system is designed that way as well. So, you do this, and you do that and what people tend to do is then they'll put the family over there. they'll concentrate on the system.

I'll do my tasks because I want to be seen as competent in doing those tasks because if I don't do the tasks, that's what people are going to challenge me on and then you see people trying to figure this out, so they tend to, you know, you sometimes, you can see people going particular ways of justifying why they're doing what they're doing and then being quite distant and lacking empathy for the families that we actually work with and just being pulled in different directions,"

Extract 71: Makine

The other major aspect of Makine's learning experience is how he has learned directly through the children and young people he has worked with. He has learned by experiencing their emotions and observing their lives within different scenarios. The physical and sensory experience of learning through encounters in practice has led to Makine learning about the importance of space, time and care for children as well as the extremes and intensity of life circumstances:

"I remember having a lad who was ten years old who was using legal highs, who was living at home with an alcoholic mother who had mental health issues, a father who was an alcoholic and who had psychiatric issues and who would fantasise about harming this child and speaking to a psychiatrist who's saying, 'he's very literal so when he says he's going to get this boy in a car and he's going to drive into a tree and make sure he's dead you know the seatbelt's gonna come off and he's gonna kill the kid this is gonna happen'.

There was an older brother who lived there and I remember knocking on the door once and the brother came downstairs and answered the door and he smelt of petrol it was

overwhelming and he'd doused himself in petrol and said have you got a match and that was my kind of introduction to him and he was like he was gonna set himself on fire and you're kinda like I've got this child then going back and trying to get that child accommodated. You wake up with a certain number of kids and you want them all to be there at the end of the day."

Extract 72: Makine

4.3.16 Danny "Not a single day goes by without learning"

Danny's experience has several strong themes that come through her descriptions and the themes as illustrated and summarised in Figure 38. The central ideas about survival are represented by Danny using a *sink or swim* analogy throughout her interviews, connected closely with experiencing social work as an extraordinary job. The job has created *Intrapersonal conflict* between Danny's private and professional life. Danny identifies learning as "*all-encompassing*", "*every day*" in "*small fragments of time*" and accidental learning through work has been incredibly significant. Learning through the senses has supported Danny to learn how to practice, using her senses in relation to complex assessment work and intuitive wisdom.

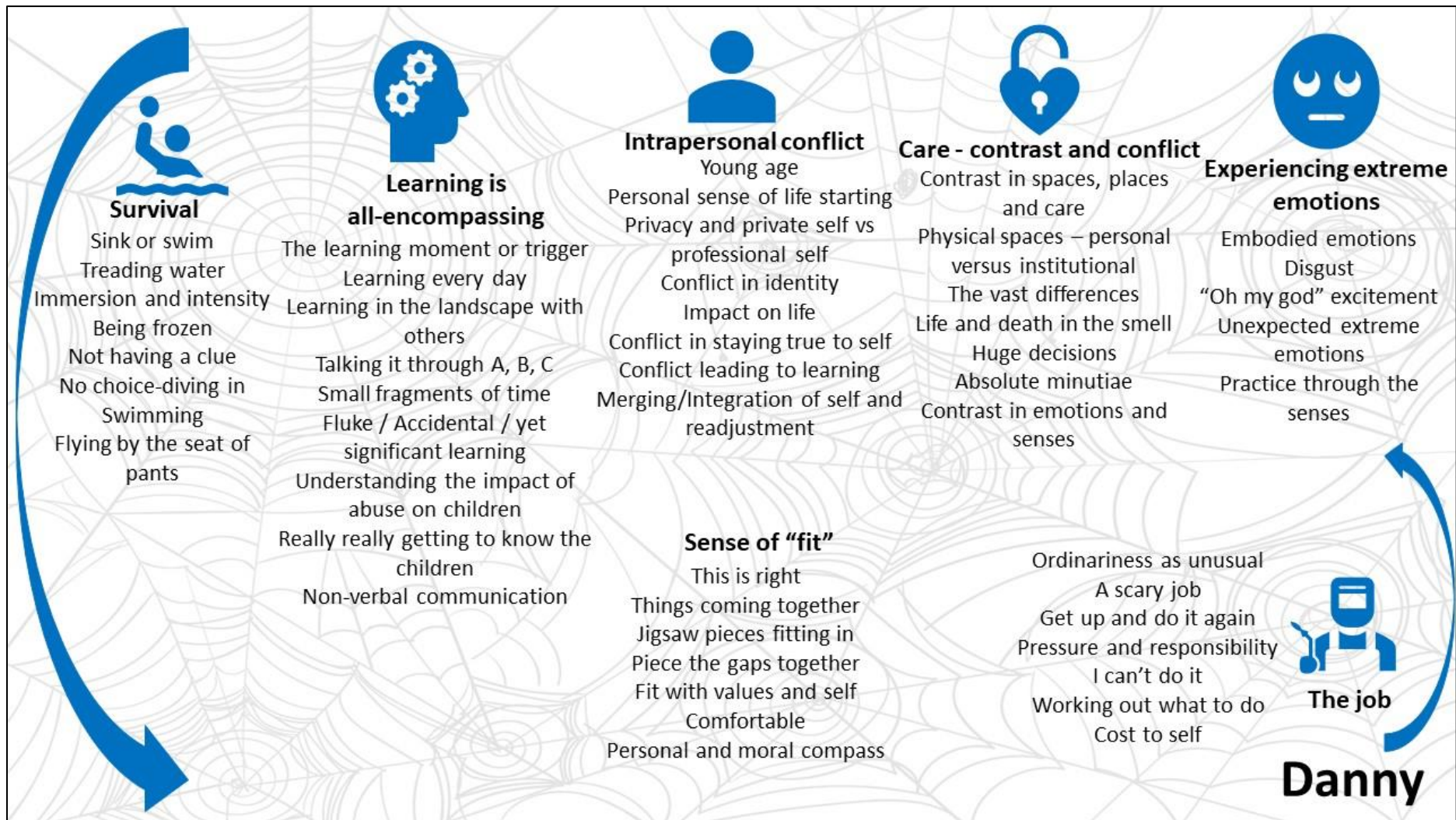


Figure 38: Danny lived experience

Learning through the body sensory experiences and the influence of this on her practice is an important element of Danny's learning. This is learned through experiencing physical contrasts in care settings and how these link to values and design of care environments:

"I suppose from a sensory perspective within the smaller setting with the four service users with learning disabilities, I remember [pause] the feel of like the carpets and stuff the feel of the textiles and things?"

I remember the carpets in the living room being really plush [laughs] the smell of the house was just the smell of an average house with like air fresheners dotted about and things like that. It was just normal, yes. It was just really, really, very normal and I just remember, you know, you would walk into the hall and it would just be this really thick carpet and it's odd because you don't ever think about that but actually having a really thick carpet in a care environment is really unusual in terms of personal care and body fluids and just the ability to move wheelchairs and things across.

The other thing as well was visually, it was all just dead normal and the bedrooms for each of the service users were all completely different and I know people talk about personalisation of care environments, clients' rooms and things and I think sometimes people buy into that in a very tokenistic way. It felt nice."

Extract 73: Danny

The contrasting environment is experienced through the body by Danny too, who describes the difference literally as life and death:

"The nursing home environment where it was incredibly clinical all the rooms were exactly the same. It was all the fire-retardant curtains and bedding and the smell of urine and you know you were maybe dealing with somebody who was in the end stages of life, so you had the smell that's kind of associated with that as well in the rooms and things. The physical needs of each of these groups of service users was very similar but [pause] the sensory stuff that came with it was very, very different?"

You have to think through your senses when working with people who don't verbally

communicate. I think people who don't verbally communicate, you think sensory world and I think for me now, thinking about domestic violence, parental substance misuse, what children's lived experiences are, a lot of that comes through your senses. You can't pin it down to what you know, to what you see, it's what you feel, what you smell all these different things and you know from the research and things they're just as, if not more, important than some of the bigger grandiose stuff."

Extract 74: Danny

Danny identifies being frozen and not knowing what to do, learning that she could either sink or swim after this limbo of uncertainty:

"I didn't know what I was doing and I just kinda sat with it. I hadn't done anything and that's because I just didn't know what I was doing. I wasn't sinking, but I wasn't swimming.

I was just treading water. I wasn't going anywhere. The case wasn't going anywhere, I was literally just treading water with it I wasn't sinking with it. I wasn't making a complete mess of it [pause] but I wasn't getting anywhere with it.

I was just standing still [pause] you've kinda just got to dive in there and get on with it."

Extract 75: Danny

The impact of learning to be a social worker on personal life also characterised Danny's experience. This is closely connected with overall identity and continual learning as a social worker:

"I have had to, chose to, prioritise the learning of my career and my role of being a social worker above other aspects of my life and I think, as I've got a little bit older, some of that comes with a bit of regret.

I don't think you ever stop learning to be a social worker. I think I probably didn't 'learn' to be a social worker until I was in the job? But in terms of the social worker that I view myself to be I didn't learn to be that until I started work.

Learning to be a social worker, what does it mean to me? I think on a personal note it's very, very time consuming, it becomes an integrated part of your identity that is very, very, very difficult to ever

change or shake after that. I think I did a huge amount of learning as a newly qualified worker within an intake statutory setting and for me being very young at the time that probably took away a lot of the normal experiences I would have as a twenty-something.

So the learning to be a social worker and being a social worker is kind of a bit of a conflicting role because sometimes I think, that's great because I've learnt so much and actually I've developed my craft so well, but that's been to the expense of other things. It was like a conflict in identity, my identity as a social worker but actually my identity of myself had to readjust.

I don't think there's a single day goes by without learning."

Extract 76: Danny

4.4 Moving from individual to group experiences

4.4.1 Individual experiences and patterns across the group

The previous section presented the individual visual webs of the sixteen social workers' experiences and used data extracts to illustrate their accounts.

Superordinate themes for the group of sixteen social workers were identified using the process detailed in Chapter 3. A table of individual themes and concepts that generated the themes across the group is included as Appendix 10, this was introduced in Chapter 3. I will introduce the seven group themes and then discuss each in turn and link back to the individual social worker's accounts.

4.4.2 Learning experiences as a complex web

The overarching seven group themes are, *Journey of the self; Navigating landscape and place; Navigating tasks; Learning through the body; Learning through others; Practices and conceptions of learning; and, Learning by chance.*

These are shown in Figure 39 with icons which are used to represent each theme visually. The web analogy is used here to help present the themes, illustrating how they sit as part of a complex experience of multiple layers. The themes do not sit alone but are connected within the lived experiences of the social workers. There is no theme more important than any other within this web and there are multiple threads across and between them. Even where there are elements that are

smaller threads or connections, these are still central to the overall web of experience.




















Figure 39: Web of superordinate themes for the group

4.4.3 Journey of the self

Presentation of the group themes starts with the *Journey of the self*, as the importance of the person within the process of learning relates to all other themes. It would be difficult to consider other elements of the social workers' experiences without understanding their personal selves in the work context.

The *Journey of the self* is illustrated in Table 6 which shows six subordinate themes, *readiness and motivation*; *realising it is serious stuff*; *fit*; *learning to use and manage self*; *impact on life*; and, *becoming*. All sixteen social workers had some aspects of this theme as part of their lived experiences. Table 6 also shows which of the social workers expressed some aspects of the *Journey of the self* as part of their lived experience. A full breakdown of the individual social worker themes that led to the identification of *Journey of the self* as a group theme, is provided in Appendix 10.

Table 6: Journey of the self

																
	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
Journey of the self	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Readiness and motivation		x	x		x	x			x						x	
Realising it is serious stuff				x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Fit		x	x		x	x					x			x	x	x
Learning to use and manage self		x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Impact on life	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x
Becoming	x			x	x		x	x		x	x	x			x	x

Journey of the self includes the personal motivation, values and life trajectory of the social worker as well as their sense of readiness to become a social worker. This was linked to age and the trajectory of their life and career journey, making sense of learning as a social worker through a described chronology of stages. Most social workers began their description with how they had begun to study social work, some identifying that their journey began before this stage, for example, Stephen and Stuart. As can be seen in the table, all social workers expressed some aspects of this theme and for some, such as Sophie, their experience has involved almost all these subordinate themes.

Another aspect of *Journey of the self* was the impact of their learning as a social worker on their personal life. This included and often stemmed from the serious nature of the work and the sense of felt responsibility. This was part of the learning experiences for most of the social workers, as seen in the table. Danny described explicitly the “cost” to her personal life, having studied social work straight from school and living with the constant responsibility of work cases. Awareness of

power and authority in task and role, such as the legal powers to restrict liberty, or remove children from their parents was an important element for these social workers and illustrated in the individual webs of experience for example, in Jade and Stephen's webs.

Learning to use and manage self, constantly adapting and learning how to manage their own limits, was part of overall learning. This is linked with managing and navigating the role and tasks of social work, trying to work out what to do, cope with the emotional web and other aspects of learning through the body, which will be explored in section 4.4.6. Learning to look after self and develop resilience also formed part of the theme, associated with the impact of working as a social worker on their own life.

The concept of becoming a social worker was described in different ways. Boab and Stephen described their creation of new personas to navigate the task and role whereas Danny, Stuart and Caroline described integrating their personal and professional selves. Makine described "*trying to avoid becoming something*" as part of his developing identity as a social worker in contrast to the "*becoming*" described by other social workers. Danny described a conflict between personal and professional selves, with these remaining separate.

The other aspect of this theme is the sense of *fit* with being a social worker, that was part of the lived experience and overall journey of learning. Reuben notably discussed his sense of fit or otherwise, *feeling human*, and in contrast, *alien*, within his lived experience. Sense of *fit* related to the social workers' sense of purpose and where services were aligned with their own values. Other social workers described *fitting in* and things *feeling right*. These ideas are closely linked with the notion of navigating the ethical areas of practice and where there were dilemmas around fairness, social justice or meaningful work.

The idea of the *Journey of the self* not only applies to the trajectory of the individual social worker in developing as a social worker, but also in relation to the ways that they navigated landscape, place and tasks as discussed in sections 4.4.4 and 4.4.5.
















4.4.4 Navigating landscape and place

The theme *Navigating landscape and place* comprises crucial aspects of the lived experience of fourteen social workers. This includes the physical spaces and also

the other elements of workplace that social workers found themselves in that led to learning. The idea of learning in landscapes of practice (Wenger-Traynor and Wenger-Traynor, 2014) was introduced in Chapter 2, suggesting landscapes form the community and shared knowledge for professional groups. In the theme *Navigating landscape and place*, the places and spaces that formed essential elements of social workers' experiences were diverse and fundamentally connected to their experience of *Learning through the body*, *Navigating tasks* and role.

The subordinate themes for the group that summarise *Navigating landscape and place* are identified as, *diverse places*; *isolation*; *no route map*; *different worlds*; and, *aspects and elements* of place and space that were important in the learning experience. The metaphor of *battle* is the final subordinate theme of *Navigating landscape and place*. A summary of the pattern of these themes as they presented for the group is shown in Table 7, which relates back to the individual experiences.

Table 7: Navigating landscape and place

														
	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
														
Navigating landscape and place	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Diverse places		x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x				
Isolation	x							x	x	x	x		x	
No route map				x		x		x		x		x		
Different worlds			x					x		x			x	
Battle	x	x		x		x	x	x					x	
Aspects and elements	x		x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x	

Diverse places is an important subordinate theme. The social workers learned through practice in very different settings that were part of their work. The court, family home, police cells, sheriff's house and office spaces featured within important learning experiences, as illustrated in the verbatim extracts earlier in the chapter. Chloe and Carol both learned through the setting and practices of the court, which they likened to theatre and Maisie with the sheriff's house and police cells. Danny learned specifically through direct sensory contrasts in physical care environments representing life and death respectively, where there was "*life and death in the smell*". Working within the home visit was a feature of significant learning for social workers across the group closely associated with their sense of safety or otherwise and their experience of the "*extreme as normal*" (Sylvia) within tasks. These experiences were undertaking tasks that social workers described as "*not normal*" (Maisie), "*not an ordinary job*" (Maisie), with extreme situations being regularly part of their work, resulting in the extreme becoming normal.

These learning environments involved heightened emotional and physical sensory experiences. Isolation of physical space is strongly associated with *Learning through the body* and experiencing physical and psychological isolation with the

absence or presence of others. Examples of learning in places that were geographically isolated were seen in Maisie, Makine, Kathleen and Jade's examples, associated with description and metaphors such as being "*in the dark*", "*on your own*" and "*at night*".

A sense of the social workers' experience of trying to navigate the workplaces and spaces was described by them and associated with trying to work out what to do, as well as how to do it, within diverse settings. There is no rule book or pathway and the physical landscape can change as services and roles change. Boab and Stephen highlight the experience of learning with no map or rule book. Often an ethical or moral compass was an element of the social worker's descriptions. This was something internal guiding them within the complex dynamic landscape that assisted working out what to do or how to find the way.

The metaphors of *battle* and *theatre* are used to describe places as seen in Chloe's extracts. Ideas associated with battleground are also used in other social work descriptions of place, with Sophie talking about "*trying to get over the threshold*" of the house and Boab and Makine using the term "*like a minefield*". Carol describes "*reflecting from a place of safety*" and Caroline describing "*being on the side lines*". Makine describes an example within an office during a piece of work that "*the world is on fire*" to represent the chaos and crisis being experienced at the time. These ideas suggest that the places that social work takes place are often unknown and part of the task is to navigate and work within these.


















The other *aspects and elements* of the working landscape for social workers include the social and economic context of people's lives, including poverty, neglect, substance use and complex family dynamics. These aspects of place are part of the social workers' experiences of learning through work within different settings and tasks. For example, Maple describes the smell of heroin and seeing children experiencing poverty and neglect. The sensory experience is explored in the theme *Learning through the body* as part of work task and place along with *Learning through others*, notably people's lives. The legislative and policy landscape was also described within examples of learning, with this an area that was hard to navigate yet crucial to be able to.

4.4.5 Navigating tasks

The complexity and uncertainty of the social work role is acknowledged in the literature and the policy context noted in Chapters 1 and 2. The different aspects of complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity presented in multiple layers for the sixteen social workers. The subordinate themes for *Navigating tasks* are identified as, *ambiguity*; *the possibilities of practice*; *making a case*; *life and death*; *the ordinary, extraordinary and extreme*; *complexity of task and role*; and, *the machine*.

Navigating tasks was a part of all the social workers' experiences and took many forms, linked with the idea of negotiating the work environment, landscape and place. A summary of the pattern of these themes as they presented for the group is shown in Table 8 and is followed by a discussion about each theme linking back to the individual experiences.

Table 8: Navigating tasks

																
	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
																
Navigating tasks	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ambiguity	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x
Possibilities of practice			x					x	x	x				x	x	
Making a case		x	x	x				x		x	x	x	x			
Life and death	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	
Ordinary, extraordinary and extreme	x	x		x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Complexity of task and role	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x
The machine	x		x	x		x	x	x		x			x	x	x	

Social workers described many examples of trying to work out not only what to do but what the actual task or role of the social worker was in the situation. *Ambiguity* of task was an explicit element of thirteen of the social workers' experiences.

Social workers described the immediacy of this within practice, undertaking tasks that were indescribable and sometimes conflicting or contradictory. Different skills for different settings also made the idea of *ambiguity* come forward in lived experience. Even when social workers had specific experience, or knowledge, this did not necessarily help them in unpredictable practice contexts. *Making a case* weaved through *complexity of task and role*, with this being a clear element of learning for formal decision-making forums. This also was related to justification for the enormity of decisions in practice, for example, Stephen's discussion of writing reports and Carol's presentation in court.

Being able to articulate what appeared to be indescribable is a feature of the *ambiguity* of task. Makine's experience showed his learning to balance and

manage ambiguity, tension and contradiction. Stuart, Boab and Reuben explored their learning experiences to question what social work was. This was not always a question fully answered and individually experienced, as shown with Kathleen articulating that for her, social work was, “*us*”.

The *possibilities of practice* were strongly related to ideas of learning through others, principally children, young people or adults that social workers encountered and engaged with. Something appearing minimal could be very significant for social workers’ learning, for example, as experienced by Reuben in his interaction sitting with a young person using play dough. For other social workers this related to the amount of time spent, the position and priority of direct casework in practice and allocation of work that had led to significant learning. The element of chance within these significant learning experiences will be discussed in section 4.4.9.

A further aspect of *Navigating tasks* across three quarters of the social workers’ experiences is the *ordinary, extraordinary and extreme* as the normal expectations of practice that they are negotiating. This has been something that has been noticed, learned and accommodated as part of the job. Ideas and experiences of *life and death* were associated with the extreme as being normal. As well as literal *life and death* the enormity of decisions and the impact on families were equally serious parts of social workers’ experiences. *Life and death* led social workers to learn about the importance of understanding the unique lives of people, keeping children alive and safe, trying to reduce chaos, trying to be realistic and understanding risk.

The experiences shared included working with dynamic and extreme or extraordinary situations, for example, with young people, doused in petrol (Makine); a father who had killed the family pet (Sylvia); the birth of a baby who had died in utero (Karl); and, working with a boy whose father had murdered their mother (Karl). These experiences often involved the management of their own and other people’s emotions detailed in *Journey of the self* and *Learning through the body*. The practice examples were described in rich detail along with the articulation of learning points that had come through them, for example, about the nature of distress and risk; the patterns of coercive control within family dynamics; importance of choice and listening; and understanding the different cultural backgrounds of families. Social workers described not only the challenging

practice examples but the idea that they would then “*get up and do it again*” (Maisie).


















The metaphor and experience of navigating *the machine* is summarised as finding a way to work within the systems and processes of social work tasks, closely associated with navigating the overall landscape. Makine’s experience is hugely shaped by this. Jade also has a strong element of navigating the system and processes within her experience, highlighted in their extracts. *Navigating the machine* involves learning points that “*the system is harmful and complex*”, “*feeding the system*”, “*managing the conveyer belt*” (Makine), “*the system may lead you to look at things in certain ways*” (Sylvia) and ideas about learning how to be within the different systems. The concept of having no rule book or instruction manual and questioning the rules is also part of trying to navigate tasks within the system and processes, for example, as in Boab and Stephen’s examples.

4.4.6 Learning through the body

The theme *Learning through the body* is closely linked with the *Journey of self* in terms of the human, individual social worker experiencing learning and the impact of this on their life. The lived body as part of the phenomenological experience is introduced by van Manen (2014) as *corporeality*, part of the lifeworld existentials outlined in Chapter 2 and considered in relation to these findings in Chapter 5. How the world is experienced by the body is an important aspect to consider and the interview questions were designed to help elicit any details within the description of learning that were related to the body senses.

The subordinate themes for *Learning through the body* are identified as, *under attack or threat; shock; managing emotions of self and others; emotional web; learning through enjoyable emotions; survival; physical and psychological isolation; and, learning through the senses*. A summary of the pattern of these themes as they presented for the group is shown in Table 9 which relates back to the individual social workers’ experiences.

Table 9: Learning through the body

																
	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
																
Learning through the body	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Under attack or threat				x	x	x			x		x		x	x		x
Shock	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	
Managing emotions for self and others		x		x			x	x		x	x				x	
Emotional web	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x			x	x	x
Learning through enjoyable emotions									x			x		x		x
Survival		x		x			x		x	x		x		x	x	x
Physical and psychological Isolation					x	x	x	x	x	x			x		x	
Learning through senses	x		x	x					x		x	x	x			x

Lived experience of being or feeling under attack was a strong feature of work examples that had led to learning about the task and the reality of people’s lives. Kathleen describes feeling “*taken aback*” by what she encountered in practice, Carol described feeling under attack in court and “*preparing to be annihilated*” and Chloe is hyper vigilant within the battlefield landscape she described. A sense of “*shock*” was an element within twelve of the social workers’ lived experiences of learning. Boab was shocked by the extent of poverty and neglect that children were experiencing but also by poor practice as he learned through others. Kathleen and Maisie both describe the culture shock of encounters, working as social workers, experiencing a new world and having assumptions shattered. The idea of survival as a theme is linked with the themes of feeling under threat but also about managing self within the context of the complex and ambiguous role.

Danny uses the metaphor of “*sink or swim*”, describing at times “*treading water*”, “*being frozen*” as part of learning to manage tasks. Other social workers describe being “*unable to sleep*” and the ethical and moral tension manifesting in physical anxiety.

Physical and psychological isolation was experienced often through the spaces and places that social workers were undertaking tasks, however the sense of being on their own also applied when in the presence of others. Sophie described feeling “*like a stranger*” as one example of a sense of isolation. Reuben described “*feeling alien*” and Boab also relates negotiating an alien and unknown environment as a “*Ziggy Stardust*” character. Examples of being “*out*” someplace were also frequent, such as feeling alone, in the dark and “*feeling blind*”, associated with navigating landscape and place. The body as a vehicle for experiencing work encounters is most notably highlighted by Maple, “*you’re just going in, in your own body*”, noted in section 4.3.8.

Emotions featured strongly and in multiple ways for social workers in their learning experiences. While specific emotions were explicitly mentioned, the emotional web of inter-relating and intense emotions was part of the overall landscape of learning. Social workers described “*overwhelmed*”, “*anxious*”, “*guilty*”, “*sad*”, “*humiliated*” and “*awful*” as some of the feelings and emotions strongly noted. It is also important to mention that social workers learned through their own emotions as well as the emotions of people they were working with. Learning to manage emotions of self and others was considered an important element of learning, for example, in Stephen’s experience of working with the mother who had just given birth. Less examples involving learning through enjoyable emotions were shared, but these were also strong when they were mentioned. Danny described being excited at getting things together and the outcome of a case. Maisie and Makine both describe in detail learning through the joy that they see on children’s faces. In these examples there are clear learning points articulated, such as “*some children just need space and a place to play*”.

Emotion would be expected to feature in social work practice. The extreme emotions and the role of these emotions in learning is not simplistic. Ferguson (2018) currently writes about the role of negative emotions in whether social workers reflect or otherwise on their experience. The development of emotional

intelligence discussed in chapter 2 is also clearly experienced in different ways by social workers (Ingram, 2013).


















Other sensory experiences contributed to learning. Social workers described examples that included aspects of sight, smell, sound, touch and taste. Danny's example described learning through contrasts in the smell that in turn led her to articulate learning to use her senses in assessment and intuitive practice. Hearing shouting, hearing telephones, hearing silence also contributed to some learning encounters and added to aspects of the social workers' learning.

4.4.7 Learning through others

The theme *Learning through others* comprises aspects of the lived experience of all sixteen social workers that involved learning encounters with colleagues and through people who were receiving social work interventions. Social workers articulated clear learning points from *Learning through others* in their interviews.

The subordinate themes for the group for *Learning through others* are identified as, *learning through the team*; *the motivation of others*; learning from the reality of *people's lives*; learning through *other social workers*; and *learning through other professionals*. *Learning through others* was a strong theme for all sixteen social workers within their experiences. Table 10 shows the theme and the subordinate themes for the group.

Table 10: Learning through others

																
	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
																
Learning through others	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Learning through the team		x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x		
Motivation of others		x		x	x		x			x					x	
People's lives	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Other social workers			x	x	x			x	x				x			
Other professionals	x				x	x	x	x				x	x		x	x

As with the previous themes discussed, the detail of the way that *Learning through others* formed part of the lived experience is unique. It is important not to assume the ways that other people influenced or formed part of the learning experience. This theme is closely linked with *Navigating tasks* that people form from aspects of the places, spaces and relations.

Learning through the team meant many things for social workers, involving support to do the task, learning through different ways of doing things, conversation, questioning and sharing experiences. The role of whether the manager enabled or facilitated learning was also associated with luck and chance. Learning from other professionals included colleagues from other disciplines as seen in the extracts from Caroline. Social workers made explicit mention of the influence of other social workers within their learning experiences, for example, Kathleen indicating the importance of this in contrast to learning within multi-disciplinary contexts. The suggestion that this is a vital component of the learning experience does not conflict with the possibilities and intentions of interprofessional learning and practice. In an interprofessional context, it is even more vital that there is opportunity to strengthen learning with different colleagues.

Chloe described the many people that had been part of her learning experiences in section 4.3.4 and elaborates further on this in extract 76:

"I learnt a lot from other people, people that I respect and I think that is probably where the best of my learning has come from, seeing practice that I'd want to copy and seeing practice that I wouldn't want to copy, to shape me to be kind of who I wanted to be but also seeing how clients, to use that word, how they respond to different people."

Extract 76: Chloe

The motivation of others has been part of many experiences shaping social worker's learning. Chloe's example is one way that her own and other's motivation has featured in descriptions. The role of the "maverick" or "dissenter" is another interesting example that sits in Reuben, Kathleen, Sylvia and Karl's experiences:

"There were some in the team there were some very experienced, really capable people. The maverick side of it is that they were always dictating what families they would be working with or not. They would decide if they were taking any more and that would be how the team manager would end up carrying the case load. In terms of power stuff there was an imbalance in management. They were kind of dictating a little bit what they were doing and that was good for them, but it wasn't necessarily good for the whole team. What it gave to me was a really good insight into the possibilities of some really complex work in a setting that seems chaotic."

Extract 77: Kathleen

Rich description of learning through the experiences of direct work with people formed a crucial element of the lived experiences of social workers. This is a clear part of, *Navigating task; Navigating landscape and place; Learning through the body*; and, *Journey of the self* with the seriousness of the social work role in family life having a huge personal impact on social workers. Learning from real people came through in rich description. The reality of life for different children and families had been striking within the experiences of social workers, including learning about particular family dynamics and the impact of neglect and abuse across the lifespan. Social workers also described learning from the impact of decisions about children, realising the significance and seriousness of the role and task. The complexity of children's lives has been learned through verbal and non-verbal cues, for example, with Makine and Maisie in relation to emotional learning through the children's experiences, witnessing joy in faces and reactions. Really

getting to know children was also highlighted as a key part of learning and the social work task.














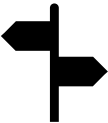
The expectations of other people in relation to families and the demonisation of parents or lack of empathy within media and interprofessional contexts was also part of social workers' learning experiences. Fairness and understanding that people should be given a chance featured in experiences in different ways, often through the ethical navigation of task. This was notable as a primary driver in Stephen's whole experience across his career. The importance of listening, respect and challenging discrimination was described in experiences often linked with the motivation of self and management of emotions.

4.4.8 Practices and conceptions of learning

The theme *Practices and conceptions of learning* comprises aspects of the lived experience that were about ways that social workers were aware of learning or conceptualised their learning. *Practices and conceptions of learning* includes themes that have guided social workers' learning where this seemed to be an important part of their experience. This was considered an important theme that captured some of the essential ingredients of learning experiences, including the ways that social workers articulated learning. *Practices and conceptions of learning* is very closely related to other themes in the overall web of experiences, Figure 39.

The subordinate themes of *Practices and conceptions of learning* are identified as, *ingredients; triggers; thinking practices; and, individual conceptions* of learning. A summary of the pattern of these themes as they presented for the group is shown in Table 11 which relates back to the individual social workers' experiences.

Table 11: Practices and conceptions of learning

													
	Carol	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Karl	Makine	Danny
	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Practices and conceptions of learning	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Ingredients		x	x	x			x	x	x	x		x	
Triggers		x	x	x		x		x	x	x			
Thinking practices	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x	x	
Individual conceptions of learning	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Ingredients of the learning experiences include methods that social workers had learned through, *by watching, talking and being shown*. *Learning quickly* was also associated with *Navigating tasks*. The importance of supervision was mentioned, sometimes associated with the role of the manager and the theme, *Learning through others*. Where supervision was mentioned, this came in the follow-up interview as part of reflection on what social workers had been surprised at not mentioning when they read their transcript:

"I didn't make reference much to my own supervision and support and things like that and I think that has been a journey of contrasts over the years.

There is quite a lot of learning from that because that is when I get to talk about my practice, so I probably missed that out in terms of my learning."

Extract 78: Kathleen

Learning through surprises and learning through mistakes were clearly important within some accounts and again linked with *Learning through others* and *Navigating tasks*. Formal learning opportunities such as training courses and study were mentioned rarely in interviews, with post-graduate study mentioned only in three follow-up interviews. *Triggers* to learning that were identified as themes for individual social workers included their *professional curiosity* (Stuart), *learning through a break from practice* (Maple), *having a thirst for knowledge to base*












practice on (Stuart) and *learning from experiences that were not enjoyed* (Kathleen and Caroline). *Thinking practices* mentioned as part of lived experience involved ideas around reflection, using the opportunity to step back and think, learning in own time, finding time and taking time. This was closely associated with the idea of trying to make sense of work experiences, manage emotions and the complexity of tasks.

Learning on a daily basis was part of the lived experience articulated by Carol, Chloe, Danny, Sylvia and Caroline. Karl also described the daily learning aspect of practice in section 4.3.14. The idea of learning never going to end was also articulated within Sophie, Sylvia, Stuart, Stephen and Maple's interviews. Within the articulation of what learning meant to the individual social worker Kathleen, Maisie, Stephen and Maple described taking responsibility for this as a key part of their lived experiences.

4.4.9 Learning by chance

Learning by chance came up as a theme in different ways through ten social workers' experiences. The subordinate themes for *Learning by chance* are, *paths lead to different places; specific cases; accidental most significant learning; and, can't prepare* as shown in Table 12. *Learning by chance* is woven within the overall web of social workers' lived experiences. This theme connects *Journey of the self, Navigating tasks, Navigating landscape and place* and *Learning through others*. Some of the most significant learning experiences were described as absolute chance.

Table 12: Learning by chance

										
	Carol	Chloe	Sophie	Sylvia	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Karl	Makine	Danny
										
Learning by chance	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Paths lead to different places	x			x	x	x	x			
Specific cases	x	x							x	
Accidental most significant learning	x		x	x					x	x
Can't prepare	x			x				x	x	

Paths lead to different places is one subordinate theme in *Learning by chance*.

This includes the importance of early work experiences, the significance of qualifying practice learning placements, individual styles and interests. The significance of contrasts in place and tasks allocated within work that led to specific learning is also part of the theme *Learning by chance*. The research did not set out to focus on qualifying learning. As detailed in the theme *Journey of the self*, social workers set their experience in chronological context. Current arrangements for planning and allocating practice learning placements in Scotland are subject to many variables and experiences are not consistent for students (Daniel and Gillies, 2016). The placement setting has perhaps influenced the employment choices that social workers made in relation to what types of work they had been exposed to and developed experience in. A recent study of nursing students career paths relating to their pre-qualifying placement experiences also suggests that this is influential (Wareing *et al.*, 2018).

Individual interests and motivation to learn were also a huge influence on opportunities to learn. Social workers created opportunities according to their own interests, for example, Stephen visiting the prison unit, resulting in learning that he may not have been exposed to through other routes. The theme *Navigating tasks* highlighted that *specific cases* had led to some incredibly poignant learning for social workers. Social workers may not have been allocated these specific cases,

therefore would not have been exposed to the elements within them that led to the learning. Although there may have been alternate opportunities, the specific variables that led to learning would be changed. There is no consistent design of allocation of work tasks to social workers to generate learning beyond basic levels in most workplaces. Allocation of tasks is subject to the variables of the team function, manager style, preferences and the team profile. It is also difficult to predict the type of any case that can be allocated, as the dynamics change frequently, as described by Karl. Chloe summarises some ideas that describe the element of chance and luck in extract 79:

“There are others that maybe can come in and do the job and just not have a willingness or a motivation to learn and just maybe practise as they have always kind of done but I also think there are people who perhaps want to learn but perhaps are not given that opportunity.

It almost kind of depends on where you end up and who you surround yourself with and what kind of conversation you get into with people and your willingness to get into the conversation. I think we can end up in places where that culture really isn't promoted and you can maybe be looking at different practitioners across the city you can see how people's practice is shaped almost by the team that they're in or their friendship groups or the people they surround themselves with and that's maybe an unfairness in practice for some people, because it almost depends on where you end up.”

Extract 79: Chloe

The theme fundamentally highlights that some of the most significant learning experiences for individual social workers took place by chance or indeed are described as “*luck*”. This was seen in Carol and Sylvia's experiences. These crucial elements of overall learning are unplanned and risk going unnoticed, without the opportunity to explore. The theme also encompasses the concept of sheer luck in the opportunities and enablers to learning that are available or otherwise within the workplace. Although this theme has, on the surface, fewer subordinate themes than the others, it is of central importance in recognising that sometimes the most important learning as described by social workers has been down to chance.

4.5 My sense-making odyssey

4.5.1 A spiral sense-making quest

My journey as a researcher within the study is a spiral process of sense-making through the analysis of the data through to presentation of the findings. I use the metaphor of an *odyssey* to explain my position in this sense-making process, a long, emotional and eventful journey with a profound personal impact. This can be described as my own *Journey of the self*. This section includes some key points from my research diary that are summarised and drawn from emotional triggers, responses to the findings and how the study affected me. I indicated my background and identity as a researcher in Chapter 1 and now return to connect again with my personal and professional interests and experiences.

The rich descriptions of social workers' experiences led to personal, professional and theoretical triggers for me. These triggers were the points of reflection and return to the data that formed part of the double-hermeneutic aspect in the sense-making spiral, moving from the parts to the whole, described in Chapter 3. In many ways my role has been of *embodied enquiry* (Todres, 2007) experiencing the research physically, emotionally and spiritually and *Learning through the body*. Embodied enquiry triggered my deeper understanding of individual experiences in the same way that the lived body contributed to participants' description and sense-making. This included bringing an awareness of what the body and mind were sensing to articulate experience. Chapter 3 discussed the reflexive process within the research, linking to diary extracts included in Appendix 5. I use the headings of *beginnings*, *middles* and *endings* now in this chapter to frame the reflexive and sense-making process and illustrate this with additional edited extracts from my research diary.

4.5.2 Beginnings

I felt well prepared with clear plans, ready for use of self as the primary research tool when I set out on the journey. Collecting data, being in the site of the research and being a social worker, brought an importance for me in making the familiar, unfamiliar, and making the unfamiliar, familiar, (Anzul, *et al.* 1991) to explore the phenomenon. I was looking at some familiar things through very different lenses and *Navigating landscape and place* and *Navigating tasks*. Although prepared, my physical experience of fear and of awe started early in the journey and returned

throughout the process. I felt overwhelming concern for the participants during the interview process. The physical sensation of experiencing this fear included distraction, discomfort and the mind-racing. Concern to make careful sense of and represent their experiences was born of my motivations and roles identified in Chapter 1. I was surprised at how this fear was so intensely coupled with awe at the depth and detail of the social workers' experiences. The relationship between the influences of my identity and the research exploration is shown in the research diary extract 2.

"I really feel just so responsible all the time, responsible for all the participant's safety, what people share and really, really, really, really, consciously, and authentically revisiting the consent all the time. I think a lot of times people will sign a consent form and it will be the initial agreement but actually this idea of ongoing consent is absolutely essential in the same way as if I was a social worker working with a family, or as a counsellor how to keep negotiating that relationship and the boundaries of it...I was almost eaten up with my own anxieties about the worst scenario.

Listening to Carol's interview I was really struck by her honesty. Her account really triggered my own awareness of being an agency decision maker, and my sense of the forum of court as a site of the work of a social worker. Her honesty and almost fear of exposure, fear of criticism was part of her experience. I was concerned about identifying the case in my own head and in any subsequent findings. This was the noise going on in my head. I was gripped by my own fear of the responsibility of a social worker and I had to work out 'Is this what Carol means here, is this about my empathy for her or my own responsibility?' When she talked about a woman having her clothes cut up, I just felt sick and questioned should I show my own shock?' I questioned does she assume I agree that this is horrific, does this need to be validated, what part of this is a theme of her learning as a social worker?'

All of this is so related to my different role and own professional knowledge because that is about managing things like ethics, consent, relationships, interviews, confidentiality. These things come from professional knowledge and are able to be applied to the research in a very authentic way and I feel that all these things I have sort of embodied to varying degrees and these are absolutely core to the success of the research. I couldn't have done them any more strongly and they come from that professional knowledge and experience."

Research diary extract 2

Responding to surprises and the emotional context of the interview process involved both exploring and validating these intense experiences of “not a normal job” (Maisie). This was a key part of formulating findings and every aspect of the findings are my *Learning through others*, as intended in the study. As an example of exploring Boab’s experience in research diary extract 3, shows this personal and emotional process.

“I was struck by the strength, passion and force of his points that were present in the words, tone and volume of what he said in his interviews. This made me pay attention to the importance for him of how serious the issue of political drivers and social injustice were. I questioned whether I was noticing this because of my personal views appearing to be similar. I was also really struck when he described being horrified by someone opening a woman’s mouth to check if they had been using drugs. I questioned whether my own horror was triggered because of my experience in working within substance use services or whether I was really picking up on Boab’s horror. This awareness and exploration being able to consider the position of Boab’s experience of being appalled as an important theme in his experience.”

I was completely blown away when Boab started with this Ziggy Stardust analogy, I then started thinking, ‘am I making too much of this because it sounds so interesting?’ I noticed my response during the interview because I was so excited at something emerging that seemed so profound in the use of the metaphor. I held back my own response to keep listening. I wondered how Boab would make sense of this. I kept thinking after the interview, ‘I should be just as interested in listening to a social worker talk about watching paint dry as I am interested in them using a metaphor connected with a musician that I am aware of and find interesting.’ The follow up interview just built on the whole thing because he elaborated more and more on this and confirmed the meaning associated with this way he had learned as a social worker. I just couldn’t believe the power and expansion of the metaphor and I knew it was a way that drew together so many aspects of his lived experience and could help explain it to others.”

Research diary extract 3

The process of the follow-up interview was fundamental in helping make sense of the meaning drawn by participants from their own words. These early explorations were the beginnings of the sense-making and analysis of social workers’ lived experiences. I was immersed in this process, everything that I am and all my

motivations and experiences, the interviews, listening to the audio recordings and the complexity of the experience that arose from participants' accounts.

Beginnings involved so many different aspects of developing themes, characterised by swinging from the elation of uncovering a gem to the doubt and despair of being lost within the volume of the data. The beginnings of my journey of sense-making was not short, it was intense and a significant part of the research process. I was in it for the long-haul and wondered if I would ever get there in terms of any concrete destination.

4.5.3 Middles

The middles of the research journey are characterised by feeling lost and having to find a way through the data, to the meanings held therein. I was grappling with themes and kept returning to the data. The *whole* felt too big and *the parts* felt too many. Letting go and trusting the process began in the data collection stage, a fear of not having enough, rich data was surpassed by having too much as I fully took the plunge into the data. I had to decide what was meaningful and returning to the data and the language used helped develop the themes this interpretative process. The language had been systematically looked at as parts of the whole in the sequence of analysis detailed in Chapter 3. I became very confident in my final themes and their representation as a whole web being a strong articulation of the lived experiences. A fear of over-simplifying or fragmenting the themes had been another key fear that emerged in the middles of the research:

“I’m screaming inside at the potential over-simplification of some the concepts if they are named as themes, if anyone has seen any of these as I work, I am thinking ‘no, no it is more than that’, and it’s very difficult to show the richness of what needs to be understood. That’s been one of my biggest fears is that there would be an over-simplification, or fragmentation and I think that has led me to develop the visual webs. It’s my attempt that people don’t fragment the themes like learning through others or navigating tasks and navigating place but it’s everything together all the time, and it’s related to all these things that are said in these theoretical bits.

I think I’ve got a long way to go with that, but I’ve presented that as a conceptual model. I had no intention of developing a conceptual model when I did the research, I was looking at finding out about the experience, but it led me to develop this idea. How would this be different if this was a nurse? how would this be different if this was a teacher? It might be

very similar in some respects, but actually what are the details beneath these things. What we talking about the task of a nurse, or the place that a nurse will be working in? And yes, of course these will be as complex and potentially as extreme or heart-wrenching work in lots of different places, but that's what it helps you articulate."

Research diary extract 4

It felt natural for me to be reflexive as a practitioner and educator, turning things inside-out, but doing things in a disciplined way helped make sense of the data and produce the themes. The reflexive process was about bringing the unconscious into consciousness, managing anxieties and reflecting on my surprise at the depth and detail shared by participants. Reflexivity helped me stay on track with the focus of the research question, specifically the structure, texture and meaning of social workers' lived experiences of learning in the workplace.

4.5.4 Endings

The endings of the research journey are characterised by excitement about the findings and coming full circle in the quest to answer the research question. The exploration within the study has been a quest for deeper understanding about the experience of learning for social workers in the workplace. The findings help offer a guide to understanding what this experience is like. I have used my experience and roles to navigate the journey which has led to a shift in my professional identity. This shift includes growth and confidence in the doctoral researcher role and a surprising new consolidation and feeling of alignment with my own social work identity. These two elements of change in my identity are influenced by the research process and the findings themselves. Coming full circle also led to reflection on the tensions that I experienced in the findings. The following extract from my research diary reveals some tensions in the findings are *Practices and conceptions of learning* and the implications of the study which are discussed in Chapter 6.

"I think some research finds its way very, very quickly into huge cross cutting policy and then practice expectations. That is something that really affects practice. The tension in my research area is that people want something tangible to measure when they are funding training for social workers. If there is maybe an issue where there's been the death of a child or the death of a vulnerable adult. That will be a sweeping raft of policy and guidance through over the formal case reviews that expect certain things and there will be expected to be an action plan.

Another tension for me that I keep coming back to is that frameworks do not feature in what I am seeing and feeling about what is important, accredited programmes do not feature. I think there's one mention of regulatory requirements for CPD from one participant somewhere, but just hinted at. Anything that matters to the social workers in terms of the structure and texture of their experience of learning is actually nothing to do with all of this formal stuff, which is not necessarily the surprising bit, but the extent to which all of that is absent is surprising to me and concerning to me.

At the start I was in a local authority, heavily involved in direct social work practice and responsible for the learning and development of social workers at that time. I was managing a lot of different workforce groups, but my interest was really strongly about the social workers that was responsible for, and I did direct practice to maintain my own credibility at the same and is fairly recent that I left. I had done all the data collection and some of the analysis before moving to a different role which had tensions for me in that some aspects of my thesis findings do not align with the current policy and practice expectations about CPL.”

Research diary extract 5

The idea of *Learning by chance* has a strong parallel process for me as a researcher. For example, it was chance that I volunteered in a rape crisis centre. It was chance that I studied social work. It was not chance that I designed the study the way it has been carried out. The skills and knowledge drawn from my different professional roles relate to the study design and the findings at every stage. The kind of professional knowledge I am drawing from and producing is influenced by these roles and interests outlined in Chapter 1. I consider *Learning by chance* and *Learning through the body* to be the findings that surprised me the most from the research and the implications of these are discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction to the discussion

This chapter will reflectively discuss the findings about social workers' learning in the workplace. The discussion returns to conceptions of workplace learning and phenomenological ideas to explore what the findings tell us about the experience of learning for social workers in the workplace. Connections with empirical research relating to social workers' professional learning in the workplace, making explicit links with the findings, are woven into the discussion. The chapter will then move towards conceptualising the experience of social workers that takes the complexity of the whole learning experience into account. An emerging hybrid conceptual web model is introduced for representing the experience of social workers' learning in the workplace, integrating core elements from the findings with phenomenological and workplace learning theory. The ideas explored and the conceptual model, provide a clear foundation for considering the contribution and implications of the research which follow in Chapter 6.

5.2 Social workers' experiences of workplace learning

5.2.1 Reflections on biographicity

The research set out to explore lived experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace. Reflecting on theoretical models of workplace learning and the nature of the lifeworld help refocus on how the findings relate to the fundamental aim of the research. Chapter 2 introduced some key principles of workplace learning theory and highlighted Illeris' (2011) *Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life* as a comprehensive way of understanding the dynamic processes between the individual and the context of their work environment. Some brief connections between my findings and some key principles of workplace learning literature will be discussed before exploring Illeris' model in more detail.

Central concepts of workplace learning acknowledge that the curriculum is individual, and the trajectory of the professional learner comprises their biographical and biological development (Billett, 2001). In the context of workplace learning, *biographicity* relates to the learner continually reinterpreting their self through workplace learning and *ontogenesis* reflects their biological development and maturation (Billett, 2001). The findings from the study can be related to both these aspects of workplace learning within the trajectory of the professional

learner, a clear parallel with the theme *Journey of the self* where biographicity and ontogenesis are woven together.

Social work identity was not the specific focus of this research yet the findings in relation to *Journey of the self* are strongly connected. Returning to literature that explores social work professional identity, Webb (2016) outlines the complexity of an evolving process that is deeply personal, involving motives, values which resonates with the findings of *becoming*, and *readiness and motivation*. A sense of *fit* was also closely related with social workers' journey in relation to their own values, interests and those promoted by the profession (Stuart; Reuben).

Professional identity is also explored in current research into the trajectory of newly qualified social workers in Scotland. Identity is found to be associated with their sense of self and role as a social worker often in the context of the workplace setting, and in particular in relation to other disciplines (Grant *et al.* 2019). Aspects of identity are also considered in this chapter, in relation to professional learning, *Learning through the body* and *Learning through others*.

5.2.2 Reflections on affordances

One of the other main principles of Billett's ideas of workplace learning is that *affordances*, activities that will generate learning, are unequal in their distribution, for example, in patterns of work task allocation (Billett, 2004). Billett suggests that the workplace curriculum does not have a robust associated pedagogy in organisations, resulting in learning opportunities that are not optimised (Billett, 2004). *Navigating tasks* and the associated *emotional web* of *Learning through the body* were closely associated with *ambiguity* for example, *looking for answers* (Boab, Caroline and Stuart), *trying to work out what to do* (Sylvia, Caroline, Stuart and Danny) and *through exposure* (Chloe). *Work allocation* (Caroline) is specifically mentioned in relation to *the possibilities of practice* and how direct work opportunities offer rich learning challenges. *Navigating tasks* shows that the products and production of the enterprise of social work are complicated and varied, beyond which *Navigating landscape and place* showed the complexity of what the workplace itself means for social workers. In social work there are no tasks that will be the same on more than one occasion, although there may be similarities in how they are described, or the expectation of what is produced, for example, an assessment report of a particular type or for a particular audience. There is also no set pattern of what work tasks will be available at any point in time within a service. This means that the distribution of work can be hard to plan.

Billett's ideas are also about the level of difficulty associated with a task, including how and when this is introduced to a learner (Billett, 2001). *Learning by chance* showed that specific cases had led to some of the most poignant learning for social workers, where the allocation and nature of work were by chance (Carol, Chloe and Makine). This theme also showed social workers' lived experience was that what you learned in one situation would not necessarily help you in another, with the subordinate theme *can't prepare* (Sylvia, Carol, Makine and Karl).

5.2.3 Reflections on knowledgeability

Different forms of professional knowledge (Eraut, 2009) outlined earlier in the thesis are woven through accounts of social workers' lived experience according to their articulation of learning. Social workers' learning, role and knowledge were described in Chapter 2 as part of an ambiguous context that draw from different perspectives. Social work education and professional practice strongly promote principles of reflective learning explicitly using the work of Schön (1983) and Kolb (1984). This research did not set out to foreground these principles in the literature review or assume these would be part of social workers' lived experience to remain open to what the interviews would reveal.

Programmes that teach social work practice educators embed theories of reflection as fundamental for effective facilitation of learning (SQA, 2016). Learning through reflection is often characterised as a cycle or spiral process of reflecting on experiences that lead to new insights that can be applied to future events. Reflecting in this way is bringing an experience into conscious focus by the learner that results in change. Although embedded in rhetoric, policy and professional discourses the complexity and nuances of reflecting in and on action in professional practice (Schön, 1983) can be grossly oversimplified. There is also limited evidence of the extent to which reflection and reflexive processes are part of social workers' professional learning and practice in reality (Ferguson, 2018). Reflective practice was only cited once as a specific aspect of lived experience in these study findings (Carol). Carol stated *Being a reflective practitioner* as important for her and used the term to define what she meant by workplace learning as a social worker. This was not elaborated, but a simple fact presented. Kathleen highlighted that there is more need for reflective opportunities, citing the interview as a very helpful reflective space.

The concept of *knowledgeability* as an outcome of learning, defined within the professional landscape (Wenger-Traynor and Wenger-Traynor, 2014), is also helpful to articulate the ambiguous aspects of learning in social work practice that feature in social workers' accounts. The idea of knowledgeability is about transferability across the landscape of practice and may help describe the intangible yet crucial outcomes of learning which are understood within the social work professional context (Wenger-Traynor and Wenger-Traynor, 2014). In *Navigating tasks* within the subordinate themes of *ambiguity* and *ordinary, extraordinary and extreme* for the group and individual themes such as *indescribable tasks/articulating what is not articulate* (Karl and Makine), *not an ordinary job* (Maisie, Stuart, Stephen, Jade and Makine) and *no instruction manual* (Boab, Stuart and Jade), the difficulty of the task and learning how to undertake the task is shown.

The process by which learning occurs, "*perception, transmission, experience, imitation and participation*" (Eraut, 2009) could take place within a single event. Within social workers' accounts, their participation was always a feature of the learning described. This often involved their body and experiencing diverse emotions. The other consistent aspect of the accounts described is that the learning was from experiencing direct practice as social workers. In the theme *Practices and conceptions of learning* social workers articulated how they understood their learning connected with perception and imitation such as the themes, *learning by talking* (Stephen); *learning from surprises* (Kathleen); *learning by being shown* (Maisie); and, *learning by watching* (Kathleen and Maisie). The overall findings and overarching web that connects these themes, stresses that learning always involves a complex and dynamic mix of processes. These reflections highlight some of the key principles of workplace and professional learning theories, applied to these findings and confirm the complexity of the learning experience for social workers.

5.2.4 Reflections on learning in working life

Illeris' three basic dimensions of learning, *content, incentive and interaction*, provide the foundation for the *Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life* (Illeris, 2011). This model is helpful to further explore the findings of the research and consider the nature of workplace learning for social workers. A map of the superordinate and subordinate themes for individuals and the group can be found

in Appendix 11 based on the dimensions of Illeris' model. *Journey of self* as a superordinate theme for the group, with subordinate themes *readiness and motivation* and *fit* reveal aspects of the incentive dimension for social workers. The self is not only part of the learning process, but also learning content, for example, self-development, growth and attitudes. This is helpful for social work where the requirements for learning involve no set body of knowledge, but do involve self-awareness, use of self and management of self as outlined in Chapter 1 and considered in Chapter 2. Identity is fundamentally connected with the individual dimension of Illeris' conceptions of learning in working life. Social workers' identity as part of their lived experiences of learning are introduced earlier in this chapter in relation to biographicity, values and motivation. Identity is also related to many of the interactions between the individual and their working practices. Illeris defines employee past experiences and future perspectives as part of the *content dimension*. Beyond individual intrinsic motivation, *Practices and conceptions of learning* will influence the *content* and *incentive* dimensions of learning. Learning is experienced as an ongoing, embedded and embodied process for social workers, identified in Chapter 4. Illeris also considers emotion as key part of the individual dimension of learning, the *emotional web* theme within *Learning through the body* reminds us that for social workers this is incredibly complex aspect of their lived experiences.

Within the centre of the *Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life*, Illeris locates the interactions between the individual and their *working practices*, which is the key to triggering learning. The interactions are in the middle of the *rational-technical* and the *social-cultural* elements of the working environment. *Learning through others*; *Navigating task*; *Navigating landscape and place*; and, *Learning by chance* all involve dynamic processes where the individual social worker interacts with the multiple elements of the workplace environment. *Learning through the body* is also related to what happens for social workers during the process of this interaction. The *technical-rational* environment includes the nature of the work, allocation, distribution and division of labour. Opportunities for working autonomously and the possibilities for interaction that can trigger the learning are also important elements. This connects with the *Learning by chance* theme where individual tasks and particular cases had been significant learning experiences, where these were influenced by the ways of doing within the workplace. In the *social-cultural* environment the norms, values, social groupings and processes are

identified as elements by Illeris. The themes of *Learning through others*; *Navigating landscape and place*; and, *Navigating task* are hugely influenced by this aspect of the environment. These three themes resonate with Hood's perspective on complexity in social work where the unpredictability of both task and eventual outcome characterise social workers' experiences (Hood, 2015). Hood identified the necessity of development in the professional network of social workers to support individual learning in this context. Emerging research into social workers' experiences shows a duality in their feeling both competent and struggling to undertake what is required of them in their work at the early career stage (Grant *et al.* 2020). Social workers described examples of struggling to work in a value-led rather than resource-led way said to "*reflect the pluralities of professional experience*" (Grant *et al.* 2020, p. 7). These ideas connect with notions of *readiness, motivation, fit* in the theme *Journey of the self* in addition to connecting with *Navigating tasks*.

The integrated web model of group themes, Figure 39, shows the intricate threads that connect tasks, the emotional and embodied experience and how these were woven together for social workers in their daily work.

Elements of workplace practice that promote professional learning such as supervision, coaching or mentoring were rarely hinted at within social workers' descriptions. Professional supervision is often cited in social work as the place and space that can support critical reflection (Kettle, 2015). Research into the experience of social workers in the early stages of their career continues to report concern over the frequency, quality and consistency of professional supervision (Grant *et al.* 2019). Professional supervision was also not mentioned in explicit terms in participants' accounts in my study. If it did feature, then this occurred in follow up interviews, when participants reflected on the absence of these in their transcripts. The role of the manager was noted more generally as a critical factor in what opportunities there had been to learn in the workplace, seen in the theme *Learning through others*. The findings show that the specific position of reflection and the influences of reflective opportunities in the structure and texture of social workers' experiences were not easily perceived or understood.

5.3 The lifeworld that social workers learn in

The research design enabled participants' individual experiences to be explored and represented as lived by social workers. Phenomenological reflections on the

findings help the discussion include the whole of the texture, structure and meaning of social workers' lived experiences. The lifeworld existentials are parts of the essential structure of human life and should not be fragmented. The lifeworld existentials introduced in Chapter 3, provide a helpful framework to do frame this discussion. The map in Appendix 11 also shows individual and group themes that link to the lifeworld existentials (van Manen, 2014). This is not a simplistic mapping but confirms that there are multiple parts of the whole lived experience. This mapping was done after the findings were established and revealed a surprising extent to which these could be related clearly with the different lifeworld existentials. I will explore the findings of the research in relation to the lifeworld existentials, linking with other relevant literature in each section.

5.3.1 Temporality

Social workers' experiences were lived in relation to their sense of time in several ways most notably in the theme *Journey of the self*, but also in the sense of *Navigating tasks; Navigating landscape and place*; and, *Practices and conceptions of learning*. *Journey of the self*, involved social workers looking to the past to make sense of the present through their career trajectory closely associated with *ontogenesis* and *biographicity* previously discussed. *Readiness and motivation*, for example, included social workers locating their learning experiences in the context of age (Reuben, Karl and Danny) and where they identified starting points of their journey. The sense of self as a social worker was associated with *experience or novice* (Caroline) that is also related to the sense of time spent in role and career. Social workers also connected to *what was there before* in describing their experiences, for example, Stuart's lived experience as a social worker is directly linked with a previous career with very different rules and tasks that did not fit for him in contrast to social work. The subordinate theme *impact on life* involved eleven of the social workers describing the parallel of learning experiences with their own life (Boab, Kathleen, Sophie, Sylvia, Caroline, Masie, Stuart, Stephen, Karl, Makine and Danny). Others contextualised their learning experience in, and relating to, their whole life (Reuben and Stuart). Developing identity and becoming a social worker closely links with this aspect of the lifeworld for involving how we consider and reinterpret ourselves in relation to subjective time (van Manen, 2014). Social workers described *creating a new self* (Boab, Stephen and Maple), *integration of selves* (Caroline, Stuart and Danny) and *avoiding becoming something* (Makine).

Navigating task also involved a sense of time such as *Life and Death*, for example, *how do you get to the point of removing children (Maisie)*. Ideas about the sense of *daily challenge (Chloe)* and *get up and do it again (Maisie)* reveal the continuing embedded nature of learning and sense of ongoing cycle. *Navigating landscape and place* involved a sense of time in *different worlds, alien landscape (Reuben, Caroline)*, *new world (Stuart)* and *dystopia (Makine)*. Within *different worlds* subjective time can have a different feeling for the social worker. In searching for meaning, social workers' *Practices and conceptions of learning* involved several examples related to Temporality. *Triggers* to learning included *through a break (Maple)* and in *thinking practices, taking time/finding time (Maple)*. Linked with the cycle of ongoing learning *individual conceptions* also included *learning is never going to end (Sophie, Sylvia, Stuart, Stephen, Maple and Karl)* and *learn on a daily basis (Carol, Chloe, Sylvia and Caroline)*. These ways of understanding learning as a social worker are deeply connected to the experience of time as being without end.

5.3.2 Spatiality

How social workers' experiences were lived in relation to space was central to the theme of *Navigating landscape and place* and extended across all seven themes. All subordinate themes are associated in some way with the social workers' lived experience of space. *Diverse places* where social workers learned spanned from an *office as place (Reuben, Caroline)*, *house as place (Kathleen, Sophie and Maisie)* to a *Sheriff's house as place (Maisie)*. *Court as place (Carol, Chloe, Sophie and Caroline)* was another individual superordinate theme for social workers that revealed the nature of space and was closely associated with *Learning through the body*.

Experiences were lived in relation to whether space felt safe, comfortable, welcoming, or otherwise. Social workers lived space as *unknown (Stuart)* *isolated (Boab, Maisie, Jade)* and *in the dark (Caroline and Jade)*. Lived space for many social workers involved *trying to find way (Karl)*, *trying to find place in the world (Caroline, Stuart)* and with *no map, no pathway (Stuart)*. The sense of lived space as having to be navigated was identified in relation to both physical space and practical task for social workers but also requiring an *ethical compass* which was a theme for several social workers (Chloe, Sophie, Caroline, Stuart, Karl and

Danny). The ideas of trying to manage and navigate what social worker understood as space was seen by Makine as *trying to be a bridge*. Themes associated with routes and paths also help us understand the sense of social workers' navigation of lived space. *Paths lead to different places* involved social workers' sense of contrast in practice settings and included placements in the training stage within the *Learning by chance* superordinate theme.

The metaphors that social workers used to make sense of their experience in relation to space also included *Battle*, which was a subordinate theme for the group and *theatre* which was a subordinate theme for Chloe. Social workers described their sense of lived space as *minefield* (Boab and Makine), *being on sidelines* (Caroline), *trying to get over the threshold* (Sophie) and *the world is on fire* (Makine). These individual subordinate themes were identified as strongly representing essential elements of the social worker's experiences as lived. The linguistic use of battle or chaos terms showed the intensity and risk of lived space. *Different worlds*, discussed above in relation to spatiality, hugely helps convey the meaning that lived space is all-encompassing.

Lived space not only included physical aspects of place or location but also the felt sense of the environment in the group subordinate theme *aspects and elements*. This included the contextual characteristics of, *legislative landscape* (Reuben; Maisie); *poverty* (Maisie); *substance misuse* (Maisie); *socio-economic context* (Boab, Stuart and Makine); *equalities and anti-oppressive context* (Karl); and, *complex family dynamics* (Kathleen, Stuart, Jade, Karl and Makine) as individual themes. Lived space has also reflected an awareness of *working in the lifespan* of others (Maisie) and differences in practice habits in different geographic spaces, *different skills for different settings* (Reuben, Caroline and Jade). Lived space is also hugely characterised by the people who are in the space, for example, *absence or presence of others* (Kathleen).

Because space is negotiated by the body, *Learning through the body* is also deeply connected to lived space with all subordinate themes linked with how social workers have felt in their body within places. In particular themes of, *under attack or threat*; *physical and psychological isolation*; and, *learning through the senses* are connected to physical experiences of lived space. Space is experienced with sights, sounds, smells, touch and the contrasts in these. Danny describes where *life and death in the smell* and *contrast in emotions and senses* are learning

through physical responses to places that are part of her learning. Maple's theme *being there in your own body* highlights the lived body within lived space.

5.3.3 Corporeality

Social workers' experiences were lived in relation to their body in profound ways, explored in Chapter 4 and the theme *Learning through the body. Journey of the self* also involves an embodied personal biographical and career trajectory that includes maturational development, age and sense of fit. *Being a stranger* (Caroline); *being human in practice* (Makine); *feeling human* (Reuben); and, *seen as self* (Reuben), all involve the social workers' sense of self within their body. The importance of the body as an aspect of learning and knowing is central to social worker experiences. It is difficult to distinguish how embodied *learning* correlates with ideas about somatic or embodied *knowing*. Mininder and Cohen (2011) describe social work having traditionally relied on cognitive knowing and explore how somatic sensations have guided what they do. Merleau-Ponty (1962) centralises the body as the starting point through which the lifeworld is experienced, that then extends into the social world. Practitioners in health, social care and social work are often working with the care of the physical body of people using their services. Awareness and use of their own body in their work is less explicit. Intuitive practice is often discussed in relation to tacit knowledge in social work along with the idea of gut instinct or hunches. Barnacle highlights embodied knowing as the integration of knowing, acting and being in a whole person (Barnacle, 2009). With the body present in all encounters, the gut is identified as having a central role in "*orientating thought*", what a person pays attention to and what they subsequently do (Barnacle, 2009, p.24). The body is the means by which social workers *Navigate tasks* and *Navigate landscape and places*.

Subordinate themes for the group *under attack or threat* and *shock* involve many ways that social workers' experiences were in relation to the body and are readily imagined using language that represents feeling or being unsafe. Beyond the physical body, *emotional web*, *learning through difficult emotions* and *learning through enjoyable emotions* helps us understand lived body through the range and intensity of emotions that are connected to individual themes. *Emotional impact* (Carol, Stuart and Makine); *feeling that it hardens you* (Caroline); *extreme and intense emotions* (Maisie); and, *we need to feel* (Stephen), are individual themes that were central to lived experience through the body. The specific emotional

themes for individuals, introduced in Chapter 4, are a reminder that the spectrum of these were an essence of social workers' lived experiences. Eraut (2007) suggests that "*our capacity to learn is profoundly affected by our state of feeling at the time we are learning or exposed to new experiences*". *Feeling overwhelmed* (Kathleen); *feeling anxious* (Kathleen, Sophie, Sylvia and Maisie); *feeling responsible* (Kathleen); *feeling sad* (Boab); *feeling shame* (Makine); *feeling exhausted and drained* (Carol and Chloe), are examples of individual themes that have been experienced in very different ways in relation to lived body. Emotions are acknowledged in the literature discussed in Chapter 2, and specifically in relation to negotiating the home visit as workplace (Ferguson, 2018). Emotional intelligence remains at the fore of professional expectations linked to self-awareness and use of self (Ingram, 2013; Gordon and Dunworth, 2017). There is also a connection between research on emotion and social workers' resilience. Awareness, management and containment of difficult emotions play different parts in the literature and are often associated with wellbeing (Grant and Kinman, 2012; Ravelier, 2019). Grant and Kinman (2012) identify the importance of effective strategies for promoting resilience through social work education that highlight individual and organisational responsibilities. Rajin-Rankin (2014) highlights self-identity as an important foregrounding factor in the management of emotion for social work practice. Resilience and wellbeing are concepts that are also foregrounded in revised regulatory standards of what social workers are required to do to qualify and maintain registration (SSSC, 2020). The *emotional web* as part of *Learning through the body* reveals more depth about emotions and the part that they play in social workers' lived experiences. *Learning through the body* includes the role of these emotional experiences in contributing to *learning*.

5.3.4 Materiality

How social workers' experiences were lived in relation to things is most easily associated with the theme of *the machine*, a subordinate group theme of *Navigating landscape and place*. This theme also relates strongly to van Manen's (2014) idea of lived cyborg relations as part of the lifeworld structure, how experiences were lived in relation to technology. Within the metaphor of *the machine* used by Makine, the system attempts to become extensions of the social worker that are resisted by him. *Managing the conveyor belt* (Makine); *system is harmful and complex* (Jade and Makine); *feeding the system* (Makine); and, *the system may lead you to look at things in certain ways* (Sylvia), all help us

understand some of the ways that things in the system are part of lived experience. Within the system, different things are part of social workers' lived experiences such as *operating procedures* (Chloe and Stuart), *importance of case notes* (Stuart) and *influence of computer system* (Jade, Makine). *Learning how to be in different systems* (Reuben and Caroline) helps show the complexity of lived things rooted in *Navigating tasks* and *Navigating landscape and place*.

5.3.5 Relationality

Social workers' experiences were lived in relation to others in very clear ways that contributed to the theme *Learning through others*, but also in *Navigating tasks* and *Learning by chance*. *Learning through the team* (Carol, Chloe, Kathleen, Sophie, Sylvia, Caroline, Maisie, Stephen and Maple) involved experiences lived in relation to different team members and a sense of the whole team. *Learning through other people's cases* (Reuben); *learning from different ways of doing* (Sylvia and Karl); and, *the role of the manager in learning* (Sylvia, Caroline and Maple), would be examples of individual themes with a clear connection to lived others. *Other social workers* and *other professionals* are subordinate themes for the group that also help understand lived relations with different professionals.

The theme *people's lives*, is crucial to social workers' experience of lived others. A broad and deep theme for the group was *learning from service users and families* (Reuben, Kathleen, Sophie, Stuart, Stephen, Karl, Makine and Danny). Specific things that were learned through others were identified. *Importance of relationships* (Stephen, Jade and Karl); *people should be given more of a chance* (Caroline and Maple); *learning about the impact of previous decisions about children* (Maisie), are some examples of individual themes that shine light on what was learned by social workers through lived others. Relationship-based practice is a central tenet of social work professional practice yet is seen to be limited by organisational and managerial constraints (Smith and Ingram, 2018). This is borne out in the theme of *Navigating tasks* such as *the machine* and the experience of Makine as an example of managing the tensions of practice.

Navigating tasks and *Navigating landscape and place* are involving lived others in all parts of social workers' experiences. Where social workers reflect on self, for example, as *experienced or novice*, it is self in relation to others. *Importance of respect* (Stephen); *importance of listening* (Stephen); *how to respond to different people* (Reuben and Chloe), are other examples of explicit themes related to lived

others. The centrality of lived others within social workers' experiences is hugely important, not least because of the connections between *emotional web* of self and others.

The position of *other social workers*, supervisors and *other professionals* are central to *Learning through others*. *Supervision* that promotes and supports critically reflective practice is widely recognised as pivotal in supporting social workers' professional learning and development (Kettle, 2015; Saltiel, 2017). Coaching and mentoring are also widely implemented to support learning in workplace contexts (HSCB, 2014). Supervision and other supportive practices are integral to learning and development policy and developing frameworks for newly qualified social workers and continuing professional learning (SSSC, 2020). How these practices could best fit with the holistic experience of learning can be understood through the web model of group themes. The different elements of learning are not isolated and can't be fragmented in understanding social workers' lived experiences.

Lived others could also be seen to include lived relations with *the machine*, with social workers part of a system that influences their behaviour, notably seen in Makine's lived experience. *Navigating tasks* in some of the vivid examples of lived experience described, linked to the subordinate group theme *life and death*. Social workers' experiences in relation to lived others were about, *remembering people and their lives are unique* (Boab and Kathleen); *real life* (Sophie and Maple); *keeping children alive and safe* (Makine); *huge decisions* (Sylvia); and, literal *life and death* (Boab, Carol, Reuben, Chloe, Kathleen, Sophie, Sylvia, Maisie, Stuart, Stephen, Maple, Karl and Makine). Lived others fundamentally connects with the theme of *Learning by chance* in many ways. It is helpful to remember the subordinate theme *a small piece of practice can generate a big learning experience* (Sylvia), in relation to the potential of workplace tasks for transformative learning.

5.3.6 Reflections on social work professional learning

The diagram in Chapter 2 located the study at the heart of different areas of knowledge. The previous sections have reflected on how the findings relate to knowledge about individual, organisational, workplace learning and phenomenological ideas. The next section will return to consider the findings in relation to the relevant literature around social workers' professional learning.

Connections between and across themes were represented through the visual web diagram and within the discussion in Chapter 4. The findings provided a clear insight into multiple layers of the social workers' experiences.

The research question "*What are the lived experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace?*" did not presuppose the meaning of learning, the elements of experience or the connections in and between these. This means that the research methods were not designed to direct what should be included in social workers' accounts of their professional learning. The themes identified and presented in the findings from the research reveal what social workers elected as important in conveying their lived experience of learning. I remained committed to the IPA approach and did not impose my own interpretation of social workers' experiences. Reflecting on the presented findings, some aspects of personal and professional development, are noticeably absent from the ideas identified by the social workers interviewed and these are included in the discussion.

Participants rarely mentioned the connection between formal or accredited continuing professional development, to their experiences of workplace learning. At times participants referred to specific training courses around a practice topic, for example, domestic abuse training was linked to specific cases. In the landscape of social work, the importance of professional learning is shared between stakeholders (Kettle, et al., 2016) however, who takes responsibility for this is not clear, which creates difficulties when trying to meet social workers' learning needs. There is a high expectation on university providers of qualifying education to ensure readiness of social workers to practice and equip them for the newly qualified and early career transition stages (Grant *et al.*, 2016). The role of social services employers is increasingly at the forefront of hopes for balancing the position of, and responsibility for, effective continuing professional learning in social work (McCulloch and Taylor, 2018). The findings of my current research offer social workers' perspectives that do not highlight formal or informal arranged learning opportunities, as the most poignant within their experiences. The magnitude of incidental learning through work tasks and the significance of *Learning by chance*, is highlighted in this research and is a profound element of social workers' experiences.

Given the current policy and practice demands of integrated services and interprofessional learning, interviewed social workers rarely mentioned this in their

accounts. It is not clear why this might be, but it is interesting to note given the current policy and legislative context. The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act (2014) and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014) both stipulate the changes to the configuration of services and emphasise how services should be shared or integrated. *Learning through others* involved some aspects of lived experience related to learning through other professionals. Kathleen reflects in her account of learning in a multi-disciplinary team and highlights the importance of having learned early in her career from other social workers being around her. Sophie's account highlights the shared duty of multi-agency partners however, she also expressed that social workers have sole responsibility when making child protection plans. How social workers see themselves in relation to other professions is another key aspect of identity (Grant *et al.*, 2019; Webb, 2016); Wiles and Vicary, 2019). Grant *et al.* (2019) show identity related to the context of different workplace settings and practice in an integrated landscape of professional practice as a key component of the development of early career social workers. Although my research showed less evidence of this in participants' accounts specifically, the complexity of every setting was revealed through *Navigating landscape and place* and *Navigating task*. The context of integrated services may continue to influence the opportunities for social workers learning in the workplace and I will discuss this in Chapter 6 implications.

Research into social workers learning at the pre-qualifying stage was not the focus of this study as learning in practice settings within the context of assessment was seen to be fundamentally different to learning as a social worker at a later stage. Daniel *et al.* (2016) Gordon *et al.* (2019). Research into how learning is facilitated was also connected to pre-qualifying practice learning in the literature review. The position of the workplace as a site for learning remains at the fore of the findings in in this research too. The study findings draw from lived experiences of learning that has not been organised or structured. It could be argued that post-qualifying frameworks or regulatory requirements might influence social workers' learning in a similar way to earlier assessment.

Recent empirical research in Scotland provides evidence that social workers' identity is also not associated with their regulation status. Simpson *et al.* (2020) assert that one of the functions of regulation of social work was to strengthen professional identity but relationships are "*conflictual and unproductive*" (Simpson *et al.*, 2020, p. 1909). Additionally, Grant *et al.* (2019) provide evidence that shows

social workers regard their regulation status as low in ranking, in a pre-determined list, in respect of their professional identity with additional qualitative data supporting that finding. Social workers wanted the regulator to strengthen their role in supporting the identity of the profession as a whole. The findings of this study also did not position regulation status as an important feature of continuing professional learning. Formal frameworks and the influence of regulation were absent from social workers' accounts, except for one cursory mention in Chloe's first interview, and a critique of the regulator itself by Boab. It is not possible to infer what this fully means because the research did not set out to explore the role of this, or social work frameworks, as triggers, enablers or barriers to workplace learning. This point is interesting because in social work practice, continual professional learning is prominent within policy and associated resources however it is absent within participants' description of their lived experiences.

Research that positioned workplace learning within the continuum of *shared professional learning* (Kettle *et al.* 2016) highlighted the key role workplace employers could and should play in connecting academic and practice-based learning. When considering how to foster social workers' learning, it might be helpful to reflect on the disconnection found here between, the importance placed on professional learning opportunities, requirements and current workplace learning strategies. Evidence from very recent research into the experiences of newly qualified social workers states that opportunities for continuing professional learning provided by the employer are limited (Grant *et al.* 2020). In the same study, social workers state that they desire more access to formal and accredited learning opportunities. Grant *et al.* (2020) describe a vision of workplace learning in line with that of Kettle *et al.* (2016) that involves a broad spectrum of learning *in, through* and *at work*. The data set and reported findings are however talking about access to training, formal learning, and traditional forms of self-directed learning or support for social workers. The broad workforce learning lens taken by my study has generated findings that can be explored about the wider nature of learning in and through the workplace that is very different to the lenses of social work academia, regulation and practice. In combination these lenses can provide a much clearer view of what is meant by workplace learning for social workers. This will be considered further in Chapter 6. I will draw learning from the findings together and offer a way of conceptualising workplace learning for social workers

before moving to the final chapter to consider conclusions and implications of this study.

5.4 Drawing together learning from the findings

There are several ideas highlighted here that are important for thinking about social workers' learning in the workplace drawn from the findings in Chapter 4, theoretical reflections in Chapter 5 and returning to empirical literature. These reflections have been triggered by the hermeneutic cycle and influenced by my researcher standpoint identified in Chapter 1.

5.4.1 The whole of the experience matters

The web of group themes (Figure 39) represents the findings for the group and the interconnected complex aspects of lived experience for social workers' learning in the workplace. The complexity of this web matters, as this helps us understand the multiple aspects of the phenomenon of learning as a social worker in the workplace. Recognition of the dynamic, multiple connections in the whole of the experience draws together ideas about the embodied, *Journey of the self*; *Navigating tasks*; and, *Navigating landscape and place*. There is a risk of oversimplification, reduction and fragmentation of the learning experience and the web serves as a reminder of the whole, not only each part. The whole of the person within this web also matters along with the nature of each thread of their experience and how these are woven together. Beddoe (2009) found that although the holistic and individual nature of learning is mentioned in models and approaches, this is rarely realised in practice. Individual and unique experiences are shown for all the social workers interviewed that represent the complexity of their experiences. Assumptions should not be made about the nature of social workers' experiences or how the different parts thread together. It is imperative to understand what the whole experience means for social workers, then design and support learning accordingly.

5.4.2 The body matters

The important role of the body in learning was an important theme across the group and highlighted in the theoretical reflections about corporeality in relation to the lifeworld. Both physical and psychological threads of social workers' experiences are directly linked with their practice with people and the places they are working in, such as family homes and courts. Ferguson (2009) as discussed in

Chapter 2 acknowledges the importance of social workers using the body to manage physical workplaces, specifically home visits. The extreme emotional responses that can prevent social workers physically and emotionally acting when undertaking tasks are highlighted (Ferguson, 2009). The physical body has been the trigger for learning in some of the most significant learning experiences described by social workers.

The subordinate themes of *Learning through the body* include *emotional web* and *managing emotions of self and others* show the significance of complex emotional experience as part of the lifeworld. It is less clear whether emotions led directly to learning or whether emotions meant that the events were memorable and therefore readily available for reflection. The ways that social workers learned through their body as a part of their lived experiences was not necessarily conscious at the time or reflected on. Further to this, Ferguson (2018) identified the impact of negative emotions on social workers' ability to reflect in action and on action. Within my research, some social workers identified that the interview process itself was the first time that they had reflected on or connected the different parts of their experience or articulated their learning.

The role of the body in learning for social workers in the workplace is at risk of being misunderstood or minimised. Social work is not often associated with physical labour and although the emotional aspect of practice is acknowledged, the full nature and extent of "*emotional labour*" (Hochschild, 1983) also needs acknowledged. Emotional labour links with several aspects of the themes generated in my research including the cost and impact on life of working with emotions of self and others. Social workers are expected to present in a professional way in the face of *life and death* whilst *Navigating tasks* that have *no rule book* and ambiguous feeling rules.

5.4.3 Learning by chance matters

Learning by chance was identified as a superordinate theme for the group as discussed in Chapter 4. This is highlighted here because of the completely incidental, significant learning that happened for social workers, linked to the circumstances of their work. Transformative learning is associated with critical moments and "*leading learners to the edge*" (Illeris, 2014 p. 11). The idea of moments within practice that were transformative, leading to learning, connects with Kettle (2017) who discusses "*fateful moments*" as a "*tipping point*" that

involves personal and professional sense-making enmeshed with decision-making in social work contexts. In an earlier phenomenological exploration Picardie (1980) describes “*dreadful moments*” for social workers where their own sense of being in world is “*violated*”. This idea is closely associated with the subordinate themes *life and death*; the *impact on life*; as well as, *learning to manage self* and own limits.

5.4.4 Social work matters

Navigating tasks and *Navigating landscape and place* could be applied to other professional roles, so it is vital to reflect on what is specific to social work. Other professionals work with uncertainty or crises such as paramedics, police and armed forces. The specific types of tasks and workplaces of social work characterise these themes in this research. The fact that *Navigating tasks* was complex was not necessarily a surprise within social workers’ accounts of lived experience, yet the way that this was experienced as part of the whole web of navigating self within the landscape of practice should not be over-simplified. The context of social work in Scotland was outlined in Chapter 1 which relates to the role, associated tasks and the changing expectations of the profession. *Ambiguity* of so many aspects of role and task is one aspect of how workplace learning was experienced. The multiple layers of tasks within an overall piece of work is shown in the example of Maisie, where the verbatim extracts 22-25 illustrate what she articulates as “*not a normal job*”. The findings show that learning the role and task of social work must be understood in terms of these multiple layers, ambiguous tasks and embodied experiences that are inextricably linked to biographicity. Hood articulates what is meant by complexity in social work and states that this is a “*unique configuration*” (Hood, 2018 p. 2) of multiple issues within a “*whole system more than the sum of its parts*” (Hood, 2018 p. 5). Hood identifies social work as involving tasks with people who have complex needs characterised by multiplicity, intersectionality, lack of predictability and where “*minor events can escalate*” (Hood, 2018 p. 10). These tasks are within systems that are themselves complex, in terms of structure. Social work practice remains difficult to articulate along with the uniqueness of role and task. Learning in the workplace as a social worker also remains difficult to articulate. Stating what is involved in social work as a profession may rely on continuing to express the complexity of the role, whilst providing detailed examples can help avoid vague description. Using Illeris’ model to consider the findings helps show the multiple layers and dynamic processes of social workers’ learning in the daily course of their work role.

5.4.5 Metaphors matter

Social workers use of metaphors were helpful in conveying the meaning of their lived experiences. Cooper (2010) described the use of metaphors to understand social work continuing professional learning. Cooper found metaphors included “*seasons and cycles*” (Cooper, 2010. p.180), identifying an understanding of the life course that is linked with the *Journey of the self*. Relatedly, continuing professional learning as “*fit*”, “*journeys*” and “*pathways*” is also noted by Cooper (2010, p.181). As a linguistic tool, metaphors helped to reveal the nature of and meaning of, participants’ experiences. Metaphors also can help us to understand different parts of participants’ lifeworld; for example, the metaphor of the *theatre*, includes *Navigating tasks* and *Navigating landscape and place*, while drawing in learning to understand themselves and their role. Other metaphors used included, *battle*, which again raised understanding about preparation, threat, places and tasks. Two other clear metaphors also revealed detail of experiences and show how the themes connect across a web of different threads. Makine uses the metaphor of *the machine* throughout his account, telling us about navigating a system where he constantly tries to manage the tensions of practice and expectations of the organisation. Tasks are associated with *conveyor belt* and the social worker *uploads to the terminal*. Chloe describes the idea of “*getting on the bus*” as the process of *Permanence* for children. The metaphor of *alien worlds* is used by both Reuben and Boab and shows their understanding of self within the landscape, navigating place and tasks. Reuben describes contrasting places that have fostered his learning about what social work is and Boab develops a striking metaphor that is woven throughout his account of *when David Bowie created Ziggy Stardust*. Boab’s metaphor shows his experience of learning to be, and learning as a social worker, creating a new self to navigate an alien world. He connects ideas through the metaphor to the longevity of social work in direct practice and having to adapt to different environments. The metaphor relates to a bold and all-encompassing persona created by a musician to perform and navigate the landscape (Cooke, 2020). In contrast, Sophie used the idea of a “*ball with two parts*”, to visually demonstrate her experience of integrating different selves, whilst learning to be a social worker. Highlighting these rich metaphors shows how they can help us understand and capture essential parts of social workers’ lived experiences.

5.5 Conceptualising workplace learning for social workers

This chapter has considered some theoretical and personal reflections on the lived experiences of social workers. The findings from the research have a clear relationship to Illeris' (2011) *Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life* and van Manen's (2014) overview of lifeworld existentials. Connecting the findings of the research with these theoretical ideas can help represent the multiple layers and dynamic processes of workplace learning for social workers. Figure 40 illustrates how these ideas can be drawn together to situate the themes of social worker's lived experiences with Illeris and van Manen's theoretical perspectives.

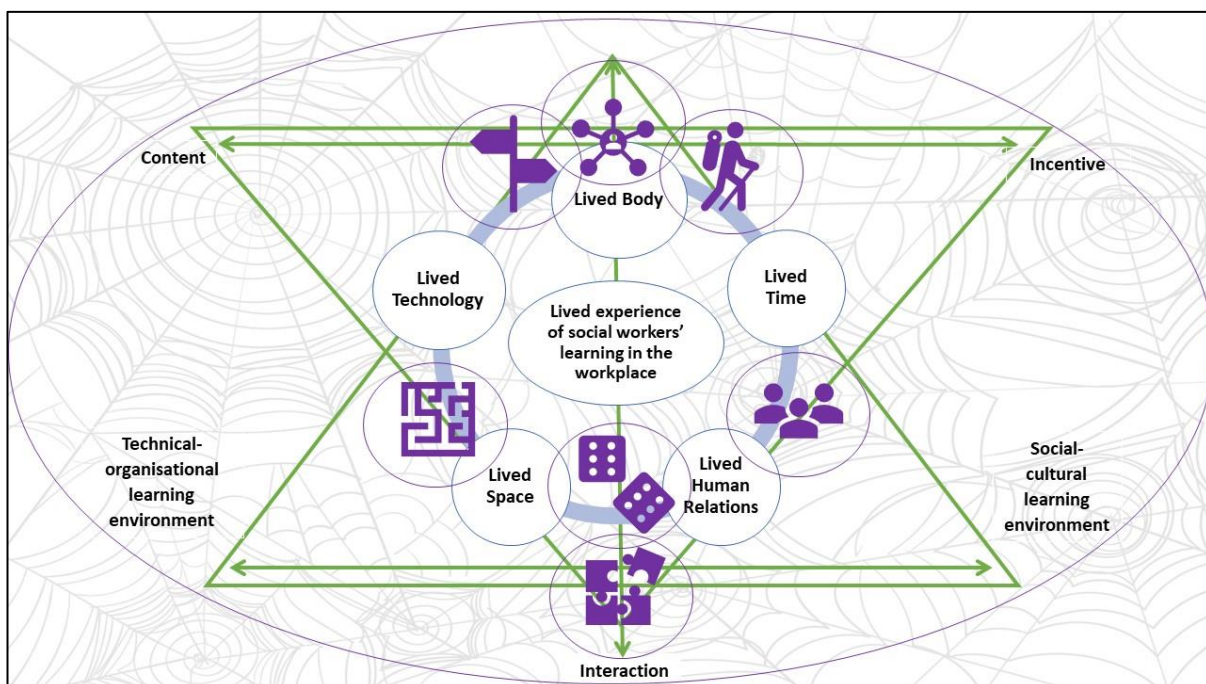


Figure 40: Hybrid conceptual web model of workplace learning for social workers

The hybrid conceptual web model shows dimensions of workplace learning (Illeris, 2011) and lifeworld existentials (van Manen, 2014) positioned in the web. The superordinate themes from the research, shown with purple icons, are also positioned in the web in relation to the theoretical ideas that are discussed in this chapter. The group themes were shown in Chapter 4. The web analogy is important for understanding the importance of the different nuances, relationships and characteristics of lived experience centralised in the web. Along the top axis, between *content* and *incentive*, the social worker *Learning through the body* is positioned centrally with *Journey of the self* also near the top axis, linking with lived time and involving emotions, values and motivation. *Practices and conceptions of learning* is positioned as part of the individual parts of the process

that interact with working practices in the centre of the process. *Learning through others* and *lived human relations* are positioned in the lower half of the web, associated with interaction of social workers with different elements of their working environment. *Navigating tasks* is positioned on the bottom axis between the *technical-organisational* and *socio-cultural* elements of the working environment and directly below *Learning through the body* in the individual dimension. *Navigating landscape and place* are sitting alongside *lived space*, again linking with the interaction of the individual within this aspect of the working and learning environment.

Learning by chance is deliberately positioned at the centre of lived experience and at the centre of workplace practices. Although the experience is an intricate web, there is not a prescribed, systematic pattern for lived experience of learning to be and learning as a social worker. The hybrid conceptual web model also is a reminder that the experience is a whole and should not be fragmented. Lived experiences of social workers learning in the workplace is at the centre of the dynamic interaction between the individual and social axes, in the areas where workplace practices trigger learning. These processes are acknowledged as taking place in a complex social-cultural and technical-organisational environment and the themes, *Navigating place*; *Navigating landscape and place*, and, *Learning by chance* remind us of what this interaction might involve for a social worker.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and implications

The central research question, “*What are the lived experiences of social workers’ learning in the workplace?*” was at the core of the study. Chapter 2 positioned the study at the intersection of different fields of knowledge about individual learning; organisational learning; social work professional learning; and workplace learning. Chapter six returns to the intention of the research and provides concluding points on what was discovered about social workers’ experiences of workplace learning. I will now evaluate the success of the study in answering the central research question and outline the contribution to knowledge produced by it. Important implications are then explored for individual social workers, social work services, education and leadership to promote continuing professional learning. I will consider these implications and the possibilities they offer for enhancing the ways that social workers’ continuing professional learning is understood, organised and supported. The research offers an important and distinctive contribution to knowledge in different areas. Importantly the research also offers contributes to the connection of different areas of knowledge, bridging theoretical and phenomenological ideas together with robust evidence of social workers’ experiences.

6.1.1 What the research discovered

The intention of the study was to explore the nature of social workers’ learning in the workplace. Crafting this research was triggered by my motivation from different standpoints, outlined in Chapter 1, to understand the phenomenon of learning for social workers in their workplace. Beyond this understanding I was ultimately interested in how continuing professional learning is best designed for social workers within the everyday working environment. The implications and opportunities I will present are informed by the context of social work described in Chapter 1, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the research findings shown in Chapter 4 and subsequent discussion in Chapter 5. My standpoints as a researcher, primarily as a registered social worker, a learning and development advisor and educator, are also important to acknowledge in what I consider to be possibilities for the future. The study found depth and detailed evidence as to what the structure, texture and meaning of social workers’ lived experiences learning in the workplace is like in answer to the central research question. The study contributes to knowledge about individual and organisational learning, professional

learning and workplace learning for social workers. The findings contribute to understanding the nature of workplace learning for social workers and the significant role this has in authentic continuing professional learning across the career.

6.1.2 An intricate web

The study found that learning to be, and learning as, a social worker in, through and at work is an intricate web of sensory and emotional experiences while negotiating and navigating places, spaces and tasks. The lived experiences of social workers can be understood as involving the seven superordinate themes for the group, *Journey of the self*; *Navigating tasks*; *Navigating landscape and place*; *Learning through the body*; *Learning through others*; *Practices and conceptions of learning*; and, *Learning by chance*. Striking metaphors helped social workers convey their experience of learning in the workplace that encompassed these themes. The themes of social workers' learning in the workplace should not be considered merely on a surface or simplistic level. It is important to pause and consider what these different themes might mean for an individual social worker, then how these might combine. The threads of the relationship between these themes form a web that is unique to the individual social worker, deeply connected to their embodied experience of learning and the type of work opportunities that they undertake.

The research has a distinctive contribution to the knowledge about social workers' experience through this workplace lens, focussing on *learning* in this context. This is an important distinction between research into experiences of social work *practice* in workplace settings, albeit there are close connections. The study highlights that learning in their workplaces can be incredibly potent for social workers in relation to the kind of work they are doing, yet it is not a primary focus in planning for continuing professional learning. Indeed, some of the most valuable and poignant learning encounters are not recognised or valued. Rhetoric and professional guidance about continuing professional learning acknowledge the validity of learning through work activities. This has been specified explicitly in the most recent guidance issued by the social services regulator in Scotland however resourcing, research and planning still focus on training courses or more tangible and measurable outputs of learning as discussed in Chapter 2. The interviews in the study became a reflective space that revealed the potency of learning through

direct work. For most of the social workers interviewed, this was the first articulation of their learning in this way.

Although seven themes connect in the intricate web summarised in this section, *Learning by chance* and *Learning through the body* are particularly notable as findings of the research. These both have wide-ranging implications for the professional learning of social workers that will be explored in this chapter. I will firstly return to these two themes, to consider their specific interest and importance as findings of the study, before outlining implications.

6.1.3 Chance

Learning by chance was one of the key themes for the group, this remains a critical finding of the study. The theme was explored in the Chapter 4 and is a key area of the findings that are identified as important arising from the study highlighted in Chapter 5 which notes that some of the most significant learning experiences were described as *absolute chance*. *Learning by chance* was also associated with the idea of either being lucky or unlucky in the work situation, the initial allocation of work, the nature of the case, the direct experience of the task and all the variables therein. Learning has occurred by sheer fluke for social workers, the opportunity and outcome of the learning neither explicit or visible in intention or regard within the workplace. There was little mention of professional supervision as an explicit link with learning that occurred through these chance experiences, noted in Chapter 5. The role of the manager, other social workers and people using social work services were however inextricably linked to *Learning by chance* in very different ways and were again notably diverse and random.

With the subordinate theme *can't prepare*, *Learning by chance* takes a further turn in complexity. Social workers identified that even when incredibly vital learning had occurred through *specific cases*, this did not mean it would necessarily help future work due to the wide-ranging variables and dynamics of practice cases. Attempts to promote practice as a series of systematic procedures was a fundamental aspect of *Navigating landscape and place*, notably in *the machine* analogy (e.g. Makine). Practice was seen as needing to diverge from these procedures in cases described, resulting in constant tension in balancing how to work, and how to learn to do so.

Chapter 4 notes that the study did not set out to focus on pre-qualifying social work education. The relationship between what happens at this stage is however inextricably linked with what happens beyond this. *Paths lead to different places*, as part of *Learning by chance*, draws from evidence about lived experiences that led to some of the chance elements in social workers' learning. Pre-qualifying practice learning placements were fundamentally linked with how social workers saw their trajectory in several examples. These early experiences were also mentioned in relation to the significance of *Learning through others*, including through other social workers (e.g. Kathleen). Diversity of workplace and task, and therefore the learning opportunities available at this stage of the career, are also currently characterised by many chance elements. The placements available for practice learning and the detail of work possibilities within them require that students can meet the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) but have scope within that to differ significantly for students. This is considered further in terms of implications for social work education in this chapter.

Learning by chance provides an opportunity to reconsider how we design work to enable learning as discussed in Chapter 5. This needs to balance learning from unexpected, rich practice and developing a way of consciously designing in optimal ways of allocating work tasks in an equitable way for professional social workers.

"We don't design the workplace tasks well enough consistently for social workers so that they can learn the best from them. It's completely by chance what work you will have and therefore it's completely by chance what you can learn. Learning by chance is some of the most important learning professionals have done. How we can connect that into how you design work better, to enable learning? We can't merely rely on chance for something so important, but you don't want to take the chance element away either because that has been some of the most mind-blowing learning."

Research diary extract 6

6.1.4 The body in social workers' learning experiences

The role of the body in social workers' learning was also a profound and somewhat surprising finding. This is discussed in Chapter 4 and 5 where it is linked with the idea of *Corporeality* as a lifeworld existential. Within this study, the theme draws on evidence of the structure and texture of social workers' lived experiences involving

physical, psychological, emotional and sensory aspects of participants' accounts. The specific role of the body in triggering learning in situ, or reflecting on physical, sensory or emotional experiences that have resulted in learning need explored more fully. The idea of embodied learning in the context of social work professional learning warrants far more detailed exploration but is noted here in concluding discussion as central to the intricate web, with the whole body being immersed in the learning experience.

Learning through the body is a surprising finding in that this is absent in current workforce development practices and plans. There is an emergence of rhetoric around resilience and wellbeing for social work professionals, this acknowledges to an extent the emotional rigour and potential impact of work on individuals. There is also an emerging research interest in mindfulness as related to social workers, discussed in Chapter 2 and 5. Mindfulness practices will encourage social workers to be noticing and attending to what is happening in the body. These important areas are distinct to, yet connected with, the findings of the research which relates to the phenomenon of learning for social workers, the core of the study. In drawing the ideas together, it is vital that the importance of and use of the body by social workers and all that entails is considered as part of the learning experience.

Emotions and physical aspects of the learning experience were firstly explored separately in the analysis process. These were then brought together in the final theme of *Learning through the body* in that each aspect needs its own place, yet each is connected in the way the person responds, in and through their body, in the course of their work, and the relationship that has to their learning. Chapter 5 explores some key ideas around embodied learning alongside emotional and physical labour in social work. The extent to which social workers' bodies are immersed in some really intense learning experiences needs to be considered fully. This is not an aspect of the structure and texture of social workers' lived experiences of learning that is subsidiary, infrequent or unusual. The study shows that the body is central as a vehicle for social workers' practice and their learning in the workplace.

6.1.5 A way of understanding social workers' learning

The findings discussed in Chapter 5 connected key ideas about workplace learning with the lived experience of social workers. Exploring the findings in relation to phenomenological ideas also revealed a way of understanding the nature and structure of the social workers' lifeworld and learning in that context. I have

represented social workers' experiences using a hybrid conceptual web model (Figure 40) which integrates the superordinate themes with workplace learning and phenomenological theory. Application of phenomenological ideas and workplace learning theory to the findings of the study brought the nature of workplace learning for social workers to life. It was surprising to see the extent to which the findings could be understood through the lens of Illeris' (2011) model and van Manen's (2014) lifeworld existentials. The thesis discussed the use of these as frameworks for understanding social workers' workplace learning and the structure and texture of their lived experience respectively. The hybrid conceptual model introduced in the thesis was not an intended outcome of the study but emerged through considering the findings and returning to the intention of the research. This conceptual web model of workplace learning for social workers can promote understanding about the nature of the phenomenon and help consider possibilities for practice. This emerging model offers an integrated way of considering the nature of learning in the workplace for social workers and could be further developed and tested. I will outline the potential uses of the model within the implications of the research. I will outline the implications drawn from the research for individual social workers and those involved in organising or supporting their continuing professional learning within different areas of social work education, policy and practice.

6.2 Implications and opportunities

This chapter has highlighted some of the specific and distinctive points of knowledge or new insights drawn from the study. There are many ways in which the knowledge produced can be used to inform practice and link with other current research to optimise the opportunities available for social workers', to learn effectively in the workplace. I will firstly consider direct implications for the continuing professional learning of social workers and for the organisations in which they work. The relevance of the research to qualifying social work education is then outlined before considering how the findings can influence leadership for continuing professional learning.

6.2.1 Individual social workers

I have identified six main implications of the research for individual social workers; acknowledging the intensity of emotion and embodied learning; social workers are vital to each other's learning; learning through people who use services is vital; the hybrid conceptual web model can promote authentic professional learning through

work tasks; social workers have power to articulate their practice and learning; and acknowledgement of *Learning by chance*. I will summarise these individual implications before considering social services and organisations. It is vital not to fragment the different parts of social workers' learning experiences in considering the implications but to remember the multiple components.

The study has shown the complex, individual and embodied experience of learning as a social worker in the workplace. The intensity of emotion as part of how social workers learn through the body and the importance of feeling safe to process experiences, is essential. This chapter has highlighted the importance of *Learning through the body*. Social work is not often associated with physical labour and although the emotional aspect of practice is acknowledged, the full nature and extent of emotional labour is not. *Learning through the body* is a core and complex aspect of social workers' lived experiences. Social workers should be aware of, and manage the expectations of, their role as an integral part of their professional learning and be supported effectively to do so. Managing the impact on personal life of learning as a social worker is also important for continuing professional learning, linked with practitioner resilience, wellbeing and longevity of career. These aspects of professional learning need to go beyond a simplistic awareness of self, reflection on emotions or self-care strategies. Consideration of the body can be embedded in understanding what the professional role involves, why the body matters in professional learning and how this is designed for in workplace learning strategies.

Learning through others notably included learning through other social workers. Significant experiences of *Learning by chance* also involved encounters with other social workers. The research findings are a reminder of the vital role social workers can have in contributing to each other's learning. Opportunities to work alongside other social workers have changed due to changes in the physical workplace environment such as hot-desking (Ravalier, 2019) and integration of services with other professions (Welch *et al.*, 2014b). Developing opportunities for social workers to be able to learn with each other in direct practice settings is an essential component of effective continuing professional learning and is considered further in section 6.2.2.

People encounter social workers through their personal or professional lives, including where they are the recipient of social services. As a recipient or user of

social services people experience direct and indirect contact with social workers with associated intervention in their lives. This study is not focused on the experience of people using social services, a crucial research and practice area, however the significance of how social workers learn through their work with people cannot be underestimated. *Learning through others* and the subordinate theme of *learning from people's lives* identified the heightened emotional experience of working with people and recognition of the seriousness and responsibility of the professional social work role. This included multiple crucial learning points that formed part of the themes discussed in Chapter 5. The research confirms the centrality of people who are in contact with social workers having one of the most vital roles in shaping their learning.

The hybrid conceptual web model can help social workers understand and connect the different elements of the context and processes involved in their learning as well as the role of direct practice with people using services in their learning. This model can help plan for and reflect on professional learning, acknowledging the significance of workplace tasks as primary learning opportunities. Other formal and informal learning opportunities can build on and recognise the fundamental professional learning that takes place through direct work, maximising the opportunity for social workers to develop the skills and knowledge that they most need to meet the challenges of their role. Qualifying social work education in Scotland is generic, as are the expectations of continuing professional learning outlined in Chapter 1. There is no accredited framework or curriculum for social work learning however, the regulator requires registered social workers to undertake a certain amount of continuing professional learning activities. A framework for supporting the first year in practice is currently being developed. While recognition of different learning activities is promoted widely in the sector (for example, SSSC regulatory guidance, 2017; 2020), the value of informal learning through work by social workers and their employers, could be significantly enhanced. The hybrid conceptual web model can help shift the focus from plans, products and procedures, to authentic professional learning at all career stages, that is meaningful to the individual social worker.

Learning by chance has been highlighted earlier in this chapter as an important finding of the study that has wide-reaching implications for what counts as significant learning for professional social workers. Learning through chance opportunities can be maximised as discussed above regarding the value of

informal learning opportunities. The theme however goes beyond this, and social workers need to be able to recognise and deeply reflect on the significance of these experiences as an integral part of their professional supervision. Social workers need to be able to articulate the learning that is drawn from these experiences to understand and convey their own professional learning. Understanding the context of social work practice remains important for how social workers negotiate and *Navigate landscape and place* and *Navigate tasks*. The research findings also provide an opportunity for social workers to articulate the nature of their workplace learning and practice to others. Social workers are key drivers who can promote understanding of the complexity of their role and influence the associated professional learning that helps them undertake this. The implications outlined for individual social workers are also important for the services and organisations that they work in, which I will now discuss.

6.2.2 Social work services and organisations

The implications of the research for individual social workers are hugely important for the services and organisations that they work in. Social work services and their corresponding organisations have a powerful role in understanding, valuing and promoting continuing professional learning. In addition to the implications outlined above for individual social workers, I have identified two main further implications of the research for social work services and organisations: understanding and valuing workplace learning; and designing for an effective workplace learning curriculum, using the hybrid conceptual web model. I will outline these implications then consider how these relate to qualifying social work education.

There is extensive learning and development activity in organisations that will be managed in different ways, depending on the configuration of personnel and resources. Learning and development strategies will prioritise mandatory requirements for workforce groups, such as those required by law or job specification. For social workers the content of this will most likely include regulatory requirements and any practice changes driven by new policy or legislation. As discussed, there is no current framework for post-qualifying learning and development for social workers in Scotland, therefore there may be constraints in allocating resources to activities that are not easily measured, articulated or understood. Ultimately, the research offers a way to understand and plan for learning that is meaningful for social workers and their services, directing

resources to support this accordingly. Evidence from the research shows the significance of learning in the workplace through direct tasks as fundamental to professional learning for social workers. This should not however be left to only *Learning by chance*. Designing services that embed continuing professional learning through work allocation and supporting these effectively with professional supervision is essential.

Although social workers are employed in diverse settings and organisations, they share a protected title and regulated expectations of continuing professional learning. The research offers a way for employers to understand the nature of workplace learning for social workers and develop effective ways to promote and enhance this. The research offers a way to understand what we mean by the workplace, work and social workers' learning within this context. The hybrid conceptual web model positions informal and incidental learning through direct practice at the epicentre of social workers' professional learning. Acknowledging the emotional and embodied aspects of learning is one example of how services and organisations can understand and value the rich opportunities that the workplace offers. Considering ways to harness learning opportunities that are currently down to chance may also be helpful. A commitment to workplace learning needs to balance the opportunities offered in work tasks and dovetail these with appropriate formal and accredited learning. There is therefore an opportunity to carefully consider how a workplace curriculum (Billett, 2005) can best be designed to foster learning in the landscape and tasks of social work.

The hybrid conceptual web model draws together ideas that can influence the design of an effective workplace learning curriculum for social workers. At the strategic level, learning and development advisors in partnership with operational services, can use the hybrid conceptual web model to consider how they plan and support social workers to learn in the workplace. This could include how they design and allocate work tasks. Employing organisations may be managing the learning needs of different workforce and professional learning requirements, for example, in integrated services within health and social care, children's services and third sector agencies. The hybrid conceptual web model can remind employers of the context and processes involved in learning for social workers. At the individual level, managers and those who professionally supervise social workers, can help implement the design of a workplace curriculum. This could focus on maximising the opportunities available to social workers for learning,

including how work tasks are allocated, managed and reflected on. Critical reflective learning, directly linked to practice, features strongly in the rhetoric. Shifting the focus to enable this to be valued, recognised and resourced, remains a challenge. The research draws attention to the impact of social work practice and the embodied nature of learning. The hybrid conceptual web model can help managers and supervisors consider the elements that contribute to the opportunities for, and processes involved in learning.

Learning through others, noted in 6.2.1, an essential component of social workers' learning in the workplace, needs to be designed for in creative ways within diverse service settings. Social work services across local authorities continue to change according to resources and policy drivers, including the integration of health and social care, under the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act (2014) and the expectations of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014). A central requirement for social workers is that they learn with and from other social workers in relation to the work they need to do. Learning and development functions within local authorities have also changed from previous dedicated resource for social work, to a varied pattern across Scotland (Kettle *et al.*, 2016). It is important for services to share responsibility for social workers' professional learning, throughout their careers (Kettle *et al.*, 2016). Employers are a major partner in supporting effective continuing professional learning within their organisations. The services that social workers practice in are the places that offer the most significant opportunities to learn.

6.2.3 Qualifying social work education

In addition to the implications for individual social workers, services and organisations, the research has implications for the broad context of social work education. Although not a focus of the study, the findings have an important contribution to knowledge that can inform this stage of learning in a social workers' career. Social work education has been under recent review in Scotland with several work streams still active at the time of writing (SSSC, 2016). Current work includes, revisions to the practice learning component of social work education; arrangements for, and expectations of, newly qualified social workers; and, the overall regulatory arrangements for continuing professional learning. Practice learning is a fundamental element of qualifying social work programmes across the United Kingdom, highlighted in Chapter 1. The research findings confirm that

direct practice is essential to equip social workers with the kind of learning and knowledge relevant to the tasks they must navigate. Lived experiences showed that the most important learning experiences for social workers were intense, emotional and embodied direct practice tasks.

The findings of the study foreground the need for practice learning experiences that are sufficient and designed well to maximise learning. Patterns set at this stage will provide a robust foundation if practice learning is sufficiently well-designed and supported. Many of the implications for individual social workers, and social work services outlined earlier in this chapter could still apply at this pre-qualifying stage. The complex role of the body in learning, not-relying on chance and learning with and from other social workers are three primary examples. In Scotland there were approximately 50% of social work qualifying placements that took place in local authority settings in 2019-20 although 85% of newly qualified social workers were employed in these settings (SSSC, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, magnified the dearth of offers for social work student's placements, within local authority and third sector settings. There has been increasing interest in developing simulated and virtual learning opportunities in different professions. Within social work this interest rose during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study does not focus on these type of learning experiences but acknowledges that there is much work to be done to design high-quality examples that offer authentic professional learning, The research absolutely confirms the importance of direct practice, as a crucial means to learn. Any developments need to promote and enhance the opportunity to learn in direct practice. The findings from this research suggest that developments in alternatives to direct practice, such as virtual or simulated practice skills development, needs to consider how issues like the intensity of emotional and embodied learning is designed in. Replicating authentic learning in workplace practice settings, as experienced by social workers' is unlikely to be replicated through other means. A holistic perspective on how to provide the opportunity for students to develop the different knowledge, skills and competences required in pre-qualifying programmes remains vital.

The importance of direct practice cannot be over-estimated in terms of learning with people who use services, through these relationships and interactions in the course of social work. The research supports the importance of learning with other social workers in qualifying education as well as continuing professional learning.

There is a need for high quality, well-designed practice learning opportunities within services to support social workers learning how to *Navigate tasks* and *Navigate landscape and place* across their career. An important implication of the research is the sharing responsibility for social workers' continuing professional learning (Kettle et al., 2016) for individual social workers, organisations and leadership within the sector.

6.2.4 Leadership for social work learning

The implications discussed are all relevant to overall leadership for social work learning. Leadership in social work needs to be "*exercised at all levels and all need to pull together to ensure a strong Social Work profession for the future*" (Daniel and Scott, 2018, p.19). This is supported by professional bodies and promotes recognition and mobilisation of leadership at all levels, including social workers' own agency. Daniel and Scott (2018) identify key leaders in relation to the future of the social work profession. The Chief Social Work Advisor to the Scottish Government, Chief Social Work Officers, Social Work Scotland, Scottish Social Services Council, Social Work Scotland, Scottish Association of Social Workers, individual registered social workers and social work academics, all have a clear role and opportunity to integrate leadership for professional learning into their vision and actions (Daniel and Scott, 2018). Social work practice and learning are intertwined with other crucial issues for the profession such as identity, status and future skills. The multiple layers and connections between the threads of the hybrid conceptual web model highlight different aspects of learning and the context in which this takes place. The research findings powerfully articulate what social work practice involves by hearing the lived experiences of those who have learned to do it.

6.3 Future research opportunities

A range of implications have been outlined, stemming from the research that deliberately focused on returning to the experience of social workers' learning, rather than exploring how this learning can be enhanced. There is more to be understood about the experience of workplace learning for social workers and there are several future research opportunities that could extend what this research has shown. My findings were drawn from rich in-depth phenomenological data and each theme would be relevant to study further. I will now outline some other specific opportunities for future research.

Exploration of how the findings from this research can be applied to enhancing workplace learning, will be beneficial for individuals and organisations. The way that work tasks are available or allocated to social workers, is directly connected to their opportunities for learning. It will be helpful to determine how formal, structured or accredited learning opportunities, fit best with workplace learning, within an overall curriculum for social workers. Given the diversity of lived experiences, how we design learning that will be effective for people in varied settings, remains an important question. The hybrid conceptual web model, discussed in Chapter 5, could help improve synergies between supervision, other supportive practices and the process of learning. The findings contribute to the current research activity in Scotland, which explores the newly qualified and early career social work stage. Further research could investigate whether the model of understanding workplace learning from this study, can support the design of effective practice learning at early career stages. The distinctive contribution of this research draws into focus the complexity of learning through work. It is also a strong reminder that learning in this context must not be misrepresented. Workplace learning is far beyond the formal, organised learning opportunities offered by employers, those self-directed by social workers or simplistic notions of learning on the job. Different ways of learning all have a role to play in continuing professional learning. It is vital that when we discuss workplace learning that we develop a better shared understanding of what this might involve, and the findings of the research offer a way of thinking about this.

Navigating tasks involved social workers trying to work out what to do within a landscape where there was *no rule book*. Exploring what constitutes knowledge in social work is an ongoing area of research, for example, Kelly (2017), which can be linked with the content element of Illeris' *Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life* (Illeris, 2011). Combining research on understanding what needs to be learned, with how this is learned through the workplace, will develop a clearer path for social work education, individual social workers and social services. The hybrid conceptual web model could be further developed, as new aspects of understanding are revealed, about the multiple layers of what workplace learning for social workers involves.

Within any of the potential future research identified above, there are two areas of the findings from my research that were important aspects of social workers' lived experiences. The implications of these specific findings have been highlighted in

this concluding chapter. Further exploration of chance incidental learning and the opportunities this offers for professional learning will be helpful. *Learning by chance* was some of the most important learning for social workers in this study. This finding was itself an unanticipated, chance discovery in the research as part of depth description of social workers' lived experiences. Understanding more about the kind of incidental and accidental learning encounters could be explored through research that has a specific focus. Research could focus on the chance variables in significant learning to better understand what they are, how they manifest and the learning outcomes that result from them.

The research also highlighted important ideas about *Learning through the body* and the nature of the emotional web. The thesis outlines some important research, in Chapter 2 and 5, about social workers' use of the body in practice, and the impact of emotions on their ability to reflect in action. The body needs to be considered as a factor in research about social workers' professional learning. Social work practice and social work learning remain inextricably linked yet not always explicitly connected in research. A research focus could better understand the role that emotions and the whole-body play in triggering, noticing, reflecting on and articulating learning that is happening through workplace activities. The hybrid conceptual web model offers an opportunity to draw ideas together that can inform research to ensure that there are connections within and across the parts of workplace learning for social workers. This can continue to enhance what is known about workplace learning for social workers ensuring that further knowledge generated is also located at the heart of the fields of individual, organisational, workplace and professional learning.

6.4 Limitations of the research

The research provides clear findings that offer a distinctive contribution to knowledge and offers a conceptual model for understanding social workers' learning in the workplace. There are several limitations of the study, which I will outline here.

Chapter 3 justifies the study interviewing a sample of social workers from one site and outlines the profile of the participants. Although social workers were drawing from their experiences from many different practice settings, beyond the site of the interview, they shared the characteristic of working for one organisation in the same UK region, in which the researcher was also employed. Lived experiences

from social workers across a broader area or from a site unknown to the researcher, could have led to differences in what was shared in interviews and subsequent findings.

Multiple roles, identified in Chapter 1, were carefully managed through supervision and the reflexive process discussed in Chapter 3. In positive terms these standpoints and the experience of the researcher, facilitated access to participants, integrated skillful, respectful interviewing techniques and located the study implications firmly within the practice field. There were potential negative influences and somewhat inevitable bias in the design of the study, the identification of themes and subsequent implications identified stemming from these standpoints. Careful attention to the research design, methods and procedures, demonstrated in Chapter 3, mitigated as far as possible against the risk of researcher bias.

The rich data generated is a strength of the research. The quantity of available data means that there are inevitably ideas yet uncovered and undiscovered within the transcripts. The methodology, methods and procedures were successful in generating rich data within the study although a different approach could yield different kinds of information about what social workers had learned through their work and how this had shaped their practice. There are considerable achievements of the research which I will now summarise.

6.5 Main achievements of the research

There are several main achievements of the research including capturing lived experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace, developing understanding of these experiences and providing a way of representing the structure, texture and meaning of these experiences. The research set out to explore lived experiences and did this with respect for the participants, valuing their contribution to the study and the profession of social work. A distinctive contribution to knowledge about the nature of learning in the workplace for social workers has been shown in the thesis.

Using the workplace as a lens to explore learning for social workers is another clear achievement, which contributes to the research on social work education and learning across different career stages. The themes generated, *Journey of self; Navigating landscape and place; Navigating tasks; Learning through the body;*

Learning through others; Practices and conceptions of learning; and, Learning by chance provide details that promote understanding of what learning to be, and learning as, a social worker involves. The study has produced a clear and new contribution to knowledge in respect of these themes, drawing different aspects together and revealing new insights into what the lived experience of learning is like. *Learning by chance* and *Learning through the body* show aspects of lived experience that reveal new insights into the phenomenon of learning for social workers. The whole of the experience can be represented by a visual web with intricate threads formed by the relationships between these themes.

Social work remains at a *crossroads* (McCulloch, 2018) in terms of how other professions and policy makers understand or value roles and tasks that are difficult to articulate. The voice and expertise of social work practitioners is minimised in both research (Gordon, 2018) and the policy context. Not only does the research return to the essence of learning, it also returns to the essence of social work practice through the attention to individual rich accounts of what takes place in everyday working life. The research offers rich perspectives from social workers beyond the early career stage. The themes not only enable social workers to recognise themselves: they also offer a way of articulating what social work is to others.

Commitment to the selected methodology is another achievement of the research. The IPA methodology, methods and procedures generated rich description and the analysis process was undertaken with attention to detail and rigour. Attention to the detail of the research design and immersive analysis process resulted in the clear and confident themes shown in the thesis. An unanticipated outcome of the practical research process was that this was described by social workers as meaningful and a helpful opportunity for them to critically reflect on their own learning. Bearing witness to the very personal experiences of social workers was a privilege for me as the researcher.

The final major achievement of the research is the emerging hybrid conceptual web model for social workers' learning in the workplace. Phenomenological concepts and workplace learning theory were applied to the findings, which supported the creation of this model. This model draws together the lifeworld existentials and a comprehensive way of understanding workplace learning with the specific findings from the study about social workers' experiences. This can

contribute to understanding the nature of workplace learning for social workers and ensure that none of the essential components is ignored or forgotten. The study was independent of and not funded or commissioned by the site of the research, the regulator, or another body with a vested interest in the findings. Additionally, the study has proven to have direct relevance to practice with tangible suggestions about how the research can help open discussion and shape thinking about professional learning for social workers. Striking metaphors, such as “*when David Bowie created Ziggy Stardust*”, which encompass the, *Journey of the self; Navigating landscape and place; Navigating tasks; Learning through others; Learning through the body; Learning by chance;* and, individual *Practices and conceptions of learning*, are a reminder of what learning in the workplace for social workers involves.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Overview of Social Work Education in Scotland

Appendix 2: Record of literature review strategy

Appendix 3: HREC application and approval

Appendix 4: Participant information

Appendix 5: Reflexivity

Appendix 6: A comparison of selected research methodologies

Appendix 7: Participant consent form

Appendix 8: Profile of participants

Appendix 9: Interview schedule

Appendix 10: Full table of group themes and contributing individual concepts

Appendix 11: Mapping of themes to theory

Appendix 1 Overview of Social Work Education in Scotland

Social Work Education Framework in Scotland - Standards in Social Work Education

The Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) contain the core knowledge, skills and competences which social workers must demonstrate to achieve the honours degree and to become professionally qualified social workers in qualifying programmes. Since 2004, student social workers must achieve an honours degree in social work, or an equivalent postgraduate award, to become professionally qualified. These standards are within a broader framework which includes the entry requirements and responsibilities of education providers. In Scotland the SiSWE are generic which reflects the fact that social work practice takes place in many different contexts within a diverse society.

Social workers work in complex social situations to protect individuals and groups and promote their well-being. Social workers need to be able to act effectively in these demanding circumstances and, to achieve this, students must learn to reflect critically on, and take responsibility for, their actions. Since the nature, scope and purpose of social work services themselves are often fiercely debated, graduates should also be able to understand these debates fully and to analyse, adapt to, manage and promote change. Social workers must be able to balance the tension between the rights and responsibilities of the people who use services and the legitimate requirements of the wider public (for example, where there are issues to do with child protection, criminal justice or mental health).

The term 'social worker' is defined in the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 as 'a person who has an entitling professional qualification in social work'. The role of the social worker in Scotland is detailed in the Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review (Scottish Executive, 2006). Social work practice takes place in complex and demanding circumstances where the role of the social worker has adapted to become one of partnership with those who use services and with other professionals with whom they deliver integrated services (Daniel *et al.*, 2016). Social workers need to be able to find the balance of power and authority in professional relationships and maintain their own professional update in relation to the statutory framework and evidence base which determines how practice is shaped and delivered.

All social workers must understand and agree to follow the Code of Practice for Social Service Workers published by the SSSC as a condition of their continuing registration with the SSSC. The SSSC was set up under the Regulation of Care Act (Scotland) 2001. One of its functions is to maintain a register of key social services workers. In order to be eligible to apply to the part of the register for social workers, people must have a qualification in social work that is approved by the SSSC. The SSSC publish the register on its website, and the public and employers will be able to check whether a social worker is registered on the social work part of the register. Student social workers must register with the Council and sign up to the Code.

Scottish Requirements for Social Work Training - Teaching, learning and assessment requirements

- (A) Design the content, structure and delivery of the training to allow social work students to show that they can meet the SiSWE and are suitable to be registered with the SSSC.
- (B) Make sure that students' achievement against the SiSWE is regularly and accurately assessed and confirm that all social work students have been assessed and have met *all* the learning outcomes before they are awarded the degree in social work.
- (C) Make sure that policies and procedures for assessment include effective and appropriate ways of meeting the requirements of key stakeholders in social services.
- (D) Make sure that students understand that they must be registered with the SSSC to start and stay on the programme, and that if the SSSC removes them from the register as a result of their fitness to practice, they will not be able to achieve the professional qualification in social work.
- (E) Make sure that all students have the practice learning opportunities they need to demonstrate that they meet the SiSWE.
- (F) Make sure that all social work students spend **at least** 200 days in practice learning, of which **at least** 160 must be spent in supervised direct practice in service delivery settings. This practice learning must be assessed. Up to 60 days of the supervised direct practice element can be subject to credit from prior experiential learning.
- (G) Make sure that this assessed practice learning is structured over the course of the degree to allow students to gain experience of and develop ability in:
 - carrying out statutory social work tasks, involving legal interventions;
 - working in **at least** two contrasting service delivery settings (for students entering through work-based routes, **at least** one of these should be out with their employing agency other than in exceptional circumstances);
 - providing services to **at least** two user groups; and
 - providing services in a way that takes account of and values diversity.
- (H) Make sure that all students undergo assessed preparation for direct practice to make sure they are safe to carry out practice learning in a service delivery setting. This preparation must include the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the experience of service users and the role of social workers.
- (I) Make sure that the students spend enough time in structured academic learning, under the direction of an educator, to meet the required level of competence. This is expected to be **at least** 200 days or 1,200 hours.
- (J) Make sure that the programme is continually updated as a result of developments in legislation, government policy and best practice so students have the skills, knowledge and understanding they need.
- (K) Make sure that the students' continuing learning requirements are recorded in an individual learning plan that they can take with them into their career in social work.

Adapted from the Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland

(Scottish Government 2003)

Appendix 2 Record of literature review strategy

Type of searches	
<p>Library Searches</p> <p>Databases</p> <p>Keywords and phrases</p> <p>Boolean searches</p>	<p>Examples of literature search terms</p> <p>Social Workers AND learning AND experience</p> <p>Social Workers AND learning AND practice</p> <p>Social Workers AND learning AND continuing</p> <p>Social Work AND professional development OR training OR post-qualifying</p> <p>Social Work AND professional development AND training AND post-qualifying</p> <p>Social Work AND experiences or perceptions or attitudes or views AND learning</p> <p>Social workers OR social services OR social work AND reflective learning</p> <p>Social workers AND phenomenology AND learning</p> <p>Workplace learning AND Social Work</p> <p>Workplace learning AND Social Worker</p> <p>Workplace learning AND lived experience OR phenomenology OR life experience</p> <p>Workplace learning AND professional development</p> <p>Professional development AND social work OR social workers OR social work</p> <p>Workplace learning AND professional development AND experiences OR perceptions OR attitudes OR views</p> <p>Social workers OR social services OR social work AND Reflective practice</p> <p>Social workers OR social services OR social work AND emotion AND learning</p> <p>Social workers OR social services OR social work AND identify AND learning</p> <p>Workplace learning AND social work OR social services OR social work</p> <p>Social workers AND learning AND workplace</p> <p>Work-based learning AND social work or social workers or social services</p> <p>Other words/phrases used</p> <p>work-based learning</p> <p>on the job training</p> <p>training</p> <p>formal learning</p> <p>informal learning</p> <p>accidental learning</p> <p>incidental learning</p> <p>situated learning</p>
<p>Journals</p> <p>Browse database search and hand search through journals</p>	<p>British Journal of Social Work</p> <p>Practice: Social Work in Action</p> <p>Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning</p> <p>The Field Educator</p> <p>Adult Learning</p> <p>Adult Education Quarterly</p> <p>Learning</p> <p>British Journal of Educational Studies</p> <p>Studies in philosophy and Education</p> <p>Journal of Education and Work</p> <p>Educational theory</p> <p>Action Learning Research and Practice</p> <p>Theory and Research in Education</p> <p>International Journal of Training and Development</p> <p>Education and Training</p> <p>European Journal of Training and Development</p> <p>Clinical Social Work Journal</p> <p>Community Work and Family</p> <p>Psychoanalytic Social Work</p> <p>Journal of Social Work in Disability and Rehabilitation</p> <p>Journal of Continuing Education in the Health professions</p> <p>Journal of Transformative Education</p> <p>New directions for Adult and Continuing Education</p> <p>Social Work</p>
<p>Alerts</p> <p>from search terms, authors, keywords, topics, themes</p>	<p>Open University Library/ Specific journal/ Mendeley/ ZETOC/ Google Scholar</p>
<p>Examples of professional and regulatory bodies</p>	<p>Scottish Government</p> <p>Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)</p> <p>Social Work England</p>

sources for research, professional policy and practice updates	Social Care Wales Northern Ireland Care Council Social Work Scotland British Association of Social Workers (BASW) Scottish Association of Social Workers (SASW) Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD) Health and Social Care Professions Council (HCPC) Care Inspectorate
Examples of research centres or repository sources	Work and Learning Research Centre - Middlesex University https://www.mdx.ac.uk/our-research/centres/work-and-learning-research-centre Centre for Modern Workplace Learning https://www.modernworkplacelearning.com/cild/jane-hart/ Centre for Work-Based learning in Scotland https://centreforworkbasedlearning.co.uk/ Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) https://www.iriss.org.uk/ International Centre for Innovation and Workplace Learning – Dublin University https://www.dcu.ie/iciwl Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRLI) – Glasgow Caledonian University and Stirling University https://crl.org.uk/ Centre for Educational Research and Innovation – University of Derby https://www.derby.ac.uk/research/centres-groups/educational-research-and-innovation/ Global Centre for Work-Applied Learning – South Australia https://gcwal.com.au/ Infed http://infed.org/ Centre for work-based learning and continuing development - University of Canterbury https://repository.canterbury.ac.uk/research-institute/80376/centre-for-work-based-learning-and-continuing-development Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) Scottish Organisation for Practice Teaching https://www.scopt.co.uk/ Skills for Care https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk

Appendix 3 HREC application and approval



HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC) PROFORMA

All OU research involving human participants or materials has to be assessed by the HREC. Where you have completed the [HREC Project Registration and Risk Checklist](#) and it has been determined that your research requires a full review, please complete and email this proforma to Research-REC-review@open.ac.uk. Attach any related documents for example: a consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, or publicity leaflet to ensure that the HREC Review Panel has everything they need to carry out a full review. If there are more than one group of participants, relevant documents for each research group need to be included so as not to delay the review process.

If you have any queries about completing the proforma please check the Research Ethics website, in particular the FAQs - <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/human-research/faqs> which include sample documents and templates, or email Research-REC-review@open.ac.uk.

The deadline for applications is every Thursday by 5.30pm. Applications are then sent to the HREC Review Panel with a minimum response time of 21 working days. However, the process can take up to a month or longer, so when planning your research and ethics application, you need to build in sufficient time for the HREC review to avoid any delays to your research. Particularly, when you are planning overseas travel or interviews with participants as it is essential that no potential participants are approached until your research has been fully assessed by the HREC.

Please complete all the sections below – deleting the instructions in italics

Project identification and rationale

1. Title of project

An investigation into the experience of Social Worker's learning in the workplace

2. Abstract

The research is a small-scale qualitative study as part of EdD Doctorate studies **to explore the experiences of Social Workers in relation to how they have learned in, through and at their work.** The study is designed to explore in depth what it is to learn within the workplace for Social Workers, using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analytical approach which focuses on authentic and in-depth lived experiences. The approach to the research has been selected to allow the experiences as lived to be foregrounded (van Manen, 1990) to seek to understand how learning in the workplace is identified and experienced by Social Workers. Learning to be a Social Worker and Learning as a Social Worker are difficult journeys to negotiate at any stage of the career. The research will explore how Social Workers learn in daily practice beyond the student and newly qualified stages and what it is to be learning in the complex workplace environment. The study will be undertaken in a local authority setting in Scotland, within a Children and Families Service using individual interviews as the primary data collection method. Identification of future opportunities may arise from understanding more about the process of learning within Social Work settings.

Project personnel and collaborators

3. InvestigatorsPrincipal Investigator/
(or Research Student):Gillian Ferguson, Doctoral Researcher, The
Open University, g.ferguson@open.ac.uk

Other researcher(s):

For students only:Please note that this application cannot be processed without your supervisor's
signature and or supporting comments -

Postgraduate research degree:

EdD

Supervisor (preferably primary):

Dr Mark Wareing

Email

Supervisor's electronic signature:

Dr Mark Wareing

07.11.17

Supervisor supporting comments:

I fully support this application.

Research protocol

4. Schedule

Research schedule is detailed below.

- The earliest date participants will be recruited is November 2017.
- November 2017 – April 2018 Pilot Study data collection and analysis
- April 2018 – September 2018 Refinement, design and planning for main study
- September 2018 – September 2019 Substantive study data collection and analysis
- September 2019 - October 2020 Further analysis and write up of research thesis

5. Methodology

The study will take place with Social Workers in one Local Authority Setting in Scotland. There will be a small pilot study in autumn 2017 to inform the shape of the research which will then be carried out in 2018 – 19.

Individual semi-structured interviews will be undertaken with a small purposive sample of five or six participants in the pilot study with a follow-up interview being carried out with the same participants within two weeks of their first interviews. Follow-up interviews will be used to develop themes emerging from the first interviews and promote depth exploration of the participant accounts of learning consistent with the hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The pilot study will test out the value of follow-up interviews to inform the design of the substantive study.

The sample size for the substantive study will be informed by the pilot study, this will remain small if follow-up interviews are being used. The interviews will be semi-structured and designed in line with the research methodology with prompts to explore more depth of the participant's experiences as lived. The interview approach and schedule will be tested in pilot study to inform the main research. Interviews will be conducted face to face and will be audio recorded.

Data will be analysed using an inductive and iterative framework appropriate to a phenomenological research. This will include:

- Line by line analysis of the experience of participants*
- Identification of emergent patterns*
- Development of dialogue with the coded data and the meanings for participants in context*
- Develop the plausibility and coherence of the interpretation*
- Develop full narrative and commentary*

(Smith et al, 2009, p. 80).

6. Participants

Participants will be sampled purposively as appropriate to the research approach as they will have *insight into particular perspective on the phenomena* (Smith et al, 2009, p. 49). Involvement in the research will be completely voluntary. Registered Social Workers employed within [REDACTED] form the population from which the sample will be selected.

The site in which the research will take place will allow participants to take part, **governance** approval is granted by the Chief Social Work Officer within the organisation and the Lead Manager of the Learning and Organisational Development Service for this research to take place **under the organisation's internal procedures for research access requests**. It is possible that some potential participants will not wish to be involved albeit anonymity is offered due to the specific nature of some job roles and personal, sensitive nature of the data.

The initial pilot study in autumn 2017 will recruit participants who have the following characteristics:

- Career span as a Social Worker beyond 2 years – This characteristic is identified for the initial study to differentiate from samples within concurrent research on NQSW in Scotland and to explore learning as experienced within the life of the Social Work role over time.
- Registered as a Social Worker with Scottish Social Services Council (but may be working in role of manager or frontline practitioner at the current time). These participants are likely to have rich description of their learning as a Social Worker and as Key Informants may reveal insights which shape the sample for the subsequent study.
- Working in different roles within the Children and Families Service at the current time-

This characteristic is identified for the initial study to explore the individual perspectives of the participants.

It is also important for the pilot study to involve participants from several different roles and service areas for spread of experience, and focus of study although it is acknowledged that participants may have worked across service areas in their career.

7. Recruitment procedures

I will offer the opportunity to take part in the research by contacting Social Workers who meet the criteria detailed in section 6. Recruitment will be through the organisational communication channels including email and Social Work Practitioners forum within the organisation in which the study is taking place. A participant information sheet will be provided and fuller details and discussion about the nature, scope of the study and expectations of participants would be discussed verbally with those who express interest. Participants will express interest by contacting me directly by email as detailed within their information sheet and initial publicity about the study.

As an inside researcher it is important to be aware of and manage the different roles I have. Participants will know me from my normal working role as a learning and development advisors and as a registered social worker. To carefully undertake the researcher role it will be necessary to clarify this difference, and specifically in how information will be gathered and used. Having the multiple roles enables access to the research participants and offers me a range of insights into the study themes. As a social worker, I have a keen interest in how my own learning has developed and examples of experiences which have fundamentally changed my being and practice. As a learning and development professional I am responsible for the workplace and work-based training of social workers. Although these interests have fostered the research questions and process, I will be consciously keeping these perspectives out of the interview process. I have selected the research approach to carefully listen to the individual perspectives and experiences of the participants.

As an employee of the organisation in which the research will take place, it is crucial to manage expectations of the study and that this is part of doctorate programme and not designed to lead to organisational change. I will set the boundaries of the study clearly in advance with the relevant gatekeepers. It is anticipated that my reputation and approach to ethical practice and trustworthiness will help encourage participation. Conversely I am aware that some participants will choose not to take part because of the existing relationship. I intend to use written notes and an audio recorded diary to engage reflexively as a researcher after the interviews and during data analysis. I will be aware throughout the study of potential ethical issues arising from my different roles and will manage these through personal reflection, supervision and negotiation with participants as part of the ongoing process. The research is also being supported by the Chief Social Work Officer within the organisation and recognition of the boundaries of my research role is acknowledged as part of the organisation's approval.

8. Consent

British Educational Research Association guidance (BERA, 2011) highlights the need to consider consent for both the data collection, inclusion in published works and to ensure that participants are aware of the *type of topics* to be explored in the interviews. I will discuss the nature of the research fully with participants who express interest in the study. It will be necessary to focus on consent throughout the data collection process, and "gain specific oral consent for unanticipated emerging sensitive issues" (Smith et al, 2009, p. 53). My intention is to review consent as a clear and integral part of all interviews. I will also be sharing transcript of the data with participants and will be specifically discussing any sections with verbatim data (Smith et al, 2009, p53) to be included within written reports. This is commensurate with the methodology and a trigger for potential further depth of data within follow-up interviews. Participants will have the right to withdraw at any stage of the data collection phase.

Confidentiality is an important feature of consent and the parameters of this will be explained to participants who express interest.

It will be important for participants to be in control of whether they choose to share with colleagues that they are part of the study or otherwise this will be fully explored in terms of the ethics and consent negotiation.

9. Location(s) of data collection

The data will be collected in [REDACTED] This setting has been chosen as appropriate to the nature of the research design and intended small-scale investigation. The research is designed to focus on Children and Families, Statutory Social Work workplace settings. There are likely to be participants who meet the criteria proposed and who can offer rich descriptions in line with the proposed methodology within this specific setting. The principal researcher (student) is currently employed within this organisation and will be undertaking the study as an inside researcher. Data will be collected and digitally audio recorded during interviews and stored securely. Interviews will take place on institutional premises within locations agreed with participants conducive to interview. Access to participants and approval to undertake research in this context needs gained from the Chief Social Work Officer and Learning and Organisational Development Service who have both welcomed and agreed to the research pending the ethical approval of the university.

10. Literature review

Literature about how Social Workers experience learning in their workplace was elusive in an initial review of the literature, particularly where learning was beyond the students and Newly Qualified stages of career. Themes of Social Work learning emerged in relation to the following other areas of research: Knowledge; Practice in specific areas of Social Work; Involvement of Service Users; Supervision; Relationships with colleagues; Identity Formation; Resilience and Ethics. These themes are often connected to the concept of learning, being and becoming and therefore central to my research question. Figure 1 shows where my study is located within the available literature coming from within the workplace.



Figure 1: Focus of research study within the initial literature review

Research reviewed in Social Work learning fell into 2 main categories, that of Social Work Education including Practice Learning and that of Social Work practice in specific contexts. Practice Learning research fell into 2 further sub-categories, that of enhanced ways of managing this between the academy and workplace organisations and conceptual papers on the practice

of facilitating practice learning, including assessment and notably managing failing students. My research falls within the centre of the four areas identified in Figure 1.

Key Ethics considerations

11. Published ethics and legal guidelines to be followed

The British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011) will be followed. As a registered Social Worker I am also required to work in line with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) Code of Ethics and the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers. If there is any disclosure of information which arose during interviews that I would have to deal with as a registered Social Worker, for example Child or Adult Protection concerns, there is a clear organisational policy for managing this. I will include specific and explicit discussion about this with participants.

12. Data protection and information security

The research project has been registered with The Open University's Data Protection Coordinator as of 16.10.17. The individuals will be the participants in the research. These individuals will have fully consented to the data being stored and been informed about the details of the safe storage and management of the data at the outset of project. The individual participants are Social [redacted] and audio recordings of individual interviews, written transcripts of individual interviews. Data will be anonymised as soon as possible after interviews. The research will fully adhere to the Guidance for Open University Students on the Use of Personal Data for Research Purposes. Participants will have been informed that with their consent the data generated will be stored in secure electronic files, password protected and encrypted by the researcher and will be destroyed following completion of the researcher's doctorate studies. A date will be provided for this by the researcher at the time of interviews.

13. Research data management, disseminating and publishing research outcomes

Published final reports of the work including the Doctoral Thesis will be available through University Open Access and Open Research Data Online. There are no funding requirements to share the published research findings. The organisation in which the study will take place require a copy of the final report and findings and will invite discussion with their services on the learning from the research.

14. Deception

There is no withheld information, misrepresentation or deception integral to the research.

15. Risk of harm

The design of the data collection methods and overarching ethical considerations regarding negotiated consent detailed in sections 6, 7 and 8 are intended to minimise any risk of harm. Participants will be adults who have volunteered as participants who will be exploring their own experiences and can withdraw their consent as detailed.

16. Debriefing

An integral part of the research design is to share information from participant interviews with them and seek clarification on meaning through follow-up interviews. Specific information will also be shared with participants about the use of verbatim extracts in the submitted and/or published work associated with the investigation. On-going consent has been identified as central to the research design. Participants will be offered full information about the content of

the thesis and the preliminary reports leading to that stage. As the findings from the research will be relevant to the work context of participants, the nature of broader dissemination will be shared and will be discussed as part of the initial consent to participate.

Project Management

17. Research organisation and funding

There is no funding associated with this research. The research is being undertaken as part of Educational Doctorate studies within the Open University CREET.

18. Other project-related risks

Project-related risks are identified as follows:

Security of data, this will be stored securely on a password protected PC and encrypted. This will minimise risk.

Participants may disclose sensitive information relating to safeguarding concerns.(Low –Risk) Participant information will have been discussed in advance of interviews and the organisational protocol for raising and recording concerns will be followed. As a Registered Social Worker I am also bound by the Scottish Social Services Council Codes of Practice which require my practice in any role to take into account protection regarding vulnerable children or adults. This will be explicit in the negotiation of consent with participants who will be familiar with these codes and the organisational expectations should disclosure arise.

Organisation withdraws approval for research activity (Low-Risk, organisation has been provided with full details of proposed research and is fully in support of the project)

Participants do not volunteer to take part in research (Low-Risk, small sample required from population. If no participants an alternative similar population can be agreed within the organisation)

19. Benefits and knowledge transfer

The study will offer insight into the learning experiences of Social Workers in the workplace. This will assist understanding of the complexity of learning within a contested and challenging professional role. By understanding more about the process of learning within work, individual practitioners and organisational development initiatives can maximise the structure and content of learning opportunities for Social Workers. Social Work learning is inextricably linked in the literature with ethical and accountable practice and balancing the socio-political demands. The study will focus on the voice of practitioners from within this context.

20. Supporting documents

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Appendix 2: Draft Interview Schedule	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Appendix 3: Participant Consent form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Appendix 4: Signed approval letter from organisation (research site)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

21. Declaration

I declare that the research will conform to the above protocol and that any significant changes or new ethics issues will be raised with the HREC before they are implemented.

I declare that I have read and will adhere to the following two OU documents (scroll down from following links):

- [OU Code Of Practice For Research](#)
- [OU Ethics Principles for Research involving Human Participants](#)

To meet internal governance and highlight OU research, the titles of all projects considered by the HREC (whether by HREC checklist or proforma), will be added to the Research Ethics website - <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/human-research>.

Name: Gillian Ferguson
 School/Unit/Faculty: Open University CREET
 Telephone: [REDACTED]
 E-mail: [REDACTED]
 Signature(s) (scanned or electronic): Gillian Ferguson
 Date: 14.12.17

End of project final report

Once your research has been completed you will need to complete and submit an [End of research project final report](#).

Proposed date for final report: 31.10.20

References

British Association of Social Workers BASW (2012) *The Code of Ethics for Social Work* <https://www.basw.co.uk/codeofethics/> last accessed 06.11.17

British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011> last accessed 16.10.17

Scottish Social Services Council SSSC (2016) *Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers* <http://www.sssc.uk.com/about-the-sssc/multimedia-library/publications?task=document.viewdoc&id=239> last accessed 06.11.17

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)



From Dr Duncan Banks
The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee

Email duncan.banks@open.ac.uk
Extension (6) 59198

To Gillian Ferguson, WELS

Project title: An investigation into the experience of Social Worker's learning in the workplace.

Memorandum

HREC ref HREC/2018/2732/Ferguson

Date application submitted: 15/12/17

Date of HREC response: 11/01/18

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted for ethics review, has been given a favourable opinion by Chair's action by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Please note the following:

1. You are responsible for notifying the HREC immediately of any information received by you, or of which you become aware which would cast doubt on, or alter, any information contained in the original application, or a later amendment which would raise questions about the safety and/or continued conduct of the research.
2. It is essential that any proposed amendments to the research are sent to the HREC for review, so they can be recorded and where required, a favourable opinion given prior to any changes being implemented (except only in cases of emergency when the welfare of the participant or researcher is or may be affected).
3. Please include your HREC reference number in any documents or correspondence. It is essential that it is included in any publicity related to your research, e.g. when seeking participants or advertising your research so it is clear that it has been reviewed by HREC and adheres to OU ethics review processes.
4. You are authorised to present this memorandum to outside bodies such as NHS Research Ethics Committees in support of any application for future research clearance. Also, where there is an external ethics review, a copy of the application and outcome should be sent to the HREC.
5. OU research ethics review procedures are fully compliant with the majority of grant awarding bodies and where they exist, their frameworks for research ethics.
6. At the end of your project, you are required to assess your research for ethics related issues and/or major changes. Where these have occurred you will need to provide the Committee with a HREC final report to reflect how these were dealt with using the final report template on the research ethics website - http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/human-research/full-review-process-and-proforma#final_report

Best regards

Dr Duncan Banks
The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 4 Participant information

Thank you for expressing an interest in this study. Here are a few questions and answers about how it will be carried out. Please contact me if you would like to discuss any aspect of the research.

Gillian Ferguson June 2018

Q. What is the purpose of the research?

A. Learning *to be* a Social Worker and Learning *as a* Social Worker is a difficult journey to negotiate at any stage of the career. The research intends to allow the experiences as lived to be foregrounded and to seek to understand what learning in the workplace is for Social Workers. The research will explore what it is like to learn *to be* a Social Worker and what it is like to learn *as a* Social Worker within the workplace. I am interested in exploring how Social Workers learn in daily practice beyond the student and NQSW stages and what it is to be learning in the complex workplace environment.

Q. How does the research fit within other areas of literature?

A. The research considers what the experiences of Social Workers are of learning within the workplace. This research is informed and shaped by literature about individual and organisational learning, professional development and workplace learning as shown below.

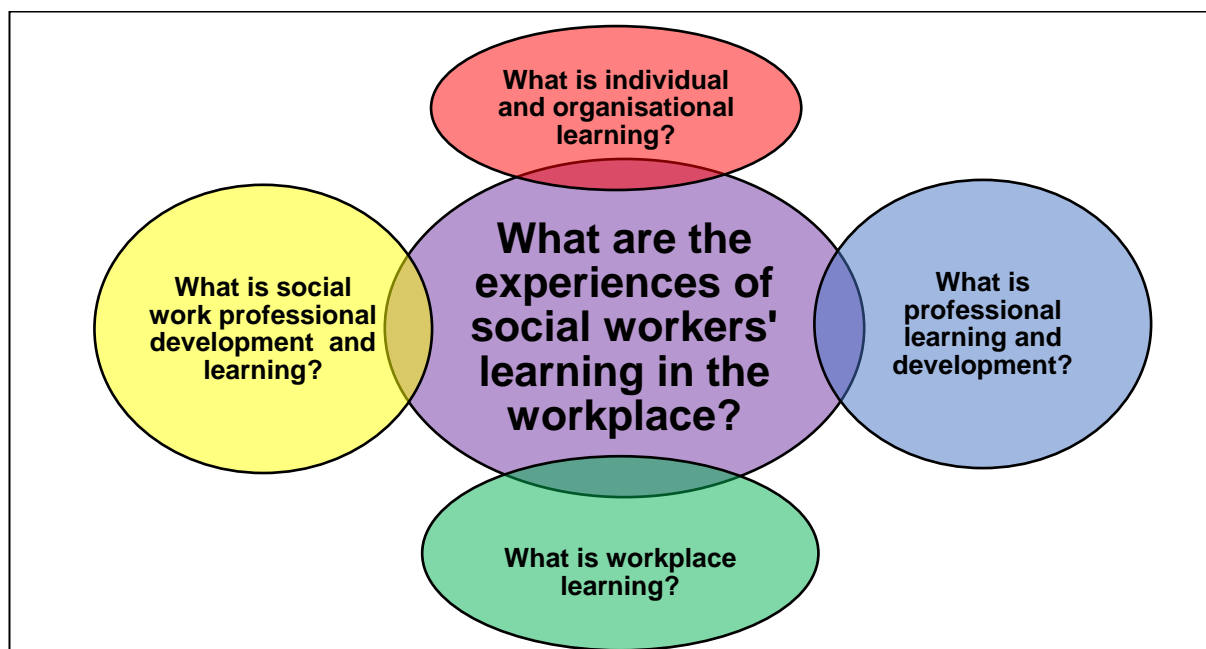


Figure 1: Focus of research study

Q. Who can participate?

A. Registered Social Workers employed within the [REDACTED] and who have been qualified as a Social Worker for more than two years. Registered Social Workers who are currently in a team manager or strategic role can also participate.

Q. What if I am more recently qualified as a Social Worker?

A. This particular research is exploring experiences beyond the newly qualified 12 month period of registration and subsequent year of practice so unfortunately you would be unable to participate.

Q. How will the information be gathered?

A. I will undertake individual interviews which will be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder which is unobtrusive. The interviews will be audio recorded to develop transcripts and I may also take some brief hand-written notes during the interviews too. The interviews will be arranged at a convenient time and venue and will last approximately one hour. A follow-up interview will also be used with participants to provide the opportunity to gather as much information as possible for the research.

Q. How will this information be used?

A. The information gathered will be analysed by the researcher and will be used solely for the purposes of the research. I will be drawing up excerpts and case studies from the data and identifying themes from what is explored. The research thesis and articles arising from data analysis will be submitted to peer review journals and conferences and the thesis submitted to the Open University library. All data within these publications will be anonymised and you will not be identified in any publication.

Q. As a participant how will my privacy be protected?

A. The information gathered will be anonymised as soon as possible and will be stored securely within a password protected file on a password protected hard drive and will be used solely for the research and accessible only to the researcher. It will be important for participants to be in control of whether they choose to share that they are part of the study or otherwise with colleagues and this will be fully explored in terms of the ethics and consent negotiation. As a registered Social Worker, I am however bound by the SSSC Codes of Practice in light of findings from the research that might be seen as posing a risk to the participant or others. Participants are advised to avoid saying anything in interview that might compromise the confidentiality condition of consent. Information gathered will all be destroyed after the research is complete and participants will receive written confirmation of this date is at the time of consent.

Q. What will I have to do as a participant?

A. Participants will need to take part in two individual interviews which will be arranged within a four-week period. These interviews will be audio recorded by the researcher who may also record some written notes during the interviews. An interview schedule will be provided to participants in advance of their interviews. An interview schedule will be provided to participants in advance and full exploration of the details of the research will be discussed with those interested and is detailed in additional information.

Q. What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?

A. By taking part in the research you will be contributing to a small-scale study which is exploring what it is like to be a Social Worker and learn within the workplace. The findings of the research are relevant to a range of current initiatives and debates about professional learning, identity and practice. Participants could choose to record their involvement as part of their continuous professional development, which can then be used as evidence of their learning in their current registration period. It may be difficult to take part due to personal time involved in being interviewed. You may discuss personal experiences and feelings. The researcher will take steps to minimise the risks through how the interviews are conducted and any situation that is upsetting will be handled with sensitivity. Information about support available will be provided routinely to all participants.

Q. What will happen if I wish to withdraw from the study?

You are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time during the data collection stages. You may also request any data relating to you to be destroyed prior to the start of data amalgamation/analysis.

Q. Who is funding or supporting this research?

A. The research is being supported by The Open University in terms of my undertaking this as part of continuing development as an Associate Lecturer. [REDACTED] are supporting this research through approving the time to undertake and participate in interviews.

Q. Who is undertaking the research?

A. I am currently a Senior Learning and Development Advisor working in a local authority context. My background includes working in many settings my professional qualifications include Community Learning and Development, Social Work and Teaching in Higher Education. I completed a Post-Graduate qualification in Technology Enhanced Learning several years ago. My current work involves a broad range of learning and development activities across different workforce and service areas.

I retain strong involvement in Social Work Practice Education and lead a qualification in this on behalf of 6 local authority partners. I have been involved in and interested in learning across my career and remain passionate about how we can most effectively learn. I have also worked as an Associate Lecturer for the Open University for many years and currently teach *Making a Difference: Working with Children and Young People* and *Leadership and Management in Health and Social Care*. Refusal to be involved in the research will not affect employment, workplace assessment/support or other benefits,

Q. How can I obtain more information?

A. My contact details are shown at the end of this questions and answers sheet. I am happy to answer questions at any stage of the research

Q. What if I am concerned about any aspect of the research?

A. Please raise any issues with me directly. I am undertaking the professional Doctorate in Education through The Open University. This is supervised through the Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology. My supervisors are Doctor Mark Wareing (University of Bedfordshire) and Professor Jan Draper (Open University). The research is approved by xxxxxxxxxx. You can contact any of the above should you have concerns about the research.

Contact

All enquiries relating to this research should be directed to

Gillian Ferguson, Doctoral Student, The Open University CREET

Telephone XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Email XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Appendix 5 Reflexivity

Extract A - from written reflection early stages changing methodology

“I have had my heart set on using an action research approach since considering the doctorate study and have started to be more and more uncomfortable with the fit of this. I intended to explore how we might improve workplace learning for social workers and became increasingly aware of the contested and diverse definitions of and meanings associated with what learning is for this professional group, and in particular what this is in the workplace context. I had been concerned that an action research approach would have raised expectations in the organisation where the research was undertaken and that a pressure may have been felt by the services and participants to improve something about learning in the workplace which was driven by current policy agendas and where the essence of learning would in fact be lost in terms of the research. What remained foregrounded in any ideas I have is the position of the participants and a commitment to ensure they are positioned at the fore of the research in terms of the value of their experiences...

A massive lightbulb moment has been thinking about if I were undertaking research with people using social work services, I would have firstly considered exploring their lived experiences therefore why would I not be doing this for social workers in order to understand more about what I do not yet understand. The process of supervision and cycle of reflection have really helped shift my thinking from a discomfort and dissonance with the original research strategy to consider the opportunity of a phenomenological study. The more exploration of phenomenology I undertook, the more I became excited at the fit this had with the intention of the research. Following this turn in the research approach, articulating a clearer focus and design choices were confidently made...”

Extract B - from audio reflection data collection stage post interview XX

“I was not sure whether the participant was saying things that they thought they should say up to a point and I was kind of having to ask a bit more to try and reveal rich description, some of the description was very practical however I did use the same technique as with XX in highlighting any key ideas that people raised, for example, the metaphor of the battlefield was used and there was something about middle ground and there was something about having your armour on and I think that was quite poignant for the social worker....I just really wanted to listen and I feel a bit of a dilemma as to when to intervene in interviews. Most participants they would just keep talking and I know I’ve been quite potentially selective in when I have chosen to be more curious or directive in what I have highlighted or chosen to highlight so I do think it is going to be really important to show the transcript to the participants and I think that the key thing will be for them to see what does that say to them? Does that provide any insights for them about what they have discussed, is there anything they want to add and what do they pick out of that in terms of what meaning for them in terms of learning and I can then almost compare and contrast what they say with what I picked up or wondered about that they were meaning when I have been doing the transcription...

Today was probably the first interview that I really had to very consciously put to the side, to the back or right out of the way any previous knowledge or preconceptions about pieces of work or learning experiences because they chose to select ones that I might have been around or known about because of their prominence. I wasn’t sure how people would experience the interview because of how they perceived me or otherwise. I am really aware that some people know me quite well and some not at all or might not like what they perceive I think about social work or decisions they may have known me to make ...some of the other examples from today were XXXX that is another area work that I have to do with which I did

not at the start of the research in terms of different roles as an insider researcher and I felt I had to be really careful to almost bracket that as clearly as I could too because I felt myself almost ready to burst open with some things and I would feel defensive...I had to really squash that down."

Extract C – from written reflection middle stages immersed in analysis

"I am swinging from excitement to feeling completely daunted about the rich and detailed descriptions that are within the audio recordings and transcripts as they develop. I am totally overwhelmed by the volume of data and detailed numerous transcripts which have been generated. Everything is a total mess and exhausting. Transcribing the 32 interviews was a mammoth task as there were many steps to generating these and now that I have these all prepared making any sense of these has been a nightmare until I took a step back to consider what has been happening so far. I have spent a lot of time on initial exploration of the data, considering this in my reflective thinking and in written notes throughout the entire process of initial transcription. It took a lot of time swimming in the mess until this step back which preceded undertaking a structured approach to analysis identified within IPA texts. Although I had been clear about this at the outset of the research data collection, it was as if I became lost and found myself back on track again with the systematic and structured steps for each transcript identified by Smith and Flowers. Initially I thought all the swimming in mess had been time wasted until I realised this had been an essential and incredibly valuable part of the overall process. Articulating the steps I had undertaken showed me why each stage had helped me get to grips with what I was finding out about social workers experiences and there was no short cut to doing this well and to the depth I wanted. An exhausting success but a long way to go."

Extract D – from written reflection later stages findings and implications

"Establishing findings for each participant was so powerful for me and I was really keen to show themes as connected aspects of these individual lived experiences so using the web idea really helped me make sense of this and hopefully convey the different threads that are crucial components of the whole... developing themes for the group involved an almost constant wrestle in my mind with not wanting to take away anything from the individuals, however confidence in the group themes came as I worked away through this and ended up very confident that these represented the lived experiences of the group well..."

A further wrestle really continued with thinking about "What had I really found out here?" I used this question to myself at times out of frustration but at later stages as a helpful focus. This focus will be something to return to in order to consider and shape implications. I have been thinking about the ethical foundations of the research and how I was clear that the study had potential benefit for individual social workers and organisations so I need to think again now about these findings, what do I want to say about these and what does this mean for professional learning..."

Appendix 6 A comparison of selected research methodologies

Methodology	Disciplinary Origin and Principles	Highlights	What this would mean for my study and research questions?
Grounded Theory	Interpretivist Sociology	Uncovering social processes, influences and impacts	Development of theory about how social workers learn in the workplace <i>What factors influence how social workers learn in the workplace?</i>
Action Research	Interpretivist Democratic Participation	Involving participants in creation of knowledge	Testing ways of improving workplace learning for social workers <i>What are the ideas social workers have about effective learning in the workplace?</i>
Ethnography	Interpretivist Anthropology	Learning cultural patterns through Observing people in their natural environment	Observation of what happens in the workplace and where learning occurs for social workers <i>How do social workers learn in their workplace?</i>
Narrative Enquiry	Interpretivist Human Storytelling and Education	Capturing stories Sense-making	Stories and case studies of the learning experiences and journeys of social workers <i>What are the stories social workers tell about their learning in the workplace?</i>
Phenomenology	Interpretivist Philosophy	Understanding individual experience and examining how individuals make sense of experience	Depth and focus on the essence of the lived experience of individuals Insights into the sense individuals make of their unique lived experience <i>What are the experiences of social workers' learning in the workplace?</i>
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis			
<p>IPA draws from a range of phenomenological approaches to research.</p> <p>The specific focus for my research on “personal meaning, sense-making in a particular context for people who share a particular experience” (Smith, 2009, p. 45)</p>			

Appendix 7 Participant consent form

Participant Consent Form
An investigation into the experience of Social Workers' learning in the workplace



The Open
University

Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology (CREET)

Consent form for persons participating in a research project |

An investigation into the experience of Social Worker's learning in the workplace

Name of participant:

Name of principal investigator(s): Gillian Ferguson, Doctoral Researcher

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written statement in plain language to keep.
2. I understand that my participation will involve individual interview (s) and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.
3. I acknowledge that:
 - a. the possible effects of participating in this research have been explained to my satisfaction
 - b. I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project without explanation or prejudice and to request the destruction of any data that have been gathered from me until it is anonymized at the point of transcription on ----- After this point data will have been processed and it will not be possible to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided.
 - c. the project is for the purpose of research
 - d. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements
 - e. I have been informed that with my consent the data generated will be stored in secure electronic files, password protected and encrypted by the researcher and will be destroyed following completion of the researcher's doctorate studies. A date will be provided for this by the researcher.
 - f. If necessary any data from me will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research. SS
 - g. I have been given contact details for a person whom I can contact if I have any concerns about the way in which this research project is being conducted
 - h. I have been informed that a summary copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I request this.

I consent to this individual interview being audio-taped yes no
(please delete as appropriate) (please tick)

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings yes no
(please tick)

Email or postal address to which a summary should be sent:

Participant signature:

Date:

Participant Consent Form
An investigation into the experience of Social Workers'
learning in the workplace






Contact Details for Principal Researcher:

Gillian Ferguson
g.ferguson@open.ac.uk



Contact Details for alternative contact (s) should you be unhappy with any aspect of how this research is being carried out:




Dr Mark Wareing

University of Bedfordshire

Professor Jan Draper

The Open University


This research has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: [HREC/2018/2732/Ferguson](http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/) (<http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/>).

Please see on page 3 the Open University statement on the use of personal data for research purposes which the researcher will observe

Appendix 8 Profile of participants

Participant self-selected pseudonyms		Number of years qualified as a Social Worker	Is the participant a Social Work Practice Educator?	Settings in which the participant has worked in and described in their interview examples				
				Statutory Children and Families	Statutory Criminal Justice Services	Statutory Adult Services	Third, Voluntary and/or Independent Sector	Wider UK or International
	Kathleen	22	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
	Reuben	29	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
	Chloe	3	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
	Stuart	29	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
	Caroline	4	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
	Sylvia	9	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
	Maple	4	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
	Danny	10	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
	Carol	9	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
	Sophie	3	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
	Makine	12	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
	Jade	3	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
	Karl	40	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
	Maisie	20	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
	Stephen	24	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
	Boab	12	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗

Appendix 9 Interview schedule

Participant profile	
How many years have you been qualified as a Social Worker?	
Which settings have you worked in as a Social Worker?	
Statutory Children and Families	
Statutory Criminal Justice	
Statutory Adult Services	
Voluntary/Third Sector	
Other	
Do you hold a Practice Educator/Practice Teacher Award?	

Introduction by researcher who will provide an explanation of:

- The purpose of the research
 - Ethical approval and safeguards
 - Nature of interview (s)
 - Use of audio recording for production of transcripts
 - Nature of data analysis
 - Participant withdrawal
 - Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection
 - Reminder of contacts regarding the research as detailed in participant information
-

Learning to be a Social Worker

1. Can you tell me what it was like learning to be a Social Worker in your career?
2. Are there any particularly vivid experiences you can describe to me?
3. What particular feelings, sounds, smells and objects were associated with that experience?
4. How has this experience influenced you as a Social Worker?
5. What does learning to be a Social Worker mean to you?

Learning as a Social Worker in, through and at work

6. Tell me about your experiences of learning as a Social Worker through your work activities?
 7. Are there any particularly vivid experiences you can describe to me?
 8. What particular feelings, sounds, smells and objects were associated with that experience?
 9. How has this experience influenced you as a Social Worker?
 10. What does learning in your workplace mean to you?
 11. Any other comments
-

Feedback on interview

- a) Were the interview questions clear and relevant?
- b) What was your experience of the interview?
- c) Do you have any other feedback on the process or practical arrangements?

Appendix 10 Full table of group themes and contributing individual concepts

Refined superordinate themes for the group in bold with the associated subordinate themes indented in bold	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
Journey of the self	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Readiness and motivation		x	x		x	x			x						x	
Sense of experience or novice								x								
Vocation												x				
What was there before				x						x				x		
Age			x											x		x
Realising it is serious stuff				x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Power and authority				x			x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Realising it is serious stuff													x			
Using humour but it is not funny															x	
Responsibility						x	x	x				x	x			x
Fit		x	x		x	x					x			x		x
being a stranger						x								x		
Being honest and ethical															x	
Being human in practice															x	
Felt human			x								x					
Felt right			x			x										x
Seen as self			x													
Fitting in		x			x	x					x					x
Learning to use and manage self		x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Constantly adapting		x														
Learning about own limits								x				x				
Learning about self		x			x			x				x			x	
Learning to use self to help people							x									
Managing self and self-regulation		x		x		x			x		x		x	x		
Impact on life	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x
Being tested														x		
Building resilience								x								
Impact on personal life		x					x	x								x
Parallel of own life	x				x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x
Protecting /caring for self								x								
Self as a target		x														
The complex intrapersonal process						x										
Whole life			x							x						
Becoming	x			x	x		x	x		x	x	x			x	x
Conflict in identity																x
Creating a new self	x										x	x				
Integration of selves								x		x						x
Trying to avoid becoming something																x

Refined superordinate themes for the group in bold with the associated subordinate themes indented in bold	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
Navigating landscape and place	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x
Diverse places																
Learning from different settings				x		x		x								
Police cells as place										x						
Sheriff's house as place										x						
Court as place		x		x		x		x								
House as place					x	x			x							
Preconceptions of place					x					x						
Institution			x													
Office as place			x					x								
Isolation																
Unknown										x						
Place as familiar or unfamiliar															x	
Risk													x			
Isolated places	x								x				x			
In the dark								x					x			
No route map																
Trying to find way														x		
Trying to find place in the world								x		x						
No map										x						
No pathway										x						
Changing physical landscape										x						
Ethical compass				x		x		x		x				x		x
Trying to be a bridge															x	
Like a theatre				x												
Different worlds																
Alien landscape/different worlds			x					x								
A new world										x						
Dystopia															x	
Battle																
Trying to get over the threshold						x										
Like a minefield	x														x	
Like a battle				x			x									
Being on side-lines								X								
Chaotic workplace					x											
Reflecting from position of safety		x														
The world is on fire																x
Aspects and elements																
Working in the lifespace									x							
Diversity of poverty and neglect									x							
Substance misuse									x							
Legislative landscape			x										x			
Workforce as element of landscape			x													
Complex family dynamics					x					x			x	x	x	

Refined superordinate themes for the group in bold with the associated subordinate themes indented in bold	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Maikine	Danny
Equalities and anti-oppressive context														x		
The atmosphere										x						
Geographic practice differences			x						x							
Culture	x			x										x		
Reality	x															
Socio-economic context	x									x					x	
Navigating tasks	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ambiguity	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x
Ambiguity of task	x						x								x	
Different skills for different settings		x						x						x		
Trying to work out what to do							x	x		x						x
Reactive practice context											x					
Indescribable tasks / articulating what is not articulate														x	x	
Practice wisdom						x	x			x						
Control versus care																x
Learning the boundaries / managing the boundaries								x						x		
Balancing				x			x									x
Learning where to draw the line												x				
Conflict and contradiction in the tasks						x	x									x
What is social work?					x					x						
Possibilities of practice			x					x	x	x				x	x	
Work allocation								x								
Position and priority of casework																x
Role complexity									x					x		
Value of direct work																
Not mechanical/technical/rational																
Possibilities of practice																
Just being																
Being there																
Making a case		x	x	x				x		x	x	x	x			
Making a case				x				x				x	x			
Writing reports											x					
Life and death	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	
Remembering people and their lives are unique	x				x											
Real Life						x						x				
Keeping children alive and safe																x
Huge decisions							x									x
How you get to the point of removing children									x							
Reducing chaos									x							
Being realistic					x		x									
Risk												x				
Ordinary, extraordinary, and extreme	x	x		x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x

Refined superordinate themes for the group in bold with the associated subordinate themes indented in bold	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
The ordinary as extraordinary	x				x									x		x
Extreme as normal		x		x			x		x	x	x			x	x	
Not an ordinary job									x	x	x		x		x	
Daily challenge				x												
Get up and do it again									x							x
Normalisation and minimisation												x				
Complexity of task and role	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x
Meaningless and meaningful tasks															x	
Simple becomes complex										x						
Complexity within and across services								x								
Multiple, fluid and dynamic tasks							x		x				x	x	x	
Working with uncertainty/managing complexity													x	x	x	
Looking for answers	x							x		x						
Learning to manage the difficult stuff		x														
The machine	x		x	x		x	x	x		x			x	x	x	
The system may lead you to look at things in certain ways							x									
System is harmful and complex														x	x	
Managing the conveyor belt															x	
Feeding the system															x	
Operating procedures			x							x						
No rule book/instruction manual	x									x				x		
Rules			x													
Influence of budgets			x													
importance of case notes										x						
Using data			x													
Learning about paperwork													x			
Influence of computer system													x		x	
Learning how to be in different systems			x					x								
Knowing the processes																
Legislative context				x							x		x		x	
Learning through the body	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Under attack or threat																
Feeling unsafe / safe / at risk				x	x				x				x			
Being frozen				x												x
Feeling scared/terrified				x									x	x		
I need to get out of here											x					
Preparation for being annihilated						x										
Feeling persecuted										x						
Something not quite right						x										
Feeling uncomfortable				x						x			x		x	
Doing things you don't want to														x		
Feeling blamed										x						

Refined superordinate themes for the group in bold with the associated subordinate themes indented in bold	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
Shock																
Physical practice of power															x	x
Feeling appalled	x															
Feeling taken aback					x											
Feeling shocked	x								x						x	
Culture shock																
Emotional web self and others		x		x								x		x	x	
Emotional impact		x								x					x	
Vicarious trauma							x									
Feeling that it hardens you								x								
We need to feel											x					
People don't learn by humiliating them											x					
Stress is an expected part of the landscape							x								x	
The source of stress was unexpected															x	
Extreme and intense emotions									x							x
You are living with it you are hanging with the powerful and complex																
Learning through difficult emotions /emotional web	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x			x	x	x
Feeling overwhelmed					x										x	
Feeling anxious					x	x	x		x							
Feeling responsible					x											
Feeling guilty						x								x		
Feeling sad	x															
Feeling disgusted																x
Feeling disappointed		x														
Feeling awful		x														
Felt like the worst social worker in the world		x														
Feeling humiliated / stupid / naïve		x							x							
Feeling shame															x	
Feeling disheartened															x	
Feeling embarrassed															x	
Feeling angry									x					x		
Feeling exhausted and drained		x		x												
Learning through enjoyable emotions																
Excitement in learning														x		x
Enjoying learning									x							
Feeling amazed									x							
Survival												x		x		x
Unable to sleep							x									
Getting sucked in														x		
It can become consuming					x											
Sitting at the top of the rollercoaster										x						

Refined superordinate themes for the group in bold with the associated subordinate themes indented in bold	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
Flying by the seat of pants																x
Sink or swim																x
Holding breath									x							
Drawing breath									x							
Intellectual and physical conflict														x		
Holding it together															x	
Catastrophic thinking		x														
Thrown into it		x								x						
Ethical and moral tension																x
Physical and psychological Isolation					x				x				x		x	
Feeling isolated															x	
Being out on own					x				x				x			
At night									x				x			
Learning through own wits										x						
Feeling blind					x											
Feeling alien										x						
Feeling like a stranger							x									
Feeling lost								x								
Feeling unwelcome						x										
Whole body experience of place										x						
Learning through senses	x			x					x		x	x	x			x
Practice through the senses																x
Life and death in the smell																x
Contrast in emotions and senses																x
Physical experience of contrasting places											x					
Silence											x					
Hearing telephones																
Hearing shouting													x			
People shouting at you													x			
Unfairness sticking in throat				x												
Being there in your own body												x				
All the things going on in head									x			x				
Screwing on a different head	x															
Learning through others	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Learning through team		x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x		
Learning in team		x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x				
Absence or presence of others					x											
Challenging discussions / questioning		x			x			x							x	
Role of the manager in learning							x	x				x				
Learning from support workers				x												
Learning from different ways of doing							x								x	
Learning from students															x	
Role in other people's learning						x										

Refined superordinate themes for the group in bold with the associated subordinate themes indented in bold	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
Shared learning				x												
Learning through other people's cases		x														
Learning in informal settings							x									
Learning through informal conversation							x									
Other people learning from the difficult experience		x														
Motivation of others		x		x	x		x			x						x
The maverick					x		x									
Motivation of others		x		x						x						x
People's lives	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Learning from service users and families/ real people	x	x	x		x	x				x	x	x		x	x	x
Learning from impact of previous decisions about children									x							
different disabilities and how these impact on daily life													x			
Importance of relationships											x		x	x		
People should be given more of a chance								x					x			
children experiencing pure joy									x					x		
Trauma and impact of abuse														x		x
Children's lives are complex, chaotic and characterised by the past and the present									x					x		
Really really getting to know the children																x
Non-verbal communication																x
Impact of a simple task for child's life experiences						x										
Impact of simple task on learning for career						x										
Learning to be straightforward with people								x						x		
Learning from facial expressions								x								
Demonisation of people											x					
Importance of respect											x					
Importance of listening											x					
Freedom and humanity											x					
Being able to challenge discrimination												x				
How to respond to different people		x		x												
Other Social Workers				x	x			x	x				x			
Learning with other Social Workers				x	x			x	x				x			
Role of the practice educator				x												
Other professionals					x	x	x	x		x		x	x			x
Feeling and seeing the experience of other professionals					x	x	x									
Conflict with other professionals								x								
Power dynamics												x				
Learning from other services													x			
Expectations of others					x					x			x			x
Practices and conceptions of learning		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x

Refined superordinate themes for the group in bold with the associated subordinate themes indented in bold	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
Ingredients				x	x	x			x	x	x	x			x	
Learning by talking											x					
Learning from surprises					x											
Learning by being shown									x							
Learning through mistakes									x	x	x					
Learning by watching					x				x							
Learning through documentaries												x				
Learning quickly				x					x							
Importance of supervision				x	x										x	
Learning what you could have done better						x										
Position of formal learning opportunities				x	x				x	x						
Triggers				x	x	x		x		x	x	x				
Professional curiosity as learning trigger						x				x						
Learning through a break												x				
Learning by choice				x												
Desire for knowledge to base practice on										x						
Learning from experiences that were not enjoyed					x			x								
Thinking practices	x			x	x	x	x				x	x			x	x
Knowing things you use every day but not really knowing them						x										
Thinking for yourself											x					
Opportunity to think					x						x					
Learning in own time				x								x				
Taking time / finding time												x				x
Reflection /make sense of experience	x					x	x				x	x				x
Individual conceptions	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x
What is practice and what is learning?															x	
Learning possible from every situation												x				
Own responsibility for learning					x				x		x	x				
Learning is never going to end						x	x			x	x	x			x	
Like learning to drive a car							x					x				
Learning dynamic according to stage of case				x			x	x								
Contrast to university learning						x	x									
Learn on a daily basis	x			x			x	x								x
Learning that SW is not for the light-hearted								x								
Learning by chance	x			x		x	x			x	x	x				x
Paths lead to different places	x						x			x	x	x				
Significance of qualifying placement for future learning	x															
According to own style and interest										x	x					
Contrast in place and task							x									x
Specific cases	x			x												x
Learning through exposure				x												

Refined superordinate themes for the group in bold with the associated subordinate themes indented in bold	Boab	Carol	Reuben	Chloe	Kathleen	Sophie	Sylvia	Caroline	Maisie	Stuart	Stephen	Maple	Jade	Karl	Makine	Danny
Particular cases have shaped practice		x														
Contrast in time spent with children															x	
How we learn depends on these tasks and how they are explained															x	
Accidental most significant		x				x	x								x	x
Learning not always conscious						x									x	
Accidental most significant						x	x									x
A small piece of practice can generate a big learning experience						x										
Can't prepare		x					x							x	x	
How do you prepare?		x					x									
What might work for one person would not work for another		x												x		
What you learn to do in one situation won't necessarily help you in another															x	
Lucky or unlucky		x														

Appendix 11 Mapping of themes to theory

Journey of the self mapped to theoretical models

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (Max van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Journey of the self	X	X	X				X	X			
Readiness and motivation		X				X	X	X			X
Sense of experience or novice		X		X		X		X	X		
Vocation		X				X		X	X		
What was there before		X				X		X	X		
Age	X	X				X		X	X		
Realising it is serious stuff						X			X		X
Power and authority						X			X		X
Realising it is serious stuff						X			X		X
Using humour but it is not funny						X			X		X
Responsibility						X			X		X
Fit						X			X		X
Being a stranger	X		X	X		X			X		X
Being honest and ethical						X			X		X
Being human in practice	X					X			X		X
Felt human	X					X			X		X
Felt right						X			X	X	X
Seen as self	X					X			X	X	X
Fitting in			X	X		X			X	X	X
Learning to use and manage self						X			X	X	X
Constantly adapting						X			X	X	X
Learning about own limits						X			X	X	X
Learning about self						X			X	X	X
Learning to use self to help people				X		X			X	X	X
Managing self and self-regulation	X					X			X	X	X
Impact on life						X			X	X	X
Being tested						X			X	X	X
Building resilience						X			X	X	X
Impact on personal life						X			X	X	X
Parallel of own life		X				X			X		X
Protecting /caring for self						X			X		X
Self as a target	X		X			X			X		X
The complex intrapersonal process	X					X			X		X
Whole life	X	X				X			X		X
Becoming						X			X	X	X
Conflict in identity						X			X		X
Creating a new self						X			X		X
Integration of selves	X					X			X		X

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (Max van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Trying to avoid becoming something						X			X	X	

Navigating landscape and place mapped to theoretical models

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work-practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Navigating landscape and place			X			X			X	X	
Diverse places			X			X			X	X	
Learning from different settings			X			X			X		X
Police cells as place			X			X			X		X
Sheriff's house as place			X			X			X		X
Court as place			X			X			X		X
House as place			X			X			X		X
Preconceptions of place			X			X			X		X
Institution			X			X			X		X
Office as place			X			X			X		X
Isolation			X			X			X		X
Unknown			X			X			X		X
Place as familiar or unfamiliar			X			X			X		X
Risk			X			X			X		X
Isolated places			X			X			X	X	X
In the dark			X			X			X		X
No route map			X			X			X		X
Trying to find way			X			X			X		X
Trying to find place in the world			X			X			X	X	X
No map			X			X			X	X	X
No pathway			X			X			X	X	X
Changing physical landscape			X			X			X		X
Ethical compass			X			X			X		X
Trying to be a bridge			X			X			X		X
Like a theatre			X			X			X		X
Different worlds			X	X		X			X		X
Alien landscape/different worlds		X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
A new world			X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Dystopia			X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Battle			X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Trying to get over the threshold			X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Like a minefield			X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Like a battle			X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Being on side-lines			X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Chaotic workplace			X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Reflecting from position of safety	X		X	X	X	X			X	X	X
The world is on fire			X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Aspects and elements			X	X			X	X		X	
Working in the lifespace			X	X			X	X			
Diversity of poverty and neglect			X	X			X	X			

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Substance misuse			X	X			X	X			
Legislative landscape			X				X	X			
Workforce as element of landscape			X				X	X	X		X
Complex family dynamics			X	X			X	X			X
Equalities and anti-oppressive context			X	X			X	X			
The atmosphere			X				X	X			
Geographic practice differences			X					X			
Culture			X					X			
Reality			X					X			
Socio-economic context			X					X			

Navigating tasks mapped to theoretical models

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Navigating tasks			X					X			
Ambiguity								X			
Ambiguity of task								X			
Different skills for different settings			X					X			
Trying to work out what to do								X	X		
Reactive practice context								X	X		
Indescribable tasks / articulating what is not articulate								X	X		
Practice wisdom								X	X		
Control versus care								X	X		
Learning the boundaries / managing the boundaries				X				X	X		
Balancing								X			
Learning where to draw the line								X	X		
Conflict and contradiction in the tasks								X	X		
What is social work?								X	X		
Possibilities of practice				X				X			
Work allocation								X			
Position and priority of casework								X			
Role complexity								X			
Value of direct work				X				X			
Not mechanical/technical/rational				X				X			
Possibilities of practice				X					X		X
Just being				X					X		X
Being there				X					X		X
Making a case									X		X
Making a case									X		X
Writing reports									X		X
Life and death				X					X		X
Remembering people and their lives are unique				X					X		X
Real Life				X					X		X
Keeping children alive and safe				X					X		X
Huge decisions				X					X		X
How you get to the point of removing children		X		X					X		X
Reducing chaos				X					X		X

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Being realistic				X					X		X
Risk									X		X
Ordinary, extraordinary and extreme									X		X
The ordinary as extraordinary	X		X						X		X
Extreme as normal	X		X						X		X
Not an ordinary job	X		X	X					X		X
Daily challenge		X	X	X					X		X
Get up and do it again	X	X	X						X		X
Normalisation and minimisation									X		X
Complexity of task and role									X		X
Meaningless and meaningful tasks									X		X
Simple becomes complex									X		X
Complexity within and across services									X		X
Multiple, fluid and dynamic tasks									X		X
Working with uncertainty/managing complexity									X		X
Looking for answers									X		X
Learning to manage the difficult stuff									X		X
The machine			X	X					X		X
The system may lead you to look at things in certain ways				X					X		X
System is harmful and complex									X		X
Managing the conveyor belt									X		X
Feeding the system									X		X
Operating procedures									X		X
No rule book/instruction manual									X		X
Rules									X		X
Influence of budgets									X		X
importance of case notes									X		X
Using data									X	X	X
Learning about paperwork					X				X	X	X
Influence of computer system					X				X	X	X
Learning how to be in different systems					X				X	X	X
Knowing the processes					X				X	X	X
Legislative context					X				X	X	X

Learning through the body mapped to theoretical models

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Learning through the body	X		X								
Under attack or threat	X		X	X							
Feeling unsafe / safe / at risk	X		X	X							
Being frozen	X		X								
Feeling scared/terrified	X		X								
I need to get out of here	X		X								
Preparation for being annihilated	X										
Feeling persecuted	X										
Something not quite right	X		X								
Feeling uncomfortable	X		X								
Doing things you don't want to	X										
Feeling blamed	X										
Shock	X										
Physical practice of power	X										
Feeling appalled	X										
Feeling taken aback	X										
Feeling shocked	X										
Culture shock	X										
Emotional web self and others	X			X			X				
Emotional impact	X						X				
Vicarious trauma	X						X				
Feeling that it hardens you	X						X				
We need to feel	X						X				
People don't learn by humiliating them	X			X			X				
Stress is an expected part of the landscape	X						X				
The source of stress was unexpected	X						X				
Extreme and intense emotions	X						X				
You are living with it you are hanging with the powerful and complex	X		X				X				
Learning through difficult emotions emotional web	X						X				
Feeling overwhelmed	X						X				
Feeling anxious	X						X				
Feeling responsible	X						X				
Feeling guilty	X						X				
Feeling sad	X						X				

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Feeling disgusted	X						X				
Feeling disappointed	X						X				
Feeling awful	X						X				
Felt like the worst social worker in the world	X						X				
Feeling humiliated / stupid / naïve	X						X				
Feeling shame	X						X				
Feeling disheartened	X						X				
Feeling embarrassed	X						X				
Feeling angry	X						X				
Feeling exhausted and drained	X						X				
Learning through enjoyable emotions	X						X				
Excitement in learning	X						X				
Enjoying learning	X						X				
Feeling amazed	X						X				
Survival	X						X				
Unable to sleep	X						X				
Getting sucked in	X						X				
It can become consuming	X						X				
Sitting at the top of the rollercoaster	X						X				
Flying by the seat of pants	X						X				
Sink or swim	X		X				X				
Holding breath	X						X				
Drawing breath	X						X				
intellectual and physical conflict	X						X				
Holding it together	X						X				
Catastrophic thinking	X						X				
Thrown into it	X						X				
Ethical and moral tension	X						X				
Physical and psychological Isolation	X		X								
Feeling isolated	X		X								
Being out on own	X		X	X							
At night	X		X								
Learning through own wits	X										
Feeling blind	X		X								
Feeling alien	X		X	X							
Feeling like a stranger	X		X	X							
Feeling lost	X		X								
Feeling unwelcome	X		X	X							

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Whole body experience of place	X		X								
Learning through senses	X										
Practice through the senses	X										
Life and death in the smell	X		X								
Contrast in emotions and senses	X		X								
Physical experience of contrasting places	X		X								
Silence	X		X								
Hearing telephones	X		X								
Hearing shouting	X		X								
People shouting at you	X		X	X							
Unfairness sticking in your throat	X		X								
Being there in your own body	X		X								
All the things going on in head	X		X								
Screwing on a different head	X		X								

Learning through others mapped to theoretical models

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Learning through others				X					X		X
Learning through team			X	X					X		X
Learning in team			X	X					X		X
Absence or presence of others			X	X					X		X
Challenging discussions / questioning				X					X		X
Role of the manager in learning				X					X		X
Learning from support workers				X					X		X
Learning from different ways of doing				X					X		X
Learning from students				X					X		X
Role in other people's learning				X					X		X
Shared learning				X					X		X
Learning through other people's cases				X					X		X
Learning in informal settings			X	X					X		X
Learning through informal conversation				X					X		X
Other people learning from the difficult experience				X					X		X
Motivation of others				X			X		X		X
The maverick				X			X		X		X
Motivation of others				X			X		X		X
People's lives				X			X		X		X
Learning from service users and families/ real people				X			X		X		X
Learning from impact of previous decisions about children				X			X		X		X
Different disabilities and how these impact on daily life				X					X		X
Importance of relationships				X					X		X
People should be given more of a chance				X					X		X
Children experiencing pure joy				X					X		X
Trauma and impact of abuse				X					X		X
Children's lives are complex, chaotic and characterised by the past and the present				X					X		X
Really really getting to know the children				X					X		X
Non-verbal communication				X					X		X
Impact of a simple task for child's life experiences				X					X		X

Impact of simple task on learning for career				X					X		X
Learning to be straightforward with people				X					X		X
Learning from facial expressions				X					X		X
Demonisation of people				X					X		X
Importance of respect				X					X		X
Importance of listening				X					X		X
Freedom and humanity				X					X		X
Being able to challenge discrimination				X					X		X
How to respond to different people				X					X		X
Other Social Workers				X					X		X
Learning with other Social Workers				X					X		X
Role of the practice educator				X					X		X
Other professionals				X					X		X
Feeling and seeing the experience of other professionals				X					X		X
Conflict with other professionals				X					X		X
Power dynamics				X					X		X
Learning from other services				X					X		X
Expectations of others				X					X		X

Practices and conceptions of learning mapped to theoretical models

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Practices and conceptions of learning									X		
Ingredients									X		
Learning by talking	X								X		
Learning from surprises									X		
Learning by being shown			X	X					X		
Learning through mistakes									X		
Learning by watching	X		X	X					X		
Learning through documentaries									X		
Learning quickly									X		
Importance of supervision				X					X		
Learning what you could have done better									X		
Position of formal learning opportunities									X		
Triggers							X				
Professional curiosity as learning trigger							X				
Learning through a break		X									
Learning by choice							X				
Desire for knowledge to base practice on							X				
Learning from experiences that were not enjoyed											
Thinking practices											
Knowing things you use every day but not really knowing them											
Thinking for yourself											
Opportunity to think											
Learning in own time											
Taking time / finding time		X									
Reflection /make sense of experience											
Individual conceptions						X					
What is practice and what is learning?						X					
Learning possible from every situation						X					
Own responsibility for learning						X	X				
Learning is never going to end		X				X					
Like learning to drive a car						X					
Learning dynamic according to stage of case						X					

Contrast to university learning						X					
Learn on a daily basis		X				X					
Learning that SW is not for the light-hearted						X					

Learning by chance mapped to theoretical models

Superordinate and subordinate group themes	Themes mapped to <i>Lifeworld Existentials</i> (van Manen, 2014)					Themes mapped to aspects of the Advanced Model for Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2011)					
	Corporeality	Temporality	Spatiality	Relationality	Materiality/Technology	Content	Incentive	Identity	Work practice	Tech/Org	Soc/Cult
Learning by chance			X	X					X		X
Paths lead to different places			X	X					X		X
Significance of qualifying placement for future learning									X		X
According to own style and interest							X	X	X		X
Contrast in place and task			X	X					X		X
Specific cases			X	X					X	X	X
Learning through exposure			X	X					X		X
Particular cases have shaped practice				X					X	X	X
Contrast in time spent with children				X					X		X
How we learn depends on these tasks and how they are explained				X					X	X	X
Accidental most significant				X					X	X	X
Learning not always conscious	X			X					X		
Accidental most significant			X	X					X	X	
A small piece of practice can generate a big learning experience			X	X					X		
Can't prepare				X		X			X	X	X
How do you prepare?				X		X			X	X	X
What might work for one person would not work for another				X		X			X	X	X
What you learn to do in one situation won't necessarily help you in another			X	X		X			X	X	X
Lucky or unlucky				X					X	X	X

