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# A study of the views of practitioners, managers and the professional body, on the purpose of support and supervision for guidance practitioners working as personal advisers

## Thesis

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Doctorate in Education

A study of the views of practitioners, managers and the professional body, on the purpose of support and supervision for guidance practitioners working as personal advisers.

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2005

**Abstract**

In the context of Connexions and an inclusion agenda, practice for careers advisers (now called personal advisers) has changed. Those working intensively with the 'harder-to-help' appear to need support and supervision. For most (at practitioner, manager and the professional institute level) this is a novel practice and the meanings/perspectives on what it is, and what it can do, are not shared. The study explored these views using a qualitative approach with the intention of foregrounding differences and similarities. Following dissemination of the findings, the aim is to enhance the effectiveness of any models put into place. In exploring the formation of a discourse on support and supervision in the field of career guidance, the study evaluated the usefulness of discourse theory. Through the use of discourse theory the study also examined the need for support and supervision.

Ten personal advisers, three line managers and three representatives of the professional and training body were interviewed. Analysis employed the techniques of a grounded, thematic approach that searched for the most important themes for each group. Three main themes emerged from that analysis:

> the need for a structured process
> managing stress and avoiding burn out
> time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change.

Although there were many similar views about the purpose of support and supervision, there were differences in emphasis between the groups. For personal advisers the central purpose was to 'manage stress and avoid burn out': support and supervision was viewed as offering a restorative space within, at times, a stressful work environment.

While line managers and representatives of the professional community also talked about this, their views about purpose brought to the fore other

aspects. Line managers viewed monitoring of performance as a central function of support and supervision. For the professional representatives the purpose of support and supervision was to 'enhance professional development within the bigger picture of organisational change'. Both groups made use of a professional discourse that placed the needs of the client at the centre of the purpose of support and supervision. They also viewed support and supervision through a lens that must consider accountability and use of the resources of time and personnel: for line managers this was the primary focus of their talk about support and supervision. Foucault's concept of 'productive power' was used in the examination of these differences.

The central story for the personal advisers was the need for a restorative space to manage stress and avoid burn out. This discourse on the purpose of support and supervision was positioned above the function of benefiting work with clients. The study concludes that this discourse needs to be heard and not silenced by other more powerful views on the purpose of support and supervision.

# Contents:

**Abstract**

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# Chapter 1. Background and Rationale

## Overview of the dissertation

In chapter one I describe the background to the study and outline the rationale for the research project. In chapter two I report on the literature review, which leads on to chapter three where I discuss methodology, methods and data collection. The discussion on methods is extended in chapter four in relation to analysis of the data. Following this, chapters five, six and seven examine the three major themes that emerged from that analysis. These are synthesised in chapter eight, where I evaluate the findings within a theoretical framework that makes use of discourse theory. The final chapter offers a conclusion and points to possible areas for further research.

## Introduction to the study

Within the new Connexions service career guidance practitioners are known as personal advisers. Some are working intensively with 'harder-to-help' young people in situations where support and supervision appears to be essential. The study sought to question that need and to investigate the perceived purpose of support and supervision.

Evidence for the potential benefits of a Connexions service is, it is claimed, found in studies of other related activities, for example, New Start and The Learning Gateway (Shiles, 2002:106). The personal advisers interviewed for this study were in the main working in the Learning Gateway. At the time of the design of my research study supervision for personal advisers was not on any national policy agenda or evident in the companies employing personal advisers. A survey conducted by Hulbert in 2000 concluded that personal advisers were expressing a need for formal support and supervision.

For the Connexions service, which 'rolled out' nationally between April and September 2003, the meanings associated with the purpose of

support and supervision need to be understood, and shared, for effective practice to be ensured. The study explored the perspectives on support and supervision of practitioners, managers and representatives of the professional community, using a qualitative approach. The perceptions of those involved are evaluated within a theoretical framework that makes reference to discourse theory.

## Background

Although many key strands of New Labour's 'post-welfare' policy agenda were established by the previous Conservative government, these were reworked within a framework that focused on the belief that what was needed was an integrated approach to youth policy (Milbourne et al, 2003:20). An integrated service was to overcome problems of inefficiencies caused by over-bureaucratic services with vested interests, hampered in their ability to deliver services effectively to young people. And, in the context of global competition there is a belief that investment in labour, including youth labour, is the key to economic success (Treasury, 2002:2, Mizen, 2003:457).

It is within this wider policy context that the Connexions service was formed in order to, 'unlock the potential of every young person' (DfEE, 1997:3). The Connexions Services in England now includes the statutory work of careers companies and careers advisers. Other 'home nations' are addressing the needs of the government's inclusion policy, but have decided against a Connexions model, preferring to keep careers services discrete (ICG, 2002:2). Although seen as a universal service providing support for all young people (ICG, 2002:8) a key aim of the Connexions service is to give sustained support to young people whose particular circumstances risk their ability to make successful transitions between education and work or training (DfEE, 2000, Shiles, 2002).

The role of the personal adviser within the Connexions Service was first outlined in the government's Social Exclusion Unit report *Bridging the*

*Gap* (SEU, 1999). The intention was to draw personnel from a number of 'youth services', for example the Careers Service, parts of the local authority youth service and a range of other specialist agencies concerned with youth welfare, in order to provide an integrated service. This new youth support service would undertake the statutory duty to provide careers guidance and was later termed the Connexions service (Blackstone, 2000). However, the only service that has been subsumed in most of its operational area is the Careers Service, partly due to its budget being under direct control of government (Watts, 2001a:16).

'Design flaws' in the Connexions strategy have been documented by Watts (2001b), who underlined the considerable difficulties caused by the confusion regarding the prime aim of the service, and the lack of clarification on the precise nature of the role of the personal adviser. Smith (2003:52), writing from a youth work perspective, regards the Connexions strategy as 'essentially, a deficit paradigm', which follows a public health model closer to social work than the traditional youth worker role. This lack of clarity about the role of the personal adviser was a recurrent theme in the transcripts of the Learning Gateway personal advisers interviewed for this study.

In the early policy documentation the title of careers adviser was absent indicating no specific role in the future service. It was not clear whether the new role replaced that of careers adviser or was in addition to it (Watts, 2001a:18). Policy statements addressed this lack of clarity by inferring that solutions should be found at a local level according to local needs (Weinstock, 2000:14). In the context of Connexions locating power at the local level in terms of identifying specific solutions for exclusion, has little effect on the wider structural reasons for exclusion. Roberts argues that sitting the problem at the individual level ignores the wider structural effects of 'the state of the economy and the distribution of jobs, wealth and income' (2002:2). As Apple indicates when writing about educational reform, in the pressing need to get something done, reducing everything to the local level amounts to

'fiddling while Rome burns' (1996:118). In the context of Connexions, there is a need to step back from the local level and to ask critical questions about viewing people's engagement with education, training and employment as the key to inclusion. *Bridging the Gap* (SEU, 1999) highlights the multiple problems faced by those risking exclusion, and yet suggests that individual action by young people and their helpers can overcome the structural inequalities that lead to multiple problems.

Colley and Hodkinson (2001:335) support this criticism and identify the fundamental contradictions in the report. Within a 'litany of lacks and needs' (2001:339) the approach advocated by *Bridging the Gap* attempts to address the problem of exclusion, caused by widespread structural inequalities in modern society, by a narrow and prescriptive focus on the need for individuals to change their behaviour and employment attitudes. This individual focus means wider social injustice is 'rendered invisible' (2001:354), where those working with the socially excluded have to direct much of their energy on meeting targets rather than the actual needs of their clients (2001:355). Later these target-driven goals for Connexions were emphasised, where 'the concentration (is) very much on the NEET group' (Not in Education, Employment or Training), (ICG, 2002:11).

Confusion over work role, related to a perceived loss of professional identity for careers advisers now working as personal advisers within Connexions (ICG, February 2004:1), may be addressed in support and supervision. This has been highlighted in a number of papers that also suggest that time for support and supervision can provide a context within which to manage those changes (Hulbert, 2000:15; Hughes; 2002:127; Reid and Nix, 2001:41). This chapter will argue that support and supervision is needed for personal advisers working intensively with 'harder-to-help' clients and for Learning Gateway personal advisers.

The Learning Gateway was the title given to an initiative where personal advisers help jobseekers aged 16+ to enter education, training or

employment (the so called NEET group) and pre-dates Connexions. In August 2003 the Learning Gateway was replaced by a new service called E2E – Entry into Employment (Connexions, Kent & Medway, 2003). The aims are very similar, but the new initiative has a greater focus on offering programmes to those young people leaving compulsory education and 'not yet ready' to enter level two programmes in further education, or a Modern Apprenticeship programme, or work. The personal advisers in the study now work as E2E personal advisers and/or Connexions personal advisers.

In the geographical area of the study it is clear that these Learning Gateway personal advisers were not receiving the support and supervision identified within the articles noted above (Hulbert, 2000:15; Hughes; 2002:127; Reid and Nix, 2001:41). Indeed, many personal advisers continue to find themselves working in very difficult situations where the word 'challenging' becomes a euphemism for disturbing and dangerous (Newman, 2001:10). It is the case that careers advisers have always worked with challenging young people, but within the boundaries of their career guidance expertise. That is, a 'traditional' role helping clients to make informed decisions about future education, training and employment. For 'generic' personal advisers with large case loads career guidance remains the key activity, but their time is focussed on working with those young clients who are, or are likely to become, the so-called 'harder-to-help'. They will be expected to maintain an on-going relationship, rather than make early referrals to other 'intensive' personal advisers with small caseloads, or other agencies at an early stage. At the same time they are expected not to go beyond the boundaries of their expertise (CSNU, 2003:8).

The study of Learning Gateway personal advisers indicated that working intensively with the 'harder-to-help' can lead to stress and burn out. There is a cost to caring exclusively for clients with multiple problems; supervision for 'intensive' personal advisers can serve the function of monitoring their work, and in addition can function as care for personal

advisers. Connexions partnerships have a duty of care to their vulnerable clients *and* to their vulnerable staff. Without clarity around the limits of personal expertise there are concerns that practice may be unethical or even dangerous, as reflected in the comments below:

> I think I do have a fear that I'll do something wrong and muck their lives up!...I was worried that I could, I was really fearful that I could make her worse (Personal Adviser, 'Anne' 1:11).

> perhaps our job is more difficult (in the Learning Gateway) because it has fewer boundaries and some people are getting into difficulties because they don't know how far they should be going, and to what extent they should be doing certain things... (Personal Adviser, 'Jane' 2:10/11).

Connexions services have been criticised by the Ofsted inspectorate (Ofsted, 2002) for not providing adequate monitoring and support for personal advisers (ICG, 2003:5). The inspections that took place in 2002 were of Connexions partnerships that were piloting the service, and it could therefore be argued that they needed more time to develop support structures for staff. However, the ICG briefing notes that more recent reports,

> which have on the whole praised Connexions partnerships for their work, have continued to bring up the issue of support and supervision (ICG, 2003:6).

The Connexions Service National Unit has now developed a code of practice for Connexions personal advisers (CSNU, 2003). Support of 'employers, managers and peers' for professional development is included (CSNU, 2003:8), although personal advisers 'must be responsible' for taking steps to ensure this happens (*ibid*). The code's main focus is on ethical issues in relation to work with clients, such as health and safety, confidentiality and child protection. Within the

counselling and health care literature, discussion of ethical codes and exploration of ethical practice is viewed as an important aspect of support and supervision (Scaife, 2001:122-134). Not one of the personal advisers interviewed was aware of any ethical code specific to their work as personal advisers in the Learning Gateway. They saw ethical behaviour as 'common sense' - 'Jiminy Cricket on my shoulder' (Personal Adviser, 'Jane' 1:20), or resulting from experience:

> Over the years I think with experience, I think you… sometimes just sort of know (Personal Adviser, 'Gill' 1:3).

They made reference to relevant professional codes of practice for personal adviser work, but qualified their understanding of this with remarks such as,

> I think on the Diploma [CSNU Personal Adviser Diploma] we looked at the ethical, the code of ethics from sort of four or five different erm agencies…Erm, there I will hold my hand up and say I can't exactly remember what's on them! (Personal Adviser, 'Gill' 2:10).

The advisers in the study do talk of times when they face ethical dilemmas, and of the need for support after they have moved on from the particular instance that troubled them. Here 'Jane' is referring to an ethical dilemma related to confidentiality:

> I mean I had a shock …in school … a young man told me something that I'd rather he hadn't, and I was very upset for the remainder of the day, and I was very shocked at how what he'd said had upset me so much (1:12). I came back to the office in the afternoon and I hadn't really, it didn't sink in until quite later on in the day exactly how the depth of feeling… and I think I probably, possibly would like to talk it through with somebody even now (Personal Adviser, 'Jane' 1:14).

In a discussion on ethics in career guidance, Mulvey (2002:85) charts a process that the practitioner can take to resolve ethical dilemmas. This includes formal support and supervision, alongside using the experience and support of peers and managers. Practitioners in the study state that they need this mix of support and supervision which must include 'on the hoof' and immediate help.

So, structured support and supervision could provide an important 'space' for advisers to attend to ethical dilemmas. How personal advisers maintain what Bond, 2000 (cited in West, 2002:266) refers to as 'ethical mindfulness' depends on more than a written code of ethics, which cannot always address the difficulties faced in practice.

Within the study it was felt that support and supervision was needed for both experienced and inexperienced personal advisers. The Learning Gateway personal advisers were both experienced and qualified career guidance practitioners, and the majority had been working as personal advisers for two years or more. When asked about whether they felt there was a need for support and supervision for their own work, the following view from a very experienced practitioner who is also giving supervision ('well I actually unofficially, do supervise other people' (1:10)), sums up the view of others,

> It's very close to my heart actually! (1:9) I would very much
> benefit I would think from some supervision at times
> (Personal Adviser, 'Kate' 1:13).

Later in the interview Kate says she is 'desperate' for supervision (1:38). When asked if support and supervision is important for experienced advisers, another stated,

> I think it's very important and I think it should have been in
> place a lot earlier (Personal Adviser, 'Mark' 1:30).

The Connexions Service National Unit recognised the need for support and supervision and commissioned the College of St. Mark and St. John to produce a report to assess the need and to suggest ways forward. The report concluded,

> that there is an overwhelming need for good quality supervision for all practitioners within Connexions partnerships (Coleridge Education, 2002:6).

A training programme for support and supervision for Connexions personal advisers was put in place in the autumn of 2003. Places were limited and aimed primarily at providing support and supervision for Connexions personal advisers working intensively with the 'harder-to-help'. This may include some of the personal advisers in the study who already have a supervisory or dual E2E/Connexions personal adviser role, but will not include the majority.

In addition to the ambiguity about role definition there are concerns about the working relationship between intensive personal advisers working with 'harder-to-help' clients and other helpers in their work situations, including personal advisers/careers advisers, mentors, school and college tutors and counsellors. There are potential dangers when working across multiple agencies if assumptions are made that values and ethics are shared (Mulvey, 2002:83). Other tensions add to the complexity of the role, for example anxieties around boundaries of expertise, confidentiality, target setting, impartiality, status and credibility (Watts, 2001a:19, Reid and Nix, 2001:41).

Thus far in presenting the background to the study, it is suggested that the government's lack of consultation with experts in the field was open to criticism when considering the early development of the Connexions service. Watts saw this as leading to a lack of understanding about the implications of the measures recommended, based on inadequate thinking around the original Connexions' strategy (Watts, 2002:45). Watts

highlighted how the strategy went from 'think tank' to policy without consultation with the professionals affected by the changes outlined in *Bridging the Gap* (SEU, 1999). This is perhaps a reflection of the lack of power of career guidance practitioners and their managers in terms of resisting the subsequent erosion of the value of career guidance for all clients. Discussing recent policy, Roberts (2002:1) cautions the career guidance profession about embracing the inclusion agenda. He views the UK's career guidance services as a success story based on catering for all young people.

However, not everyone is critical of Connexions. Law states,

> I'm on record as being a supporter of Connexions ...(it)
> is the first policy measure in a generation to have the
> needs of the most vulnerable most sharply in its focus
> (Law, 2003:29).

During the course of the study there have been a number of changes in direction with regard to the implementation of Connexions. One line manager talked about having to manage the constant shifts in policy:

> people (use) the analogy of the big ship and trying to turn it
> around and that's what I think has happened, but there have
> been several changes in the direction that the ship's being
> pushed (Line Manager, 'Liz' 1:31).

In the context of managing the bigger 'vessel' that is Connexions, it is perhaps unsurprising that support and supervision has not been a priority. A second line manager said, 'I'm not sure we have really discussed it hugely within the company' ('Deirdre' 1:38). Another referred to how supervision had been left on the 'back burner'. She hoped that the research would help the company to,

sit up and realise and think that we do need to be doing something about this (Line Manager, 'Lorna' 2:17).

With the announcement of budget cuts for the Connexions service amounting to 35 million pounds (ICG, February 2004a:1), is there now an increased danger that it will remain 'on the back burner'? Restricted resources are likely to be focused on services to clients: what resource commitment will be made for practitioner support in this context? What effects will the budget cuts have on any work-related stress? The Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 2004:3) state that,

> Evidence suggests that stress is the lead cause of occupational ill health in local authority managed sectors of employment such as education and social services.

The work of personal advisers is closely related to the above. Addressing work-related stress can result in benefits to both the individual and the organisation, but requires a culture change for many former careers services and career guidance practitioners. However, 'the law requires organisations to take action', states the Health and Safety Executive, and makes reference to a case where a 'formal enforcement action' was served on a National Health Service hospital trust (HSE, 2004:2). In this context it seems that an outlet for the 'voice' of practitioners is even more important for both personal advisers and those that manage the service. This suggestion leads to a discussion of the aims of the study and the need for a clear understanding of the purpose, and potential of support and supervision.

**Rationale for the study and the research questions**

> A study of the views of practitioners, managers and the professional body, on the purpose of support and supervision for guidance practitioners working as personal advisers.

In the context of Connexions, the research explored the perspectives on support and supervision held by the groups involved. It looked for both shared understanding and difference in understanding of the purpose of support and supervision. It did not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of any model already in place. It was anticipated that these 'understandings' would be changing throughout the study and arriving at a settled definition would be difficult for those involved. The study aimed to clarify any differences rather than solve the problem of changing or unsettled definitions of purpose.

The exploration of what support and supervision means for the personnel involved could enhance the effectiveness of any models put into place. I am suggesting that without such an exploration, the development of support and supervision will not support practitioners or meet the ethical standards developed by Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU, 2003). During the course of the study many careers companies and Connexions services were researching and developing approaches to support and supervision, before clear guidelines from the Connexions Service National Unit were received. The Institute of Career Guidance' report indicates that this was in response to practitioner demand in some areas (ICG, 2003:11-14).

The aim of the study was to foreground meaning, rather than to place it as something shared or fixed and in the background of other 'more important' issues related to methods or content. My interest in the topic is also related to my role as principal lecturer in a Higher Education Institution involved in training courses, at different academic levels, for both careers advisers and personal advisers. The meaning given to support and supervision will, of course, be influenced by the context of the speaker. Edwards (1998a:24) points to the importance of translating the meanings of different 'discourses' in guidance to increase capability. Edwards goes on to discuss how some discourses at any one time are more influential than others. For instance, policy makers will want to ensure personal adviser work is evaluated against standards and

targets; and will need to take into account competition across government departments for public funding. For Connexions managers it remains a high priority to secure and account for government funded contracts to deliver policy.

As already indicated, managers will have to consider the cost implications and other resource constraints when considering the purpose of, and processes for, support and supervision. Practitioners, although working within the same policy constraints, may have practitioner expectations of support and supervision based on a different set of priorities. For example, practitioners may be less concerned with the cost implications and more concerned with personal support for their work.

The needs of all parties may be met, but there is potential for those with the greater power to determine the priorities for support and supervision. In discussing power, Foucault's work moves on from a Marxist view that sees power as being held only by the powerful. For Foucault power is 'not possessed by or attached to any particular social class', but negotiated (Fairclough, 1995:17). That said, the 'need' for support and supervision for guidance practitioners was not discussed widely or negotiated until the advent of Connexions. Bimrose and Wilden argued the need for support and supervision for career guidance practitioners in 1994, but it was not viewed as a management priority at the time. More recently, Prieto and Betsworth (1999) have argued for a comprehensive model of clinical supervision for trainee career counselors in the USA, but their work has had no apparent impact on training in the UK.

Now, with the introduction of the role of personal adviser, a 'discursive event' (Fairclough, 1995:10), has taken place where managers, practitioners and the professional body are beginning to form a discourse on support and supervision for personal advisers. When faced with difficulties in recruitment (ICG, 2001) and retention, support

and supervision is no longer viewed as a luxury, but seen as fitting into wider organisational needs (Reid and Nix, 2001:45). This study considered the views of all parties to see if there were differences in priorities about the purpose of support and supervision. As discussed in a later chapter, dissemination of the study also aims to give voice to the less powerful views.

Although the purpose of support and supervision may be contested, there could be an assumption that support and supervision **was** a perceived need for the groups involved: it was important to challenge this assumption.

Following the initial study and the literature review, the research questions were:

> ➢ Is there a need for support and supervision?
> ➢ Why does (or why does not) each group perceive a need for support and supervision?
> ➢ How does each group define the purpose(s) (what would they expect support and supervision to achieve)?
> ➢ Who needs to be involved (doing what)?
> ➢ How are these views similar / different?

The initial analysis indicated that there were large areas of agreement. Three key themes emerged in the full analysis:

> ➢ The need for a structured process for support and supervision
> ➢ The need to manage stress and avoid potential 'burn out'
> ➢ The effects of time constraints of fitting support and supervision into busy practice, and the impact of the wider context.

Although these were key themes across the groups, there were differences in emphasis between groups on the purpose of support and

supervision, and the stress placed on how far the wider context would or should affect its provision.

## Shifting horizons within the rationale

The methodology chapter will discuss how the researcher in qualitative work cannot be separated from the research and how the researcher's interpretations cannot be value-free (Hodkinson, 1998). An example of a 'horizon shift' was the need to review my initial thoughts on who to involve in the study. Connexions did not 'roll out' in every area within the large careers company studied as quickly as was originally expected. Also, due to the ambiguous nature of the development of the Connexions policy (Watts, 2001b), confusion led to uncertainty around the transfer of professionally qualified careers advisers into the role of personal adviser.

What emerged was a new 'differentiated', universal service, where all careers advisers were renamed personal advisers. Those universal personal advisers working in schools operated within a three-tier model of helping (DfEE, 2000). At the top of the model personal advisers have a greater percentage of their time focused on work with those students thought to need intensive help. In the middle tier they work with students needing help but not intensive help, and in the bottom tier they can provide information for those students thought not to require direct help. The weighting of the personal adviser's hours for each tier depends on the individual school and its needs: in terms of numbers of those at risk of not making successful transitions into further education, training or employment. This model has since been questioned (DfES, 2004a:10) as schools are experiencing difficulty providing career education and guidance to **all** pupils, beyond those 'at risk'.

Within a school (depending on the particular school) there could be in addition one or more personal advisers with small caseloads of up to thirty, working intensively with the 'harder-to-help'. It became clear that Connexions' intensive personal advisers working in the geographical

area of the study, were either trainees or were not from a career guidance background. In the main, these intensive personal advisers were drawn from staff operating at assistant level within the careers company or were newly appointed staff without the professional careers adviser' qualification, albeit they might be working towards this via the National Vocational Qualification framework.

It became difficult to find qualified careers advisers working as Connexions' intensive personal advisers, either because careers advisers were not moving (or being moved) into the role, or because the implementation of Connexions was delayed. So, in order to research the views of career guidance practitioners on the purpose of support and supervision for the personal adviser role, I decided to locate personal advisers with a careers guidance qualification working as experienced personal advisers in the Learning Gateway. And, as noted earlier, evidence for the potential benefits of a Connexions service was, it was claimed, found in studies of The Learning Gateway (Shiles, 2002:106), so this became a sensible solution and a useful 'shift'.

Moving on, Bradley and Kottler (2001:21) stress the importance of supervision in the helping professions and view supervision as 'indispensable' and 'a key to accountability'. Specific training for support and supervision (for supervisors and supervisees) was not implemented in the company whilst the study was in progress. Writing about the helping professions in the USA, where there is a growing body of research into supervision, Bradley and Kottler state,

> Saying that counselor supervision can be one of the most
> instrumental factors affecting future development of the
> helping professions is not an exaggeration. Furthermore,
> counselor supervision can have a similarly facilitative
> effect on counselor-offered services in other disciplines (2001:21).

We do not use the term 'counselor-offered services' for Connexions and the work of the personal adviser is not described as counselling. However, counselling skills are needed and work with 'difficult' clients can be stressful. Several of the personal advisers talk about how the work can actually, rather than metaphorically, 'keep you awake at night'. All the participants in the research stated the need for a structured process for support and supervision. To provide adequate support and supervision there is a need for statements that clarify intent and direction. Scaife (2001) states that it is important to establish a supervisory contract as,

> Participants need to be clear about the different desires and expectations brought to the relationship by the different parties (2001:53).

And there is a need for,

> an òvert plan and purpose rather than taking a risk with a haphazard and serendipitous process (2001:53).

It became apparent during the study that some inexperienced personal advisers do have a mentor, review case-loads with managers and do attend network meetings and multi-agency conferences: but a coherent approach for all personal advisers across the company was not evident. There was evidence that relevant training had been given for the work for both experienced and inexperienced personal advisers (for example dealing with child protection issues), but this did not include support and supervision.

## Summary
In this chapter I have given a brief overview of the content of each chapter, outlined the background to the study and described the policy context. I have also explained the rationale for the study and indicated why I am interested in the topic. The role of the personal adviser in the

Learning Gateway and in Connexions is complex: I have argued that support and supervision is needed to help those involved manage the work. I have suggested that this need for support and supervision is not an assumption but is supported by the key themes that emerged in the analysis. Before moving on to discuss methodology, the next chapter will survey the literature related to the field of study.

# Chapter 2. The Literature Review

## Introduction

The literature review focuses on the key themes. Part of the interpretive process of this qualitative research project involved determining which themes were 'key'. This will be followed up in chapter three, along side my use of grounded theory.

The detailed analysis that took place after data collection revealed some themes that were less well supported by the original literature review. An inductive approach, where the researcher moves continually between data collection and analysis, necessitates a search for new literature as new themes emerge. The literature search for additional material was influenced by the ongoing analysis of the data and potential 'gaps'. As such this is part of the intertwined nature of data collection and analysis and highlights how the research process is circular rather than linear. As will be shown in the final chapter, this dissertation is not a complete 'story'. In the final chapter I have identified areas that would benefit from further investigation.

The review will be in two parts. The first part of the review is organised around major themes and sub-themes. Due to word restrictions many areas that formed part of the original literature review will be condensed. The themes are closely related and the literature often crosses themes. The second part of the review will introduce the concept of discourse as the theoretical framework for the study. This is part of my pre-existing frame of reference derived from the pathway course for the doctorate (OU, E839). However, the usefulness of the concept in this case will be explored further in chapter eight. A discussion about the literature on research methodology and methods will be included in the next chapter.

**Part 1. Literature linked to themes**

A key theme, fundamental to the research topic and the research questions, is **the need for a structured process for support and supervision**. Sub themes across the groups are:

> ➢ A desire for clarity about purpose and provision
> ➢ The need for training
> ➢ The importance of a structured process
> ➢ The potential for professional development and lifelong learning.

A second major theme is **managing stress and avoiding 'burn out'**, with the sub themes of:

> ➢ Navigating unclear boundaries in a non-traditional role
> ➢ Coping with the emotional impact of the work.

The third major theme centres on **time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change**, and the sub themes are:

> ➢ Meeting the contractual requirements
> ➢ Fitting support and supervision into busy practice.

There were other minor themes some, of necessity, are abandoned in the writing-up process. Writing research reports involves omitting many details, some insights and reducing the text. This selection and omission involved struggle, but decisions had to be made about what to include and what to write about for this dissertation. Inevitably what is produced will be, 'imperfect, provisional, partial, historical and situated' (Ezzy, 2002:139), but the result is my interpretation of the central themes in this case.

## The purpose of support and supervision

*A desire for clarity about purpose and provision*

The work of the personal adviser takes on many areas associated with counselling, youth or social work, all areas where support and supervision is thought to be an established practice.

Within counselling, Bradley and Kottler (2001:3-21) discuss the 'principles, process and practice' of support and supervision. They explain that the term supervision can be divided into two words 'super' and 'vision'. The implication is that an experienced person looks over, from above – 'super', the work of a less experienced person and has a view – 'vision', of the work of the other.

According to the British Association of Counselling (1988:2) the primary purpose of supervision 'is to address the needs of the client'. Bronson, writing about supervision in career counselling in the USA, notes,

> While the value of counselor supervision as well as the potential problems associated with supervision has been widely documented, the role of supervision in career counseling has been largely overlooked (2001:222).

This lack of material was experienced in my own text, journal and Internet searches for literature on support and supervision for career guidance work. The literature is located primarily within the counselling field and has largely ignored the supervision of career counselling (Prieto and Betsworth, 1999:174). Of notable exception in the UK is a call for supervision from Bimrose and Wilden (1994) who suggested that changes in career guidance practice during the 1990s had the potential to lead to anxiety and confusion.

It is not just practitioners that need to be clear about purpose. 'Management' needs in supervision can lead to subterfuge in the

supervisee, due to conflict over the meanings given to support and supervision (Dryden *et al*, 1995). This can in part be avoided by keeping supervision outside of line management. Within the study there are mixed views about line management supervision. Dryden *et al* also highlight the difficulties where supervisor and supervisee may have been trained using different theoretical models (which is a likely occurrence in cross-agency personal adviser work).

Group supervision is one solution. In the area of social work supervision, Arkin *et al* (1999) discuss the benefits of group supervision and in particular its ability to reduce the sense of isolation felt by many practitioners. They state that group supervision can reduce the often, hierarchical supervisor / supervisee relationship and can lead to a clearer conceptualisation of problems related to ethical working and expertise (1999:50). Within my study group supervision was not viewed as an effective use of time by the majority of those interviewed.

Returning to line management supervision, whilst recognising the difficulties involved in managerial supervision there are benefits. Although organisational goals can take priority, a study by Turner (2000) claimed that many social work practitioners expressed the view that scarce resources would ensure that the roles of line manager and supervisor were combined. Separation of the roles was viewed as ideal but unlikely in an over-stretched service (2000:237). Whilst there was evidence of an ambivalent attitude to line management supervision in my study, one personal adviser ('Yvonne', 1:12), who had supervision experience from a previous work role, viewed line management involvement as essential.

Others felt there needed to be a clear distinction between the line manager and the supervisor. 'Jane' felt that whoever gave supervision the most important thing was for structured time, set aside specifically for supervision. She explained further,

Jane: I mean (*pause*) the tendency I have is to fire off
immediately after I've come out of an interview, but this is,
I know that's not necessarily beneficial to anybody, because
you do need time to gather your thoughts and admit whether
or not you've handled it well and what you could have done
better.

Hazel: (*Smiling*) Admit is a very strong word.

Jane: (*Laughs*) Well you know we like to think we're doing it
well don't we? And that we're not making mistakes I
suppose. So you must be a, you know, you must have an
ethos where you're allowed to make mistakes (Personal
Adviser 'Jane', 1:15/16).

'Jane's' comment links to what Dryden *et al* (1995:128) see as how
support and supervision can be thought of as 'shame–based' if the
practice is only perceived as a way of solving problems. Within the
study all participants felt there was a need for training to clarify
expectations, purpose and process.

*The need for training*
Holloway and Carroll (1999:4) argue for training for supervisors. Hughes
and Morgan (2001) observed in a study of a pilot Connexions service,
that whilst supervision was in principle separate from management
related to monitoring performance, most line managers were not trained
in professional supervision techniques. Wheeler and King note,

It is now widely recognised that supervision of counsellors
can benefit from training (2000:280).

However we need to question the assumption that formality in the
supervision process is always beneficial, and question whether training
for supervisors provides a valuable safeguard or a professional

constraint. If a supervisor can only supervise a practitioner working in the same professional area, employing the same theoretical approach, then this would limit the number of experienced staff able to supervise the range of professionals involved in Connexions' work. Such professional boundaries would be contrary to the partnership approach of Connexions (SEU, 1999).

That said, participants in the study viewed training for the role of supervisor as essential. Training, or other preparation, was also thought to be important for supervisees. The supervision course tutor said,

> I certainly have talked to the groups about preparing your colleagues for supervision, that is, don't expect people to come to the process cold (Tutor 'Matthew', 1:10).

This points to the importance of not assuming that those engaged in supervision will automatically understand what is involved.

Training that also includes an exploration of purpose, could help to reduce the anxiety about 'formal' models of support and supervision. The words 'formal', or 'clinical' were viewed with some suspicion in the study, as they appeared to be a challenge to practitioner' autonomy:

> I don't know about 'formal', but more regular I think...I think the 'formal' word means perhaps, when it's **informal** you feel more happier to discuss your issues (Personal Adviser 'Mark', 1:12/13).

Here, 'Anne' reflects on 'formal' supervision delivered by a line manager:

> There could be a real danger that you get a line manager [as supervisor] who tries to fix you. If my line manager turned around and told me what to do, I would go (*makes explosive noise*), I **know I would!** (Personal Adviser 'Anne', 2:39).

Whilst recognising the need for training, practitioners also talked about the supervisor having the 'right personality and skills', to facilitate a space for collegiate dialogue rather than a teaching approach to supervision. This is supported by Weaks (2002) and Wright (2004) where both conclude that it is the quality of the supervisory relationship that appears key. In considering the level of experience of a supervisor, Wright concludes, 'better a good non-specialist than a less-skilled specialist' (2004:41).

*The importance of a structured process*
A function of structured support and supervision can also be to provide a space where stressful work situations, which are potentially de-motivating, can be discussed. A topic considered, and abridged in this review, was motivation theory. The implication for research into personal adviser work is to not make assumptions about 'motivators' for the work, or assumptions about what a personal adviser needs in terms of avoiding stress and 'burn out'.

To avoid making assumptions, interviewees were asked about their views on the need for a specific contract for supervision, which is regularly reviewed to clarify the purpose of support and supervision (Scaife, 2001, Bradley and Ladany, 2001). It became clear that a structured process was viewed as important across the groups, although some regarded **support** and **supervision** as separate activities. For example, 'Lesley' stated,

> …they are slightly different. I see supervision, erm, as somebody who ensures that what I'm doing is OK, and the quantity I'm doing is OK, and the method I'm doing is OK. Support I see differently. I see that as somebody… who is available to say [to] 'Look, I've just done some work with a client but I'm not happy… how can I stop feeling inadequate, what can I do to make myself feel as though I've done all I can? (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 1:27/28).

Although the complexities of power relationships will be examined in chapter eight, the majority of personal advisers interviewed did feel they had a real involvement in some aspects of the development of the role at the local level. In comparison, feedback from the personal advisers in a study by Oliver suggested that their involvement in the development of the personal adviser role was experienced as superficial (2002:34) as they felt 'powerless' (2002:37). That said, the Learning Gateway advisers in my study had been in a personal adviser role, in some cases since 1999, without what they viewed as adequate support and supervision. This inadequacy is often linked to a lack of understanding by the organisation on the purpose of support and supervision. In discussing this one personal adviser said,

> You know I don't think it should be something that you get
> because there's a crisis... it's something that should be part
> of what we do on a regular basis, and not something you
> slot in because you're about to burn out! (Personal Adviser
> 'Norma', 1:5).

*The potential for professional development and lifelong learning*
Beyond initial training, McMahon and Patton (2000) state that supervision should continue throughout practice. Writing about school counsellors in Australia, they claim that without on-going supervision the skill level of practitioners was seen to decrease. They suggest that self-monitoring counsellors can be unaware of 'blind spots' in their work (2000:340). They view supervision as valuable for both support needs and learning needs, as a route to lifelong learning.

Prieto and Betsworth (1999:180) suggest that very experienced counsellors within their study placed great value on supervision. Although achieving a higher degree of autonomy than less experienced counsellors, they were less defensive in supervision and had greater self-awareness of their strengths and limitations.

Support and supervision, in the context of lifelong learning, could be viewed as part of a process of continuous professional development for the personal adviser role. Attempts to define lifelong learning are hampered by its contested nature (Tight, 1998), but a general view is that it refers to learning throughout life for personal development. In practice a narrow definition is often used that links the concept to vocationalism or learning for work and employability.

The individual motivation implicit in linking supervision to lifelong learning leads to a view that the individual must take responsibility for their own supervision needs (Collins, 2003:25). However, this view needs to be contested if a) it overlooks the time pressures that practitioners face when trying to fit support and supervision into busy practice, and b) it is not clear who 'pays' for this. It is also important not to assume that support and supervision will be seen as lifelong learning, and to recognise the resistance that some personal advisers may feel towards formal models of support and supervision.

In an attempt to assuage this resistance, one careers company in the south east of England calls support and supervision 'reflective practice'. The term, derived from the work of Schon (1983), is used widely in the training of guidance practitioners and in ongoing professional training, but is rarely looked at critically. Munby and Russell claim that Schon's work is not sufficiently analytical and state,

> The reflection that Schon is calling attention to is *in the action*, not in associated thinking about action (1989:73).

Eraut, who is also critical of Schon's work, questions the position of the reflective expert as enshrined by professional codes and the status they give (1994:155). Rather than be seen as infallible, routinized behaviour can lead to out-of-date experts who lose critical control over the more intuitive parts of their day-to-day practice. This reminds us that the space to engage in, what Eraut prefers to call, 'metacognitive' or

deliberative thought processes on our work, is not just for new practitioners or for 'old' practitioners in new roles, but should be continuous for all practitioners.

Continuous professional development in guidance involves enhancing one's understanding of theoretical models, processes and skills, developing ethical watchfulness in relation to work with clients, and reflecting on the emotional impact of work in 'difficult' circumstances. Within counselling, support and supervision is seen to have these *formative, normative* and also *restorative* qualities (Inskipp and Proctor, 1993). However, how personal advisers achieve ethical watchfulness (Reid, 2004) is an area of some confusion in the data. This leads to a discussion around professional boundaries and ethical decision-making.

## Managing stress and avoiding 'burn out'
*Navigating unclear boundaries in a non-traditional role*
At the current time when boundaries and roles remain unclear, there is a concern that personal advisers may be offering counselling without the ethics (Reid and Nix, 2001:41). Support and supervision can be a site for discussion of ethical behaviour, and the study explored whether this is considered as part of its purpose.

The personal adviser in the initial study viewed ethical behaviour as reliant on 'common sense' rather than a code of practice; this was mirrored in the full study. Although the concept is difficult to define, there was little evidence to suggest that sharing and dissemination of common sense had taken place. However even within professions that have established practices of supervision, built around ethical codes, there is evidence that common sense is perceived as central to ethical decision-making. Hayman and Covert (1986) found that in a study to assess how counsellors resolved ethical dilemmas, 93 per cent of those surveyed relied on common sense. Also the study noted that fewer than one-third used the professional guidelines in published codes of practice. Bradley *et al*, commenting on the findings state,

Such a decision-making process works well only if the
so-called 'common sense' is consistent with established
professional and societal standards of conduct (2002:356).

Definitions of ethical behaviour, levels of impartiality, client-centredness,
confidentiality and the measurement of outcomes of (personal) adviser
interventions, are central areas of concern for guidance practitioners
(Crawford et al, 1998:intro). The Connexions Service National Unit's
draft code, which is concerned with ethical behaviour, stated,

It is intended to ensure that practice develops within criteria
and standards that have been widely agreed across the
professions contributing to Connexions (CSNU, 2002:preface).

The complexities of reaching agreement across a range of professions
within Connexions, have been highlighted by Mulvey (2002). Defining
the purpose of support and supervision as a new practice within career
guidance and personal adviser work will be difficult. There are already
difficulties when trying to define the differences between advice,
guidance and counselling. McLeod (1993:3) discusses the fragmented
nature of practice informed by a diverse range of theoretical concepts.
He questions the assumptions that professional codes of ethics do
guarantee quality, and contrasts the preoccupation with professional
status with research that suggests para-professional helping is as
effective. This highlights the importance of placing myself in the
research and examining my own assumptions about the importance of
professional qualifications (my professional and academic discourse).

Bond and Shea (1997:520-532) identify the problems that exist when
working across professional boundaries in multi-agency work, and
suggest that ethical codes cannot cope with this type of unstructured or
unbounded work. This view challenges the stated benefits of a
partnership approach and the work of the personal adviser as outlined
in the Connexions document (DfEE, 2000:32).

Managers are likely to want to define ethical practice in order to provide structure and ensure standards (Reid and Nix, 2001). West notes the desire for services to have clear answers to ethical issues and to write these up into codes of practice (2002:261). He suggests that ethical practice cannot be reduced to such codes and, citing Bond (2000), says practitioners should develop an attitude of 'ethical mindfulness' (2002:266). This indicates that responsible and reflective practice cannot be encapsulated merely by a set of rules about behaviour. West does not view the achievement of an absolute ethical position as something that is possible. Beyond the maxim of 'above all do no harm' he sees the consideration of ethical issues as 'a matter to be regularly addressed in supervision' (2002:267).

Returning to the research questions, support and supervision could help personal advisers work towards ethical practice when navigating the unclear boundaries of their role. The Institute of Career Guidance briefings (2002, 2003) suggest that Connexions partnerships in England are not yet clear about the purpose of support and supervision. For example, to serve support and supervision needs, one service has 'provided a confidential counselling service for personal advisers' (2002:12). But, counselling is therapy with a focus on 'learning for life', whereas the focus for supervision is 'learning for work' (Scaife, 2001:11). Three personal advisers in the study have used a counselling service 'in desperation', but they felt it was offered as a last resort when they had reached the point where they could no longer cope with the work. As such this is indicative of a deficit view of the purpose of support and supervision closely linked with ideas about competence, rather than a process linked to continuous professional development or lifelong learning.

It should not be assumed that support and supervision can deal with all of the issues faced by personal advisers in their work. Then again, when considering the need for ethical behaviour in a 'new' profession, support and supervision seems prudent. Related to the view that acknowledging

the boundaries of expertise is a key aspect of ethical practice, Bronson (2001:238) states that a sound rationale is needed for the goals and tasks of counselling in careers guidance.

Her comments are of particular relevance for careers staff moving to the role of personal adviser, or placed in the dual role of careers adviser and personal adviser:

> (Also,) given that some counselors are trained primarily to address career issues with clients and do not posses the expertise to address mental health concerns in counseling, these limitations need to be clearly addressed in supervision. If and when a counselor does not posses the ability to counsel both career and mental health issues, appropriate referrals need to be available and supervision needs to attend to issues of how and when to refer. It is clearly unethical to practice outside of one's expertise (Bronson, 2001:241).

When practitioners are placed in the position where they are working at the limits of their professional expertise, many will question their own competence. However, experienced advisers in the study usually question if they are doing enough rather than too much. Without an adequate support structure that helps to clarify boundaries, this anxiety can lead to work-role stress.

> I've seen colleagues 'burn out', for lack of a better description. And who's to say what that was all about? I mean to some extent I think it was about lack of clarity about what we could do (Personal Adviser 'Norma', 1:17).

Another personal adviser talked about a time when supervision could have helped her in a difficult situation working with 'an extremely disturbed young man':

(I'd been) walking the floor during the night and got up and
done the usual things and written it down in the hope that it
would go away and the following day I did actually ring [a
counselling service]. But had I had somebody as a supervisor...
to go and talk to, that would have prevented that, or I feel that
should have prevented that...

[The counselling service help line] were extremely good with
me and very supportive, and the outcome of that actually was
just they were horrified that there wasn't anybody in place to
offer supervision... (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 2:24-26).

*Coping with the emotional impact of the work*
In considering aspects of role conflict, and to locate perspectives on this
from professionals other than careers guidance practitioners, literature
was sought from the fields of social and youth work. For example,
Jordan (2001) views the Labour government's inclusion agenda as
relegating public-sector social work to a limited role where assessing
and managing risk is viewed as the prime task. He views the treatment
of public services as being indicative of the government's view that
agencies are part of the problem 'rather than part of the solution'
(2001:528). He is critical of the position that employment is seen as the
cure for social exclusion and points to the paradoxical thinking behind
Labour policies,

(This combination) constructs citizens as active,
morally-autonomous individuals, with higher expectations
of state services, but who in turn should be expected to be
self-responsible and hardworking (2001:528).

Many agency workers involved in Connexions are experiencing identity
crisis and role confusion. This can lead to feelings of exploitation and
isolation when working in a new service where a collective professional
identity is not yet apparent (Jordan, 2001:533). Similarly, the language

of participation and involvement is complex but is used as if meaning is shared (Oliver, 2002:30).

The people who choose the role of personal adviser working with the 'harder-to-help' are typically those who care deeply about vulnerable young people. They are anxious to make a difference. Morrissette (2002:130) notes that in the mental health professions, until recently, little research attention has been paid to the emotional welfare of such helpers. The concept of 'burn out' however, has been reviewed extensively in the literature. Burn out has been defined as a 'state of extreme dissatisfaction with one's work' (Morrissette, 2002:135). Morrissette goes on to describe the key characteristics of burn out as: excessive distancing from clients; impaired competence; low energy; increased irritability; depression and physical, emotional and mental exhaustion (*ibid*).

Burn out is a concept discussed by the personal advisers in the study who have moved to a personal adviser role. When considering the impact of that move, role transition theory was a key area for exploration. Arnold (1997:148-163) gives a detailed analysis of theoretical models that explore work role transitions (Hopson, 1984, Nicholson, 1990). Work role transitions, specifically, are defined as an event that causes a change in the assumptions about self and work role that necessitate a change in work behaviour and relationships.

Within the field of social work, Ainley *et al* (2002:376) write of the 'uncertain social policy environment' within which social services were delivered within a Connexions pilot in a London borough. A key finding of their work was how a further education college and the personal advisers working with young people at the college, viewed advocacy differently. The college had a concern about retention on courses that Connexions was seen as potentially affecting. This in turn would affect funding for the college. For example, if students were removed from

classes to focus on their wider personal issues this impacted on numbers and target funding.

Unless the personal adviser's intervention could demonstrate that it aided retention or achievement, the college might withdraw from participation in Connexions (Ainley *et al*, 2002:380). Within my study the newly appointed Intensive Support Manager currently spends most of her time 'fire fighting' for inexperienced Connexions' intensive personal advisers, who are finding building support networks within schools stressful.

In the Institute of Career Guidance briefing (ICG, 2002:11) it was noted that Ofsted (2002), as the inspection body for Connexions services, had pointed to inconsistencies or lack of management and support arrangements for personal advisers. More recent reports (Ofsted, 2003) suggest this is an improving situation in those Connexions partnerships inspected in the latter part of 2003, However one report notes that,

> the supervision procedures are implemented
> inconsistently by operational managers, some of who have
> not completed the necessary level of training for the task
> (Ofsted, 2003:19).

**Time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change**
*Meeting the contractual requirements*
Effective use of time within a bigger picture of constant change is a key theme. The 'bigger picture' can be related to a context of global change in the nature and understanding of the concept of career, and how policy then affects practice (Collin and Young, 2000). This includes how different groups interpret policy, i.e., the contested meanings given to practice that affect implementation (Dryden and Watts, 1993; Roberts, 2000; Savickas and Walsh, 1996; Watts *et al*, 1996a). Jayasinghe (2001:52) questions the lack of counselling theory in careers guidance. The criticism is particularly pertinent at a time when much personal

adviser practice may cross the boundaries of existing expertise, and enter the counselling field (Westergaard, 2003).

Westergaard suggests there are important links between counselling and personal adviser work. In the USA Manuele-Adkins (1992) goes further and proposes that career counsellors are too focused on vocational guidance. Written for the US context where career counselling is a separate activity from career information and career placement, this is relevant to the transition that many career guidance practitioners are facing currently in England. For example, where practitioners have moved to the role of personal adviser working with the 'harder-to-help' group, confronting psychological problems is often the first task before any other outcomes can be considered.

Manuele-Adkins' remarks are interesting in the light of criticism from Ofsted (2002), that careers advisers working as personal advisers, do not pay enough attention to the client's wider social needs. Manuele-Adkins cites research from Niles and Pate (1989) that suggests career counsellors are inclined to be 'too myopic in their focus' (1992:314), and do not address the links between personal context and career decision-making. She states that for career counselling to be effective the process needs to be grounded in a holistic view of the client's social and psychological needs (1992:315). However what is implied here is a long-term client/helper relationship, which may be difficult to achieve in England with the contractual focus on 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training) outcomes.

The model for school counsellors in Finland described by Lairo and Nissila (2002) does appear to avoid such a myopic focus. The role of these school counsellors is not unlike that of personal advisers in the UK. Lairo and Nissila note,

> In order to respond to the current counselling needs of young people, school counsellors have extended their counselling

practices from traditional study and career counselling more
into the area of supporting growth and development (2002:164).

However all such developments, including the introduction of support
and supervision, have to be encompassed within the constraints of
meeting service contracts:

> I think we're always caught in that tension between what we
> need to be doing and need to be seen we're doing and what
> the time allowance is (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:16).

*Fitting support and supervision into busy practice*
Time constraints and the effective use of time, was a recurrent concern
for participants in the study. It appeared to limit the opportunities for
personal advisers to meet and share practice. In the setting up of the
New Deal initiative time was available for personal advisers to 'take time
out' to discuss their role, their interventions with clients and their own
learning needs. 'We were on a steep learning curve' was a phrase
repeated by many personal advisers. It seems as they became more
experienced that 'space' in meetings became filled with the 'rubble' of
other operational matters.

When pressed to provide information for managers, or to complete other
'paper based' tasks, support and supervision gets 'put on the back
burner', even when time has been allowed for a group meeting to take
place. For example 'Mark' talked about how if time for support and
supervision were not imposed, personal advisers would use the time for
catching up on other tasks, such as 'putting things on the computer,
telephone calls' (Personal Adviser 'Mark', 2:19).

Organisations do employ the rhetoric of the reflective practitioner and
best practice, and they also acknowledge that extra time is required for
this to be achieved in practice. One chief executive of a Connexions
partnership commenting on support and supervision said,

There is a cost implication because you need to build time in for the people who are seeking support as well as those who are providing it. However, the greater danger is that people do not have the time to review their work. And to give people that time you need to take some time out of the working day and therefore need, perhaps more personal advisers than you would otherwise (ICG, 2003:11).

In a study of occupational stress and social work, Storey and Billingham noted the need to increase the range of support strategies for practitioners. However they state,

such strategies cost money, and without proof that they actually help reduce and prevent stress and are actually cost effective, organisations do not appear to implement them (2001:668).

Time is a costly resource in the helping professions and central to Eraut's criticism of Schon's (1983) work. Eraut suggests (1994:145) that Schon fails to give sufficient attention to the variable of time when considering the reflective process. When time is a scarce resource the scope for reflection is limited and action proceeds on the basis of rapid interpretation rather than critical reflection. In a criticism of Schon and Eraut, Ixer (1999:513) goes further and states that in the context of 'busy practice' in the helping professions 'there is no such thing as reflection'.

Then again, time constraints may not be a suitable reason for ignoring or paying insufficient attention to the support needs of workers in any of the helping professions. Sending practitioners on 'time management' or 'coping with stress' courses will not address the organisational responsibility to ensure health and safety at work. Such approaches make work-based stress an individual pathology rather than a collective responsibility. One of the key messages on stress from The Health and

Safety Executive is that the law requires organisations to take action (HSE, 2004:1).

Storey and Billingham (2001:659) note that the belief that stress is an individual problem has been challenged by the case of a social worker who made legal history when his employer, a county council, was judged to be responsible for his two nervous breakdowns. Turner also points to evidence that suggests that in extreme cases in social work 'inadequate supervision has resulted in serious consequences for vulnerable children' (2000:231). Clearly there are potentially grave consequences here for the Connexions service to consider.

As a term, 'busy practice' does not adequately express the effects of work-overload, initiative weariness and compassion fatigue. Stress is not always experienced as a negative force, but time - 'a space' – is required in busy practice to ensure that the high demands of stressful work are matched by adequate support and supervision (Storey and Billingham, 2001:661).

**A cautionary note on the need for support and supervision**
When discussing the role of the personal adviser in the research interviews, it was important not to assume that there **was** a perceived need for support and supervision. I ensured this was addressed by asking a direct question of participants. As indicated earlier, all the participants agreed there was a need, although agreement was not found on the form that it should take or what it should be called.

The participants in the study viewed support and supervision as essential for intensive personal adviser work, but of course their initial interest led them to volunteer to take part in the study. Others not interviewed may not view support and supervision as both necessary and beneficial: indeed in the area of counselling Feltham offers such an alternative view (2002a). He suggests that supervision is not universally understood, accepted or viewed as a 'good thing' by all therapists.

Whilst arguing that supervision is a necessary activity for trainees, he claims there is no evidence in the UK to support the view that supervised experienced practitioners perform better than unsupervised experienced practitioners (2002a:26). This is contrary to the view expressed earlier by McMahon and Patton (2000) whose study suggested that skills decline without supervision.

Feltham suggests that assuming supervised practice overcomes complacency, arrogance and potentially dangerous behaviour, ignores the possibility of unwitting collusion where supervisees (and supervisors) play the game within a professional, time-costly bureaucracy (2002a:27). He refers to anecdotal evidence of supervisees,

> feeling cowed, deskilled and wary in relation to supervision, however skilled and ethically competent the supervisor (2002a:27).

Feltham regards supervision as an institution that can lead to 'infantilisation' and states,

> We might have learned from Foucault and others the dangers of a surveillance culture (2002a:27).

This reminded me of the need to examine the assumptions inherent in my own thinking about the 'virtue' of support and supervision. And, to question how supervision could itself be viewed as an aspect of Foucault's notion of power and the products of power as exercised through practices of self-regulation, self-improvement and self-development (Edwards, 1997:8,9).

So far I have discussed the purpose of support and supervision and its relationship to professional development and lifelong learning; work role stress, transition and motivation; the contested meanings given to

guidance practice and the ethical boundaries of the role in a context of constant change. Linked to ideas opened up in the previous paragraph, the review will now move on and consider discourse as a theoretical framework.

## Part 2. Literature on Discourse Theory

Viewing lifelong learning as a contested concept, Edwards (1997:12) highlights the reasons for the current 'gaze' of policy makers on the area of guidance. 'Gaze' suggests a current interest where the eyes of policy makers get fixed upon, in this case, guidance as a mechanism for delivering aspects of wider government policy. Careers education and guidance, once viewed as 'the Cinderella service' within education, was later viewed by policy makers (Howells, 1998) as pivotal in the drive to increase access to opportunities to engage in lifelong learning (Guidance Council, 2000:3/2). Connexions, guidance and personal advisers form a significant part of the delivery of the current government's inclusion policy. Roberts states,

> A wide raft of policies – on social security, education, crime, housing, training and employment – have social exclusion as the enemy. Careers guidance, too, is now to be judged by its ability to deliver inclusion (2002:1).

Edwards, looking at these shifting discourses, or meanings, within guidance (1998a) and lifelong learning (1997), suggests that the meanings given to both are complex, contested, and linked to the exercise of power through knowledge.

For example, Edwards (1997:9) cites Metcalfe (1991) who suggests that whilst the aim of careers guidance may be to help individuals research a range of options, those options are constrained by what is viewed as acceptable. Put another way the aim is to help clients make 'realistic' decisions. The suggestion is that realistic is decided elsewhere by

those who speak from more powerful discourse positions. This 'governmentality' works through educating people to govern themselves rather than through coercion (Ball, 1990).

> Governmentality works through bringing people's self-regulating capacities into line with the gaze (and regulation) of 'government', a process where the gaze is interiorised... Power is exercised through seduction rather than repression (Edwards, 1997:9).

Part of the appeal of using the concept of discourse is that it helps us to 'render(s) the familiar strange' (Hoskin, 1990:29). I have found the theory useful, but will restrict my comments here to a review of the relevant literature.

## Discourse as a theoretical framework

*Defining discourse*

Edwards (1997) and Ball (1990), consider how ways of acting upon the world are shaped by the discourses we use to understand the world, which may be different from other groups within and across diverse cultures and societies. Discourse theory proposes that the spoken word arises not purely from the knowledge of a language, but from the impact of experience that gives meaning to an individual's use of the language. It is viewed as above language. Thus language for the individual is not neutral but resonates with meaning interpreted via their position within society. Our perspectives, background, beliefs and language, then, shape the way the world is viewed. In turn, the way we read the world shapes the meaning we bring to the written word. Further, discourse is located in a historical context, in so far as a particular view becomes valid over other possible viewpoints at any one time. This suggests that words and their meanings are not fixed, but will alter according to the particular context and who is speaking.

Discourse structures our comprehension to the point where
action is defined by our concept of what is possible
(Reid, 2002:53).

There is a need to recognise that what is both included and excluded
from our system of meanings - what is meaningful – leads to competing
discourses, based on a different view of what is valid. These different
discourses can stand, therefore, in antagonistic positions. For example,
the word 'opportunity' means very different things to a government
policy maker than it does to a young person who earns a living in the
illegal or informal economy. 'Developing opportunities for learning
outside school' (DfEE, 2000:5) could have a number of different
meanings! Much of this Connexions document is about conforming to
the dominant values and discourse where value-laden statements are
not recognised. For example in the introduction, young people will learn
to 'use their leisure time positively' and 'become caring and active
citizens' (DfEE, 2000:8). This seems to fit into the Moral Underclass
Discourse described by Levitas (1998), where to be a 'good' citizen
does not mean challenging the status quo.

Levitas (1998) also defines discourse as more than language, as a set
or sets of connected ideas that form a framework or 'matrix through
which we understand the social world' (1998:3). Levitas goes on to
discuss the differences in meaning of inclusion and exclusion (1998:7),
which are useful in understanding the political 'social inclusion' agenda
for the Connexions strategy and role of the personal adviser. She views
exclusion as endemic in all modern societies and, in order to clarify the
concept of inclusion, suggests that definitions can be organised around
three concepts. A redistributionist discourse (RED) where inclusion will
only be achieved with a redistribution of material goods, (in simple
terms) those that are excluded have 'no money'. A social integrationist
discourse (SID) where it is not necessary to change the status quo, but
those excluded need to increase their employability skills for work and
be given greater access to education, training and work – the solution

lies in addressing the issue of 'no work'. And the moral underclass discourse (MUD) where the excluded are perceived as a threat to the cohesion of society, with the root cause being lack of the correct values toward work and citizenship – they have 'no morals'.

Her work highlights the need to question the 'taken for granted' assumptions that lie behind a policy of inclusion and the development of the personal adviser role. Hayes (2003:30\31) for example questions the need for a 'therapeutic' Connexions service, which makes 'victims' of 'ordinary' young people. The same critical examination needs to be applied to the 'need' for support and supervision.

Levitas (1998:28) posits that New Labour has moved away from RED to an inconsistent use of MUD and SID. Levitas also states, that the 'virtuous talk' of inclusion, often using moral underclass language, suggests a cohesive society where social justice is reduced to mere access to opportunities. Such pluralist approaches depoliticise the real experiences of the excluded (Kincheloe and Steinberg,1997:6,17). Stating that exclusion is not about poverty allows government to justify action that does not address poverty directly (the move away from RED, Levitas, *ibid*). Whilst insightful, this can be viewed as a 'grand conspiracy', which overlooks the benefits that a 'holistic' Connexions service can bring to some, if not all 'excluded' young people.

Edwards (1997:153) explores the concept of power and discourse whilst looking at reflective practice and the decline in professional autonomy. This is particularly important when considering support and supervision as an arena for identifying strategies for client intervention and the self-development of the practitioner. Support and supervision could be viewed as a key site for the development of effective practice, where lifelong learning can take place. This may lead to what Edwards defines in the statement,

Knowledgeable practice requires more than practical
knowledge (1997:155).

What is suggested here is more than a mechanistic understanding of
what works in practice: it suggests a need for deeper reflection and
development. One of the Connexions key principles is,

Evidence based practice – ensuring that new interventions
are based on rigorous research and evaluation into 'what works'
(DfEE, 2000:33).

The meaning of the statement is not entirely clear. It could indicate a
distrust of 'academic' research that is not seen as directly 'useful',
and/or it could indicate a more important role for research in the
development of Connexions. It could suggest the need for continuous
reflective development and dissemination of good practice, i.e.
'knowledgeable practice'.

When considering how power operates, it is important to recognise that
guidance and counselling cannot be viewed as providing neutral
intervention. Government funds the Connexions services, as it did the
statutory careers education and guidance services. As such they are
both the object of public policy and potentially the instrument of public
policy (Watts, 1996b). Practitioner impartiality, from this viewpoint, could
be an illusion if the personal adviser's role is not 'problematised' in this
way.

Many of the critical accounts of lifelong learning link with the theme of
discourse and contested meanings in practice. For example, Bamber
(1998) writing on fieldwork supervision for youth workers, emphasises
that meaning cannot be assumed because meaning is shaped by
individual experience, 'bounded by organisational settings and socially
constructed conceptions of role' (1998:31). These positions influence
how and what we learn and how we act in a social world. In his view

critical practice involves some risk as we need to open up our practice to others through supervision. This can entail challenging existing knowledge and views, and practitioners may respond to the power of that challenge with resistance (1998:34). Resistance can lead to changes in talk about practice rather than changes in action (1998:38).

Whilst valuing experience, Bamber warns against 'common sense' meanings or 'internal theory' (1998:35), which are not open to rational scrutiny. Moreover, together with values, internal theory may also encompass nothing more than common sense views; 'the culturally determined ways of thinking whose power is a function of their all-pervasiveness' (*ibid*). However this suggests that if you strip away common sense, a rational and consensual 'truth' would be revealed underneath.

Looking at the different discourses within guidance it should be possible to explore how each 'group' constructs meaning around the practice of support and supervision.

*Discourses within guidance*
Edwards (1998a:31) identifies six competing discourses ('schematic and not intended to exclude others') that operate within guidance. These he names as user, practitioner, manager, professional, policy and academic discourse. Edwards describes the differential power of these different 'discursive domains'. The study tests these ideas by examining, practitioner, manager and professional discourse via interviews, and other texts for policy and academic discourses on support and supervision: user discourse is not included in this study.

Edwards recognises that discourses overlap but suggests that the most powerful discourses shape practice. However, this is not achieved without conflict, as the meanings given to practice are likely to be contested between discourses. This reflects Foucault's (1992) view that where there is power there is resistance. The study looked at these

ideas at the micro-level to test the concept of competing discourses when researching the purpose(s) of support and supervision.

Foucault moved beyond structuralist notions that view power-knowledge as only coercive and saw power as also being productive, rather than just negative or repressive. By 'productive' Foucault means that power shapes and constructs the lives of individuals in a way that makes them 'useful' subjects (Besley, 2002a:134).

Foucault called this 'panopticism' – a pervasive gaze through which governmentality results in subtle and overt forms of making subjects, disciplined objects via governmental interest, policy formation and self-regulation. The panoptic prison designed by Jeremy Bentham was not built, but with a central watchtower which could observe inmates at all times, prisoners would be disciplined by this potential 'gaze' whether or not there was someone watching. The concept of the panoptic gaze can be extended to other processes of governmentality,

> there is no need for arms, physical violence and material
> constraints. Just a gaze (Foucault, 1980:155).

This works as power at a distance, not through force but through activities that produce 'disciplined' subjects (Edwards, 1997). From this view education and guidance (e.g. guiding 'NEET' young people into education, training and employment) can be seen as forms of discipline that socialize individuals into the dominant discourses in any society at a given time. As such we can say that guidance, like counselling (Besley, 2002a:134, Fairclough, 1995:81), is not a neutral but a political activity.

The deficit view of the focus group within Connexions encourages practitioners to view individual clients as victims, needing to grow, develop, change, and improve for a better future. This can cloud the real causes of their current situation, which if caused by poverty or health

issues for example, may be outside of the individual's control. At the same time it justifies the need for that professional help. From this viewpoint personal advisers will need to be aware that they are working to some extent as agents of social control (Stacey and Mignot, 2000). Support and supervision may provide a 'space' for practitioners and their supervisors to consider these issues related to power. Besley clarifies how power operates from the Foucauldian viewpoint,

> Power is not regarded as being solely possessed or exercised by individuals, but is part of what people negotiate in their everyday lives and social relationships where power is about 'positioning' in relation to discourse. Subject positioning involves power relations in that it operates discursively determining whether a person can speak, what is sayable and by whom and whether and whose accounts are listened to (2002a:138).

Consequently we also need to listen to the silences, to pay attention to what is not said – a recurring Foucauldian theme. Williams and Irving (2002) also emphasise the importance of counsellors' awareness of the differences placed on the meanings of decisions made by different clients and different counsellors; this links to the conflicting discourses that different groups have to negotiate in their search for meaning. Shotter (1993) describes this as experiencing different universes of discourse which give rise to different 'conversational realities'; in other words what we say is determined by who we are and the context. Williams and Irving clarify this further by saying (2002:208) that in the search for meaning we must recognise that we are looking for **a** meaning not **the** meaning. If meanings are dependent on context and are contested then it follows,

> that those who apparently share the same language can have completely different understandings of what they perceive (2002:209).

However, there must be some shared meaning within a culture or we would not be able to operate on a day-to-day basis. But, what discourse theory highlights is that meaning and values are not absolute, but are context-bound and can change within and across discourses.

Returning to the study, it seemed likely that research into the meanings ascribed to support and supervision would reveal tensions between the different discourses of practitioners, managers and the professional community, and possibly, conflict, competition and confusion within individual discourses.

*Critiquing discourse theory*

Jaworski and Coupland (1999:preface) state that establishing boundaries around an academic topic such as discourse is always difficult. Texts on discourse are sited in philosophy, psychology, sociology and socio-linguistics. There are of course critiques of discourse theory and Foucault's work. Hoskin (1990:29) questions the key theme of power-knowledge central to Foucault's work. The main difficulty is the notion that there is nothing we can experience which is not constructed through the power of discourse (Merttens, 1998:59). This appears to dismiss the influence of individual agency which then,

> plunges us into an uncontrolled – and arbitrary - relativism for which the aspiration to truth ceases to be a regulative idea (Soper, 1990:13).

Gergen (1998:153) suggests that we should avoid being drawn into a binary position that views discourse as either the reflection of some kind of collective consciousness, or the reflection of individual essence. According to Gergen, meaning is located in both sides of the binary structure as we adopt different discourses on various occasions – change our position - 'as conversational exigencies prevail' (1998:153). This fits with the view that discourses are neither fixed nor watertight (Merttens, 1998:63).

There is a need to open up what Strauss and Corbin (1998:292) refer to as the 'black boxes', the ambiguous concepts in any theoretical framework. Theories and other concepts need to 'earn their way' into the study and not be made to fit the data. For example, whilst convinced of the need to focus on social context there is for me some unease about the macro view that nothing exists outside of our position in relation to our, often, competing discourses. Discourse theory would suggest that the power of the dominant discourse is, of course, subtle not overt (Edwards, 1997). So, whilst recognising the importance of discourse it is however essential that the influence of individual agency is not lost (West, 1996:210-11). Gergen suggests,

> With increased focus on that which is shared, the lethal edges
> of opposition might be blunted and new forms of relationship
> invited (1998:155).

There were many shared views across the groups in the study. However, the concept of shared goals is highly contested and returns us to the question about who decides which goals are legitimate in a multicultural society (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997:1-26). Indeed, Fairclough's work on critical discourse analysis (1995) shows how the dominant ideology about shared goals, becomes a 'common sense' understanding through the power of discourse (an example in the context of the study would be that education leads to employment which in turn leads to inclusion). 'Common sense', from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, is not synonymous with 'truth'.

For Fairclough the goal of critical discourse analysis is to 'de-naturualize' common sense understandings (1995:36), in other words to question any assumed 'truth'. Here the meaning of critical is to make visible what is hidden in discourses, i.e. the social, political and cultural interactions that occur. The concept of discourse has allowed me to question and 'problematise' the taken-for-granted belief that support and supervision is both a necessary, and 'natural' consequence of the move

from a career guidance role to a personal adviser role. This 'reality' may be produced through the indirect exercise of power and discipline where advisers comply with a need to conform to expectations. This could link with support and supervision being a disciplinary force – a kind of 'panoptic' technique of control. It may prove to be an example of what Olsen (2003:201) describes as, 'a new regime of adapting each individual to the whole'.

Foucault was interested in the sets of relationships that lead to change in society. He argued that individual elements of social change should not be studied in isolation from the examination of wider changes taking place in the overall texture of social life (Foucault, 1994a). In locating the individual within a larger context, Stacey and Mignot refer to how career guidance 'inhabits and is inhabited by' (2000:26) multiple discourses which reflect historical, political, economic and social contexts.

**Summary**

This chapter has summarised the literature studied before and during the on-going data collection and analysis, and related this to the findings of the study. The first part of the chapter organised the literature around the themes that arose from the detailed analysis that took place after data collection. The second part reviewed the literature around the concept of discourse and its relationship to the policy context of inclusion and guidance practice.

Chapter eight will extend the definition and critique of discourse theory. I will discuss how discourse positions may constrain or facilitate particular viewpoints. Before moving to that evaluation, the dissertation will discuss methodology and the methods used for data collection and analysis.

# Chapter 3. Methodology, methods and data collection

## Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodology and methods used in collecting data for the study. It will do this by first discussing the methodological approach. It will then describe the method used, report on the research procedures for data collection and consider ethical issues. I will extend the discussion on my own subjectivity and its effects on knowledge creation, in the following chapter.

## Methodology

Research is concerned with understanding the world, and how we understand the world is informed by our view of the world. These views vary and influence the approach taken to research. The practice of research in educational settings can be viewed as falling into one of three approaches: 1) based on scientific and positivistic methodologies; 2) arising from naturalistic and interpretive methodologies, or 3) methodologies from critical theory (Cohen *et al*, 2000:3). The terminology used here is not transparent and I will attempt definitions later in the chapter. This study is sited initially in the second approach, although it seeks to apply discourse theory (discussed in the previous chapter), which moves it towards the third approach. In this first section of the chapter I will consider the ontological and epistemological assumptions that have led me to work from this particular methodological approach.

Ontology is the way we understand ourselves as 'being' in the world: the assumptions we take to our understanding of the phenomena that we observe. A **relativists'** view would see reality as 'relative' to our existing, internal comprehension of how the world operates. This view sees reality as rooted in culture and upbringing, or socialisation. **Realists** however, view social reality as external to the individual as objects in the real world exist independently to the interpretation made of them (Cohen *et al*, 2003:5). The position taken on ontology influences

the epistemological view of the researcher. Epistemology concerns how we come to know something or how knowledge is generated. Is knowledge something that is 'out there' capable of discovery and transmission to others, or is it something that is personal, 'softer, more subjective' and based on experience and creativity (Cohen *et al*, 2003:5)? How the researcher positions themselves in relation to these debates will influence the actions taken to produce knowledge through their research.

What follows will place the research within my understanding of the social world. This viewpoint has influenced the interest in the topic, the questions raised and the method and techniques adopted.

*Understanding social reality*
In the context of the study, one of the Connexions' seven principles is: 'evidence based research into what works' (DfEE, 2000). The following statement from the then Secretary of State for Education may illuminate this further,

> We're not interested in worthless correlations based on small
> samples from which it is impossible to draw generalizable
> conclusions. We welcome large scale, quantitative information
> on effect sizes which will allow us to generalize, with in-depth case
> studies into how processes work (Blunket, 2001:conference
> address).

The good news is that there is a place here for 'in-depth case studies' despite the opening language, which suggest they are worthless if seeking to make any kind of generalisation. Case studies here play a subservient role to an epistemology based on a positivistic view of how knowledge is generated. The methodology preferred in investigating the problem of understanding social behaviour, it is implied, needs to be addressed by 'large scale' quantitative methods, which produce

verifiable and 'tested' data. Tested however does not mean the same as true, as the understanding arrived at remains partial.

Positivism in the human sciences is based on the view that a scientific approach provides us with the greatest possibility of reaching the truth in the pursuit of knowledge (Cohen *et al*, 2000:8). This however can ignore the immense complexity of human interaction when compared with the relative (but not absolute) order of the natural world.

The search for truth has of course engaged thinkers in the philosophical tradition for centuries. Researchers working from naturalistic and interpretive methodologies do not believe that the truth is 'out there' waiting to be discovered. In opposition to the positivists' concern with discovering reality, those working from an interpretive background look for ideal knowledge not real knowledge. In other words they do not deny the world exists, but state that different people will construe the world in different ways according to their social viewpoint thereby producing **versions** of reality. 'Deirdre', a line manager in the study, illustrates this when she acknowledges that line managers and practitioners have different views about the adequacy of current support structures for personal advisers:

> It's as if we're seeing it one way and they're seeing it in a different way (Line Manager 'Deirdre', 1:56).

> ...there is this mismatch. It's that bit that concerns me more than anything else, that you have two kind of quite different points of view (Line Manager 'Deirdre', 2:12).

The role of research in the social sciences from the interpretive view is to understand how different people view the world in which they live, and what influences that view. Denzin states that the qualitative researcher,

can no longer presume to be able to present an objective, uncontested account of the other's experience (1997:xiii).

In terms of ontology, the interpretive approach would acknowledge that individuals always have prior knowledge about what life is about (Scott, 2000:54), whereas the positivist approach views the researcher as able to set these meaning to one side in the search for objective truth. The interpretivist believes that in order to understand social phenomena the importance of personal meaning is the prime concern.

The critical approach would regard both of these paradigms as ignoring the influence of the political and ideological context for educational research. A critical approach has a political agenda based on the intention to realize a society that is based on the principles of democracy and social justice (Cohen *et al*, 2000:28). The impetus for research is to produce social change, not merely to describe, understand and anticipate social behaviour and action. Issues related to power and ideology are paramount in this approach, which will question the neutrality that many researchers may claim for their practice.

For example Habermas (1972) suggests knowledge, which is one product of research, serves different interests. This can be seen perhaps in the Blunket statement that values a particular type of knowledge over another. In this way knowledge is socially constructed in that those in power can determine what constitutes 'proper' knowledge. Such knowledge, it would be argued, seeks to reinforce the *status quo* rather than to challenge it. Researchers working from a critical approach are likely to have emancipatory interests and make no claims to be value–free. An aim of my study is to ensure the voice of practitioners is heard amongst other more powerful views on the purpose of support and supervision.

An exploration of truth, competing values and power leads on to a discussion of postmodern and poststructuralist approaches in

educational research. Scott (2000:55) tells us that 'postmodernists seek to subvert all *foundational* knowledge' (my emphasis) and therefore the approach cannot be truly regarded as an epistemology. The postmodernist approach examines power-knowledge relationships and aims to give voice to those whose voices are often unheard or silenced (Lather, 1991).

Although defining 'post-modernism' is difficult, a starting point is needed before disappearing into a relativist black hole! The prefix of *post* means *after*, so we can take a literal definition of post-modern to mean after a late 19th and 20th century 'modern' preoccupation with secular and rational knowledge. This could be described as the move from a 20th century focus on facts to a 21st century focus on meanings (Savickas, 1997:149). 'Post-structuralist' suggests a move beyond the grand narratives of social theory, which were based around Marxist ideas about class structure determining (rather than influencing) social behaviour. Feminists and anti-racist researchers who point to power imbalances other than those of class position, have challenged the latter.

In terms of the study, sharing understanding of meanings given to the activity of support and supervision was the key aim of the enquiry. Implicit within that is the possibility that those meanings are not shared and that policy makers will have greater power than others to determine the purpose of support and supervision. Policy texts position the reader in presenting the world in a certain way, i.e. within a particular discourse of common sense.

In this study I stand within the interpretive approach to understanding human behaviour with its emphasis on exploring meaning in a social world. The postmodern and poststructuralist approaches, which I read as being informed by the critical approach, appeal because I can see the links to discourse theory, which helps to place meanings in their historical, social, political and economic contexts.

Stronach and MacLure (1997:6) speak of how the postmodern approach can be seen as having the potential to 'open up' discourses around 'regimes of truth'. In terms of the study this can open up practice that may be closed to the possibility of a range of meanings in the activity of support and supervision. This can help to question assumptions, ask new questions, hear a range of voices and give voice to those who may be silenced in the process.

## Methods

Having discussed methodology, this chapter will move on to discuss the research method. An interpretive approach may use a range of methods such as participant observation, narrative or life history methods for data collection. As the study sought to understand the meanings associated with a particular and new practice in guidance, the method that seemed most suitable was that of case study.

> Case study is study of a singularity conducted in depth in
> natural settings (Bassey, 1999:47).

In looking at a particular case it is hoped that any findings will illustrate principles that **may** be more general. The language here is necessarily tentative as the claims made for findings need to state their limitations. However, Bassey (1999:25/26) discusses such tentative language when addressing the issue of generalisations from case study research, and notes that not all writers see generalisation as a necessary outcome. He quotes Stenhouse (1988:49),

> Generalisation and application are matters of judgement rather
> than calculation, and the task of case study is to produce
> ordered reports of experience which invite judgement and offer
> evidence to which judgement can appeal.

The case study approach may include both quantitative and qualitative approaches but the distinguishing feature of case study, according to

Sturman (1994:61), is the strong view that human organisations should be explored as an integrated system and not as 'a loose collection of traits'. In other words recognition that the whole is more than just the sum of its parts. This supports the need for in-depth studies and what Geertz (1973) referred to as 'thick descriptions'. Thick descriptions, providing detailed information, give richness to the text. This richness provides background contextual information that can enhance understanding of the phenomenon described. This is particularly useful in complex, qualitative accounts for explaining the intentions of the research and the inductive development of meaning. Lincoln and Guba (1985:214) note that case studies are useful for providing thick descriptions that grasp the attention of the reader by revealing what it is like to be involved in the situation portrayed. Within the dissertation I have included numerous quotes from interviews with the aim of achieving this.

Another relevant feature of a case study approach is that of boundary. Case study provides a unique insight into the world of meaning of real people managing real issues. The story that the research tells is likely to be more accessible to others than abstract theories and indeed quantified data. The use of narrative approaches (Clough, 2002) would extend this further and gain greater authenticity. I decided a narrative approach was not appropriate for this study as I was asking participants to talk about a new practice they were yet to experience. In terms of my study the case is bounded by practitioners and managers with a qualification in careers guidance, working in a large careers/Connexions company in the S.E. of England, and includes data from other representatives of the career guidance profession. The case is also bounded in terms of time, in a specific year and at the start of a new initiative.

There are limitations to a case study approach. There are perils if a journalistic approach is adopted, where the case study researcher selects those parts of the case that are more striking. This can lead to

selective use of the data, which may misrepresent the full story. Such selective use can be over-reductive, and can lead to looking at small aspects in more and more depth to the point where their significance is incompatible with the context in which they occur (Miles and Huberman, 1994:11). Such 'low-level data' can lead to over-statement in terms of findings, and a parochial view that ignores wider social influences (Nisbit and Watt, 1984:91). As will be explored in later chapters individuals in the study did make striking remarks, but where these were not supported by other transcripts these had to be set aside.

Bassey uses the term *fuzzy generalizations* to describe the type of generalisations that can be made by case study in terms of the knowledge produced. The notion of *fuzzy generalizations*, and Bassey also uses the term *fuzzy propositions*, which appears to be more tentative, suggests that appropriate language for findings from case study work can be expressed as, for example, *it is possible* or *it may be in some cases* or *it is unlikely*. This moves from 'In *this* case it *has been* found that...' to a more generalized statement such as, 'In *some* cases it *may be* found that...' (Bassey, 1999:12). Such language is congruent with the aims of case study and interpretive research and perhaps more realistic than many definitive claims of 'broad brush' positivist research.

In my study a method of triangulation was used to increase validity, namely interviewing three different groups involved in the development of support and supervision. At the point of analysis, validity and reliability are also dependent on the honesty, depth and richness of the data collected. The data itself cannot be valid or invalid, it is the inferences that I draw from the data that need to be measured in this way (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:191). As an alternative to validity and reliability Lincoln and Guba (1985: chapter 11) introduced the concept of 'trustworthiness' for qualitative studies. This focuses on an ethical approach that has qualitative rigour (Ezzy, 2002:34) and a respect for 'truth' as an ideal.

Although the singular case study does provide a rich source of understanding, there is also the concern that one-off case studies do not build into a body of knowledge (Hargreaves, 1996:2). Despite this limitation published case studies can provide in time a historical insight into particular 'instances'.

## Qualitative method

Case study may include quantitative methods but my study uses the qualitative technique of loosely structured interviews with full transcripts for the analysis of the data. Whilst recognising the value of quantitative methods (or a mix of the two approaches), the general characteristics of a qualitative approach fit with the purpose and direction of the study. In other words, an emphasis on interpretation and exploring the nature and meanings given to action, rather than testing some pre-defined hypotheses, and a tendency to work with unstructured data gathered from a single case. In the analysis of the data, aspects that are viewed by me as less significant may have been concealed. Claims made for any findings foreground such matters.

This qualitative approach, then, attempts to avoid the false distinctions between objective and subjective. The notion of *reflexivity* which 'recognizes that researchers are themselves part of the social world that they are researching' is useful here (Cohen *et al*, 2000:141). Reflexivity points to the need for researchers to acknowledge their own position within the research and how that shapes both the process and the results. For example, I had a strong view that qualifications are important for personal advisers before they undertake the role, but not all of the participants held this view:

> I don't know that you need this qualification [in career guidance] to do Learning Gateway work... it's more about life experience (Line Manager 'Lorna', 1:34/33).

I suspect that they'd [Connexions services] miss out an awful lot of
good people if they say, 'Oh you must have a qualification'
(Personal Adviser 'Norma', 2:24).

I had also supposed that support and supervision was a 'good thing'.
This view was challenged by my reading of Feltham (2002a, 2002b),
where this taken-for-granted assumption is questioned. With these prior
beliefs in mind, I took care in the second round of interviews to state my
position and to avoid leading questions.

The goal of qualitative research is not to produce a set of results that
another researcher working with the same material would replicate. As
previously discussed, the lack of generalizability is often viewed as the
major problem with qualitative studies (Schofield, 1993). Validity must
be questioned, but specific generalisations are not aimed for in an
interpretive piece of research. The internal (rather than external) validity
of the work, will be judged by others based on the evidence produced
against any claims made. Any generalizability could then be considered
in terms of the 'fit' between a particular study and others to which the
conclusions of the study could be applied. Schofield describes it thus,

The goal ... is to produce a coherent and illuminating
description of and perspective on a situation that is based
on and consistent with detailed study of that situation
(Schofield, 1993:93).

In a similar vein, West (1996:13) suggests that what matters is the
quality of the case studies used and the extent of the 'explanatory
power' of the work. The quality of the interpretation appears key here.
Any resulting text is always open to further interpretation, which
suggests respondents' 'stories' are never complete accounts. Reliability
can be viewed as the fit between what is stated in the findings and what
actually occurs in practice. Kvale (1996:181) states that in using
interviews there is likely to be a number of interpretations placed on a

single case. When using open-ended interviews reliability may be difficult as the questions will vary according to the respondent's interests. However, reducing bias and a collaborative approach can help to increase reliability, along with appropriate interview skills. Such ethical issues will be looked at briefly in the final section.

Moving on to consider views about research in guidance and counselling, McLeod suggests that the goal of qualitative research is to produce,

> inclusive, authentic, descriptive accounts of experience and action, and if too many informants are recruited, it will prove impossible to do justice to their contribution to the research (1994:32).

This then, supports an approach that may be constrained in terms of the numbers of respondents. Strauss and Corbin (1998:11) tell us that qualitative methods help us to locate the intricate detail about thoughts and feelings that would be difficult to extract from quantitative methods. Although the use of loosely structured interviews and literature sources were the main data gathering methods, as the work progressed there may have been a case for using alternatives. The design of the research, 'like the concepts, must be allowed to **emerge** during the process' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:33). For example with greater time the findings might have been shared and checked with participants via focus groups or a questionnaire.

As already noted, case study research can also involve quantitative data (Yin, 1984) and a quantitative instrument may indicate relationships in the data that may not be salient to the researcher. This can act as a break on the tendency to get carried away by the vividness of rich data. The interviews plus other texts have provided a wealth of data, but a quantitative survey could be used to check out the findings

described in the later chapters and help to strengthen the conclusions. Time has prevented this but it remains a possibility for follow-up work.

**Research procedures**

This section will detail the research procedures and make reference to some of the ethical considerations for the work.

Audio-taped, loosely structured interviews were arranged with a) 10 career guidance practitioners working as personal advisers with 'harder-to-help' young people between the ages of 15 -18, b) 3 managers, managing personal advisers, and c) 1 paid officer of the professional institute involved in continuous professional development, 1 tutor from the Connexions' supervision course and 1 'Intensive Support Manager' from the region. The loosely structured interviews allowed for greater depth and richness and avoided the potential of controlling the information. To this end I sought to ground any theory in the social activity it purports to explain (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Interviews were approximately 50 minutes long with follow up interviews of the same length. The value of follow up interviews needed to be weighed against the likelihood that respondents would want to improve on their original ideas, which then become reworked and could be viewed as either more considered or more contrived. I shared the transcripts with the participants after each interview, to ensure a degree of collaboration for the project. The only changes asked for by two personal advisers were minor clarifications following reflection on the first transcript.

A full transcript was made of each interview, with a copy sent to the participant. I decided not to make a selective transcription as this risks making a judgement at an early stage about the significance of parts omitted (Cohen *et al*, 2000:126). I did not keep detailed field notes, but noted in a diary after each interview points where the participant gave

'silent' or other important signs through body language, or other gestures not captured on the audiotape (Cohen *et al*, 2000:281). These are written into the transcripts, as are pauses, laughter and hesitation.

I decided to interview each personal adviser and line manager twice for the following reasons, to:

> check understanding
> explore the development of their thinking
> see if the provision for support and supervision had changed, or was due to change
> discuss topics that appeared common or uncommon across the range of first interviews.

With a previous professional background as a careers adviser and with advanced counselling skills training (Egan, 1990), interviews of a non-directive nature are a relatively easy tool for me to use. The skills include building rapport, active listening, asking open questions, using space to allow the respondent to find full expression, and using challenging and summary skills. In guidance interviews a practitioner is always evaluating the content of the interaction whilst it is in progress (Kidd, 1996:193). In a research setting this skill helped me to avoid unproductive material taking over the interaction. The data gathered is richer as a result.

I have to acknowledge that my participants also have these skills and recognise when they are on the receiving end! However, as is evident in the study they have such little 'space' to reflect on their practice that they welcomed the opportunity to discuss their work. A number of the participants stated that the research had provided them with an opportunity to think more deeply about their role and their views about support and supervision. Unfortunately these comments were made after the tape was switched off, but the following examples from transcripts illustrate ways the research affected participants' views:

I have actually formalised some of the supervision that I'm
doing with people in my team... that has come as a result of,
probably, the conversation that we had last time (Personal
Adviser 'Kate', 2:42).

Thanks Hazel, this has been very informative and indicates
the need for more staff including myself to receive training
(Line Manager 'Liz', 2:4).

When considering how the research can help participants, a danger can
arise here if the researcher begins to wander into the area of
counselling. In three separate personal adviser interviews, issues were
discussed with me as if I were a supervisor. On each occasion I was
aware that the line between non-directive research interviews and
'therapy' is not as distinct as one might suppose. Boundary
maintenance (Kvale, 1996:147) is as important in research activity, as it
is in guidance work and the practice of support and supervision. It was
uppermost in mind that the principles of *beneficence* and *non-
maleficence* should apply (Cohen *et al*, 2000:279). In other words, the
participants should benefit from the process and not be harmed in any
way.

**Other ethical considerations**
Particular ethical considerations revolved around confidentiality. The
purpose of the research, the level of intrusion, issues of confidentiality
and implications for the service of any published findings, were agreed
with senior managers before interviews took place. The BERA code of
ethics (1992) was used as a working framework and shared with the
senior manager. Individuals' real names and other identifiers, e.g. place
names, were removed from the transcripts. Each participant was given
a full explanation of the above factors, which I shared again at the start
of each interview. They were all volunteers who gave informed consent
to being interviewed. Interviews took place in private rooms in their
place of work. I was open about the purpose of the research and made

it clear that I would be publishing extracts of the research both during and after the study. And, as mentioned earlier, each participant was given the opportunity to change their transcript.

Senior management in the company is keen to initiate planning for models of support and supervision during the academic year of 2003 / 2004. As part of negotiating access, I agreed to produce a short report on initial findings in September 2003: all participants received a copy. Feedback on the report from the senior training manager was very positive, 'this will help to place support and supervision on the agenda... we need to know how personal advisers are feeling about this issue' (Duncan, 2003: personal communication).

Although not part of the organisation and therefore not an 'insider', I cannot claim to be a clear 'outsider'. The large careers company in the study pays for its career guidance staff to be members of the professional institute, The Institute of Career Guidance. I sit on the editorial board of the professional journal and have contributed material to the journal and to other publications. Participants may 'know' me through this and other writing. I have, in the past, worked with other practitioners in the company as an NVQ assessor and with senior line managers as an NVQ internal verifier.

There is also a geographical link. I chose this company for practical reasons, as the furthest distance to travel to interview participants was under a hundred miles. However, that does mean that within different centres there are practitioners that I have trained on external courses or have been students who I have tutored at college. There were also current students at the time, seconded part-time on to the career guidance course.

Another linked problem related to research reactivity is the rapport building mentioned earlier. If rapport is built and detachment from the process is not the goal in a qualitative study, then there is a possibility

that participants will want to 'help' with the research. This is often expressed in statements at the start such as, 'I'm not sure what you want me to say' or at the end, 'Was that enough, was it useful?'. If the aims of the research and the collaborative nature are explained fully at the start, this kind of reactivity can be lessened. It would not work however if the practice of the interview was not congruent with this, so once again this points to the need to be a skilled interviewer.

## Summary

This chapter has considered the methodology, method and procedures that informed the study and data collection. I looked at competing views about truth and knowledge production and discussed these in relation to quantitative and qualitative method. The chapter argued for a case study approach in the pursuit of foregrounding meaning, and suggested that 'fuzzy generalizations' is the way to describe the knowledge produced. Finally I described the research procedures and made reference to ethical considerations.

The next chapter describes how the data were coded and analysed. The analysis of case study research is not easy, particularly when the data is taken from loosely structured interviews. With a desire not to lose the integrity of the whole, I struggled with the transition from data collection to detailed analysis. How far should I take the process of coding transcripts and fragmenting the text? How do you know when to stop? Whilst aware of the need to stop, I needed help to start! That struggle is the subject of the next chapter.

# Chapter 4. Method of Analysis

## Introduction

Before describing the method of analysis, this chapter will first discuss the issue of 'placing self' in the research. Although this is relevant throughout the study, it was at the transition point of moving to the detailed analysis that this issue caused me the greatest struggle. I like order and structure and was concerned that I might impose this on the data at this stage. I needed to ensure that, whilst immersed in the data, I was also able to stand back and allow the themes to develop from the analysis. The concern was that I might make themes fit into my pre-existing ideas of what was important.

I was keen not to lose a sense of the whole and worried about the fragmentation of individuals' views if a microanalysis method was adopted. Before starting the detailed analysis I had the opportunity to discuss this 'placing of self' in the research at a faculty conference. This, plus a discussion with my supervisor and other colleagues, helped me to move on and make a decision about the direction to take. This chapter then begins with that reflexive discussion as a prelude to describing the analytic approach taken.

## Placing self in the research

When first involved in research I battled with a perceived need to be 'objective'. Whilst the discourse around research methodology has moved on from the somewhat sterile debates around objectivity and subjectivity, there remains a powerful view that researchers need to keep themselves outside of their research. I will not focus here on the binary oppositions of objective/subjective or quantitative/qualitative, but attempt to open up the spaces in my thinking around either/or boundaries connected to placing self in the research activity. In so doing I am not saying I can ignore those boundaries but maybe I can choose not to choose between them (Stronach and MacLure, 1997:8).

**Interpretive approaches in qualitative research – differing views**

Arising from the government agenda on inclusion (DfEE, 1997) a value has been placed on 'research into what works'. This is exemplified in the Blunket statement referred to in the previous chapter (Blunket, 2001:conference address).

Blunket asks for 'large scale quantitative information' (*ibid*). As argued earlier, with an interest in 'meanings' I decided that a qualitative rather than quantitative approach would be appropriate, but I cannot separate this decision from the influence of my own preferences. For example, qualitative research can be processed via computer-assisted, qualitative data analysis packages, but I was wary of using this for a number of reasons. First, I would have to learn to use a package and was not sure I would have the time to do this. Second, and more importantly, a content analysis would focus on specific words rather than ideas and meanings (Ezzy, 2002:113). I felt the attempt to automate this somehow through the use of a computer package would take more time than a manual approach. Finally, I was concerned that I would be removing myself from the data somewhat by adding another layer between me and the content, which would then distance me from the immersion that I knew would be important. I wanted this level of placing myself in the research to be with the transcripts not the output from a computer package.

That said, I have no doubt that this is a learning need for the future, as I am aware that such programmes can reveal aspects that the researcher has overlooked when **too** immersed in the data. Computers are also better at retaining and retrieving large amounts of data than any researcher. Nonetheless, what is retained and retrieved is still dependent on the quality of the input. This is an interpretive rather than automatic or mechanical task. Words can be retrieved but 'meaning' is less easy to locate this way.

Understanding is always an interpretive endeavour and we cannot escape the cultural and historical circumstances which shape our understanding. We are already in the research. We bring our own interpretive frames of reference and our commitment to certain values in the way we conduct research. Rather than trying to distance myself or apologise for my involvement, by acknowledging the self in research I can actively engage with my pre-existing understandings and assumptions rather than attempt to deny them. However, this cannot mean that just anything goes methodologically.

So, in terms of placing self in the research, where are the boundaries then between me as an interested researcher, and the subject(s) of the research study? Language is unhelpful here. I wanted to work with people as participants in a collaborative way – not subjects. I did not want to be involved in a 'hit and run' research project, but wanted to share transcripts of loosely structured interviews. I wanted participants to have the opportunity to change what they said on the transcript. Indeed I saw these interviews as conversations, not question and answer 'interviews'.

The transcripts show the thinking spaces in between speech where pauses, false starts, moments of hesitation and noted body language are included in the text. The transcripts also show where I contribute, think on my feet, ponder issues, try out responses. Such involvement aids the thinking of both parties. And this means my inconsistencies, lack of articulacy and the like, are also included in the transcript. I found this liberating, not problematic. A fully collaborative approach would take this further and share the draft analysis with the participants.

But boundaries matter of course. In collaborative work where a researcher has good communication and interview skills and a genuine, reciprocal conversation is taking place, there is a danger that you can wander into a helping or counselling relationship: the potential for this to happen arose on at least three occasions.

## So where do you set the boundaries?

I ponder the legitimacy, if not the authenticity, of research that 'makes up' encounters with the purpose of extending understanding in a research study. For example Clough (2002) creates fictions in order to question the common sense understanding of data. The knowledge he produces is the result of story telling experiments, which confront us with the struggle to make moral and ethical sense of the relationship between the personal and the professional in research.

Whilst such narrative methods give the silenced a voice, Clough takes this further and in his research includes details about his own as well as his subject's experiences. At this level, is this placing of self in the research going too far? I continue to wrestle with this whilst at the same time recognising the value of literature for revealing meaning.

In considering the boundaries for my study I have tried to be clear about my role, when arranging and conducting interviews, and in the writing up of the analysis. I have endeavoured to be honest, to demonstrate 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:chapter 11) and rigour (Ezzy, 2002:50-2), and not to hide in the text any limitations arising from my influence.

## Producing fuzzy generalizations

Placing self in the research has been a revealing and rewarding experience in this qualitative study, for example via the conversational nature of the interviews discussed earlier. The realisation that you can be a part of the research removed a worry for me, even if I am not sure about the degree of involvement of self. I recognize that I will not produce evidence that can be generalized across large populations, but I can produce the 'fuzzy generalizations' described in the previous chapter (Bassey, 1999).

Interpretive, narrative and auto/biographical approaches can provide us with new ways of seeing, **but** we do need to interrogate the forms they

take so that we are not promoting uncritical research practice. This also applies to the case study method used in this study. Without this, do we simply perpetuate a policy maker's view that qualitative research is parochial? Oakley (1998:708) suggests that whilst the goal of feminist critical theory has been to produce qualitative evidence in order to change unjust social systems, ignoring quantified data can perpetuate the myth of women's 'otherness' in the minds of (male) policy makers. Without any quantifiable data, we may not be able to replicate findings but there is a clear need to build, revise and display the composition of the analytical work that produces fuzzy generalizations. Such generalizations, built on case study evidence need to make an empirical statement about what has been found in the particular case and how the findings **may** be applied more widely (Bassey, 1999:55).

The turn to more interpretive and narrative approaches in understanding human behaviour represents a shift from the primacy of knowing what and why (ontology) to the primacy of knowing how (epistemology). Or put another way moving from first-order observations of 'what is out there' to second-order observations of where we stand when we observe 'what is out there' (Anderson, 2003:xi). What we see always depends on our vantage point. Perhaps what auto/biographical and narrative accounts in particular ask us to do is to stand somewhere else to look, in order to 'see' different understandings of what is 'true'.

Although praising 'fuzziness' around this particular aspect of analysing data, for me there is still a concern about how you then create a valid order out of rich and multidimensional data. As indicated earlier I struggled with this transition from data collection to detailed data analysis. Although clear that whatever I did create would be only one version of the story, I wanted that story to be as faithful as possible to the views expressed by participants. Having set the scene for that struggle, I will now move on and describe the process of analysis.

## Analysis method

To begin I will discuss the themes that appeared important in the initial and on-going analysis during data collection, then I will describe the detailed analysis that took place after data collection. This section will end by outlining the major themes that are the focus for the following chapters.

## Initial and on-going analysis

Whilst listening to the tapes and reading the transcripts of the first round of interviews of personal advisers and line managers, I noted a number of potential themes. Before interviewing each participant for a second time, I returned to their first interview and identified points that needed clarification and noted these on a card. I added questions and points of interest that had arisen in other interviews based on the potential themes. The discussion was also influenced by the development of my knowledge on the topic via the on-going literature search. This included my reading around the concept of discourse theory and its potential to open up the unquestioned parts of their individual discourse. The representatives of the professional community were interviewed once only, however, the above influenced the questions posed in their interviews.

I wanted to balance the desire for a loose structure for the second interview with a need for some comparison across individuals and groups. To achieve that I encouraged participants to extend their answers by using follow up questions and ensuring time for them to add other points not covered. My identification of potential themes was inevitably a question of interpretation, but the relative importance was verified with the respondent in the second interview or by follow up questions (via e-mail with one line manager). It needs to be acknowledged, of course, that in the first interview what the respondent gives is already an interpretation (from their perspective) of events. This is not a problem provided limitations are clarified when explaining any findings and describing the methodology.

Preliminary analysis identified a number of potential themes, namely the implications of *boundaries* in the work and how this linked to *expertise and ethical practice*; views on *professional and para-professional* roles for the work; the lack of *shared 'good' practice*; a conflict between a tradition of *autonomy versus an imposed structure*, particularly in relation to notions of 'formal' or 'clinical' supervision; confusion and/or disparate views on the *purpose and process of support and supervision*; and concerns about *time constraints*.

**The detailed analysis after data collection**
First, a cautionary note is needed here about categorising people into groups. Categorising implies individuals have shared experiences, interests and understandings. Individuals within groups may not share all the characteristics applied to the group. Within the group of personal advisers and the group of line managers, there were different views on the same issue. My third group is very loosely structured and includes a salaried member of the professional institute, a course tutor and the intensive support manager. The latter was a newly created role in one area of the study, following the pilot of the Connexions' Supervision course. Grouping people is unavoidable if I am attempting to look at both their individual and 'group' discourses, i.e. the way they talk about certain practices. Categorising people in this way is according to Ezzy (2002:159) 'an inherently political act'. I do not want to ignore this, and it is fundamental to a discourse analysis, but the implications need to be recognised and stated.

In listening to the stories in interviews I was looking for 'special events' and other alerting factors. Other clues were irregularities; what is said and how (**bold** is used on the transcripts to show participants' use of emphasis); what people get excited, angry, surprised or confused about; any myths or received wisdom; the use of powerful metaphors and non-verbal signals (the latter were noted immediately after each interview and added later to the transcript). And, in the back and forth between

the data and the literature, I also noted things said (or not said) that suggested links with discourse theory.

My original intention was to use grounded theorizing (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The ongoing analysis would note any links to related literature and comparisons with other data. This method of analysis requires a method of constant comparison (Ezzy, 2002:90) across all the interviews in order to develop and identify codes **during** the gathering of data. Ongoing coding needs to take place throughout this activity. This proved too time consuming and I was not convinced of the usefulness of this approach, as there was a danger that early coding would be based on my pre-conceived notions of what was important or meaningful. I abandoned this approach and general themes were looked for, but coding did not take place at the data collection stage.

Although I have undertaken small-scale research in the past, I was not sure how to progress with a relatively large amount of data. I needed to read widely around how to conduct the detailed analysis to avoid an intuitive approach that I would be unable to 'display' (Miles and Huberman, 1994:91). This display needed to demonstrate how the procedures are well thought through, followed, explained and supported.

I had thought previously that I did not want to go too far into deconstructing texts. If too fragmented by a coding process the sense of the whole can get lost. West (1996:31) rejects grounded theory on this basis, saying that for him it felt like 'pretending to be a good positivist'. A close reading of Strauss and Corbin (1998:11) suggests they reject the quantifying of qualitative data, although the axial coding described appeared to restrict the inductive nature of a more open and thematic coding process. I recognised that it was not possible to separate the activities of data collection and analysis; they are interrelated. For example, Ball (1993:45) states that research data are part of the research process, in other words, socially constructed rather than 'out

there' waiting to be discovered. This interpretive approach fits with the aim of the study to search for meaning rather than facts. However, nothing in this debate got me started on the process of coding! Turning to Miles and Huberman (1994:65) I noted their statement that having 'a start list of codes prior to fieldwork is helpful'. They acknowledge that these will develop and change but assert that 'coding should not be put off to the end of data gathering' (1994:66). This alarmed me a little and I began the coding of the data with what, from a skim read of the transcripts, appeared to be the general topics as potential coding categories, linked to the original research questions.

However, by the end of the second participant's transcripts I felt I was making the data fit into the codes, rather than allowing the themes to emerge. In other words, this approach seemed too technical and almost deductive. I seemed to be looking for evidence that fitted pre-determined codes and this seemed closer to a content analysis approach, than one based on allowing themes to emerge from the data. I closed Miles and Huberman and proceeded in the way described below, which, with the limitations noted above, is based on the principles of grounded theory taken from Strauss and Corbin (1998).

**Open coding of the data**
Each tape was listened to several times to achieve some immersion in the data. Brief notes were made later on any notable thoughts arising from that activity. When working with the transcripts, each line of the text was examined to produce open codes, written as terms used by participants wherever possible. Appendix 1: 205, contains an excerpt of a coded interview transcript, with a key to the codes used.

As I progressed through the first six transcripts (3 x personal advisers) codes were added to the list: the total being 90. I then organised these under what seemed relevant headings. Where there were codes that appeared very similar, I located these on the transcripts and decided to recode them. For example the original code CON related to '**confusion**

in current work role'. A related code NB = 'working with no boundaries or unclear boundaries for the role', appeared to be a more useful and developed code and occurred more readily.

I transferred the headings and codes to a large board and continued with the coding of the next 3 participants' transcripts. Another 10 codes were added under the headings. I continued with this process for the remainder of the practitioner interviews and produced an exhaustive list of 110 codes. A similar process took place with the transcripts for the other two groups, employing the same and additional codes. Appendix 2: 216, shows the exhaustive coding board for the Line Managers' transcripts. I then completed a preliminary count on each participant's transcripts to note codes used and frequency.

I was conscious that what was talked about in the interview reflected the initial and follow-up questions asked by me, and the opportunities for the participants to introduce their own topics. As noted elsewhere, I was confident in my ability to use loosely structured interviews, with guided questions, but I must acknowledge that the interviews were not unstructured to the point where the participant alone decides what to talk about.

On completing this stage of open coding I was not sure how to continue, as I was still concerned about imposing order on the data too soon. Although it seemed risky to change direction, I considered moving to a narrative approach but was advised against imposing this at this stage of the project. Following a discussion with my supervisor, we agreed that I would be able to include some 'biographical data' with the quotations used from the interview transcripts. 'You cannot use all the data in this dissertation' was a re-assuring piece of advice. What follows does not achieve the thick descriptions as outlined by Geertz (1973), however the quotations do give an illustrative richness to the text.

Although the approach adopted is a thematic analysis employing the principles of grounded theory, in the actual exercise of coding I have used axial coding. My understanding of the Strauss and Corbin's text (1998) was not activated until I was compelled to move forward. What follows is the description of that experiential learning process.

## To count or not to count?

Glaser (1978:3) appears to advocate a simplistic, inductive method for analysis. It is suggested that researchers should not read the literature before entering the field of study. It is thought that researchers will 'contaminate' the data with their existing understandings. Ezzy notes (2002:11) that grounded theory has identified two main issues. If the researcher overemphasises theoretical deductions they, 'will not be prepared to reformulate theories in response to new evidence', and if the researcher overemphasises inductive theory this can result in, 'a failure to be explicit about the preexisting (*sic*) theoretical source of ideas'.

A sophisticated model of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) does not present an either/or approach to deductive and inductive theory building. The researcher identifies important issues from the literature **and** their pre-dispositions and interests. Through the use of iterative data collection and analysis, theory is developed and redeveloped. This includes checking the emerging findings in the data with the participants (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:45) and being open to alternative possibilities for understanding the data.

A postmodern critique is likely to view grounded theory as embodying a modernist approach to knowledge. This would suggest that grounded theorists, as well as other ethnographic researchers, ignore how knowledge creation is a profoundly political act (Stronach and MacLure, 1997:102). In discussing the relationship between the data collection, methodology and the resulting analytical text, Stronach and MacLure highlight how the text produced has to be read and critiqued to highlight

its treatment of evidence. Does it present evidence as fixed and reliable; does it gloss over 'ambivalence and uncertainty' (1997:56)?

MacLure is particularly influenced by Derrida (1976:159) when she explains elsewhere (2003:81) that texts cannot be reduced to singular meanings, or, put another way, single versions of what is meaningful to the participants in any study.

> There is no external, non-textual vantage point from which research knowledge can be grasped. 'No outside-text'.

Grounded theory from this perspective would appear to retain aspects of positivist methodology, the 'traces of an enlightenment understanding' (Ezzy, 2002:29). Postmodernists would highlight how the text and the teller of the text and the reader of the text are all entwined, where discovering an ideal 'truth' is not possible. Keeping close to the words in a transcript will not guarantee a 'truthful' account of the meanings of the participant. Further, in describing a case study approach as a 'strategy which focuses on understanding present within single settings', Huberman and Miles (2002:8) can be criticised for ignoring the impact of wider systems on the single case. Also classification systems, as advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994), will not escape the postmodern criticism of being personal to the researcher. Taken to extremes a postmodern view can deny any 'perceived' reality.

That said it was important to retain the central criticism of grounded theory and classification systems. In order to avoid a naïve belief in inductive research, I have located this study in its wider social and political location. As a researcher I cannot claim to be merely describing what was observed: the theory does not 'emerge', it is created from the story of the research.

Having considered a range of approaches in the literature, including narrative, hermeneutics and critical approaches, I had to move on. Being better informed about the perils of adopting an uncritical approach to grounded theory and thematic analysis, I decided to take the next step and move to axial coding. Diagram 4:1 displays the process that I will now describe below.
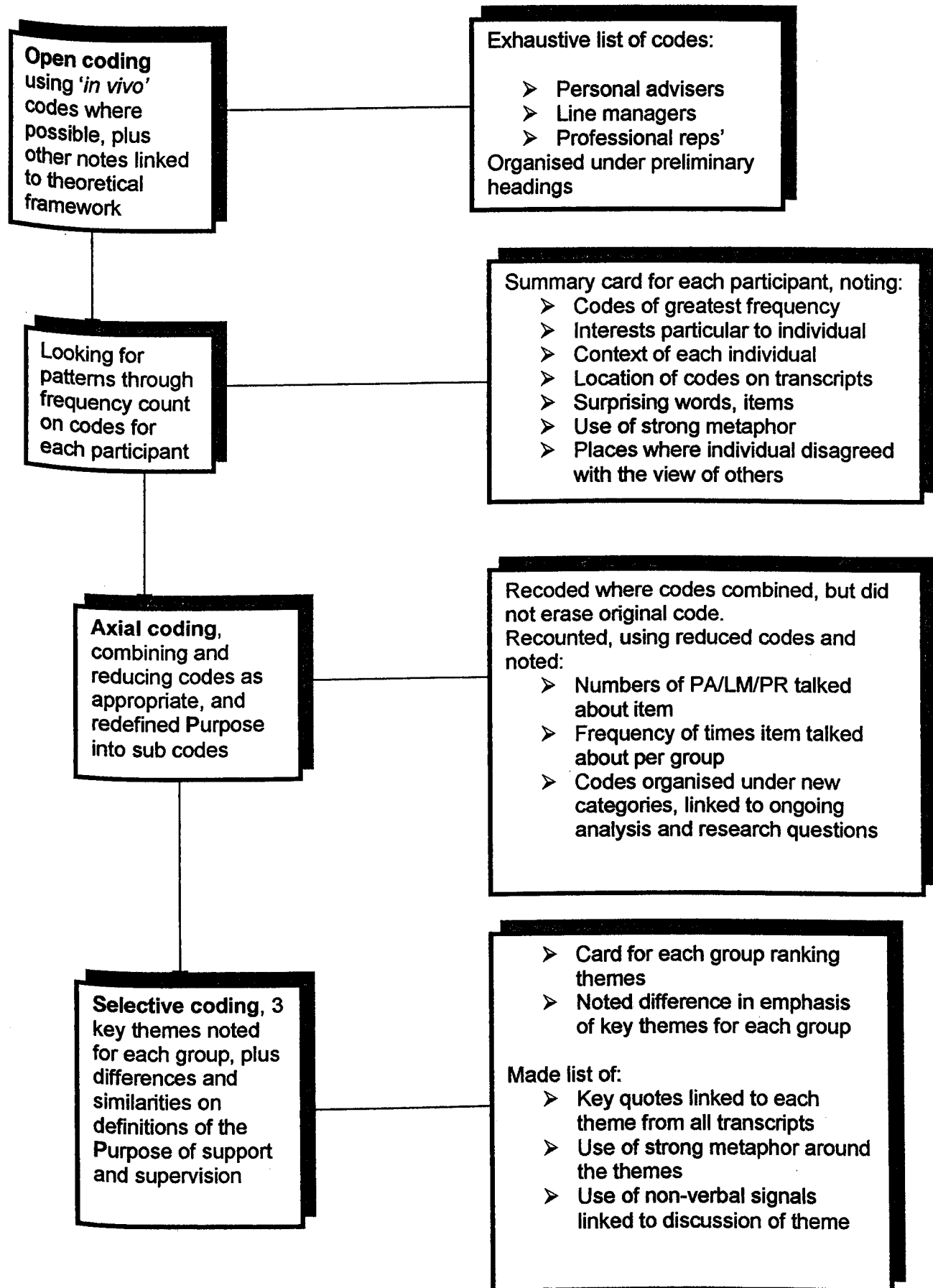
**Axial coding of the data**

I went back to individual transcripts and produced a summary card for each participant, noting coded items talked about with the greatest frequency; interests particular to the individual; location of codes on transcripts (for quicker retrieval later); words, things said that were surprising or said with particular emphasis; use of strong metaphor to convey meaning and places where the individual's view was different from others.

This going back to the transcripts occurred a number of times during the detailed analysis and helped to keep me rooted in the transcripts. There was a danger that progressive coding techniques would remove me from the original source and fragment retention of the whole transcript.

Straus and Corbin (1998:129) explain that axial coding is not merely about finding, 'conditions, action/interaction and consequences', and they caution against a rigid approach to axial coding. They state it is important to consider both structure and process and to ask, 'why, where, when, how, and with what results' questions, to uncover relationships within the data (1998:127). The aim of axial coding is to organise codes around the categories that appear central in the transcripts. I found this process of alignment difficult to understand until I used it in practice.

I am aware of the danger of restricting the data by making it fit my interests rather than those of the participants. In order to 'see' patterns it seemed that using numbers, looking for frequency in the data, would be

## Diagram 4:1. Process of data analysis

**Open coding** using '*in vivo*' codes where possible, plus other notes linked to theoretical framework

Exhaustive list of codes:

 ➢ Personal advisers
 ➢ Line managers
 ➢ Professional reps'

Organised under preliminary headings

**Looking for patterns through frequency count on codes for each participant**

Summary card for each participant, noting:
 ➢ Codes of greatest frequency
 ➢ Interests particular to individual
 ➢ Context of each individual
 ➢ Location of codes on transcripts
 ➢ Surprising words, items
 ➢ Use of strong metaphor
 ➢ Places where individual disagreed with the view of others

**Axial coding,** combining and reducing codes as appropriate, and redefined **Purpose** into sub codes

Recoded where codes combined, but did not erase original code.
Recounted, using reduced codes and noted:
 ➢ Numbers of PA/LM/PR talked about item
 ➢ Frequency of times item talked about per group
 ➢ Codes organised under new categories, linked to ongoing analysis and research questions

**Selective coding, 3 key themes noted for each group, plus differences and similarities on definitions of the Purpose of support and supervision**

 ➢ Card for each group ranking themes
 ➢ Noted difference in emphasis of key themes for each group

Made list of:
 ➢ Key quotes linked to each theme from all transcripts
 ➢ Use of strong metaphor around the themes
 ➢ Use of non-verbal signals linked to discussion of theme

a useful way of avoiding this bias. For example, in doing this it became clear that a concern about qualifications for the role of personal adviser was far more important to me than it was to participants.

Miles and Huberman (1994:253) defend 'counting',

> When we identify a theme or pattern, we're isolating something that (a) happens a number of times and (b) consistently happens in a specific way. The "number of times" and "consistency" judgements are based on counting.

They suggest that using numbers is a useful strategy for engaging with the data, some, but not all, of the time and allows you to see 'the general drift of the data' (*ibid*). By counting things a researcher can check their assumptions and then follow up the insights that the numbers suggest.

I moved from the general headings used to organise the open coding to categories that appeared more closely related to the participants' interests, via a counting process and checking with the transcripts. At the axial coding stage, categories were related to the emerging analysis and the research questions. At this stage it became clear that the code of Purpose needed to be defined further. Appendix 3: 218, is a copy of the axial coding board for the professional representatives' group. I then made a card for each group ranking the codes, from the most important issue down to those of least significance across the group. The list for the personal adviser group is given in Appendix 4: 220.

**Selective coding - finding themes in the data**
By comparing these rankings I was able to identify tentative major themes for each group (diagram 4:2). Before deciding these were the major themes I returned again to the transcripts. I created a new board for each group where I identified quotes from each participant connected to the major themes. This helped me to get back to the

## <u>Diagram 4:2. Major themes related to groups</u>

**PERSONAL ADVISERS**

Need for a structured process for support and supervision that includes:

➢ Training
➢ Clarity about provision
➢ Time allocation
➢ Management support

Managing stress and avoiding burn out

Navigating unclear boundaries in a non-traditional role

**LINE MANAGERS**

Need for a structured process for clarity of purpose, delivery and outcomes

Managing stress and avoiding burn out

Effects of time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change

**PROFESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES**

Support and supervision needed for professional development

Training needed for the development of support and supervision

Effects of time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change

words and meanings in the transcripts and to check the apparent major themes. Of course, there are other themes that are important for a small number of participants and themes that are very important for individual participants. However, it is at this stage that I had to select the major themes as the core story around which the analysis was to focus.

It would be possible to find new information in the data, but by the end of the process I did feel that a level of 'saturation' (Ezzy, 2002:93) had been achieved. The coding, counting, reading, re-coding, re-counting and re-reading of the transcripts did reach a point where I felt the process supported the emerging major themes.

Many of the themes have places where they overlap other themes, and between groups there are many similarities but some clear differences of emphasis. These aspects will be discussed in the analysis chapters that follow.

## Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the process of analysing the data. I began by describing the struggle related to 'placing self' in the research activity and went on to describe in detail my use of the principles of grounded theory. I charted the move from open to axial coding and outlined how I arrived at major themes for each group. In this chapter I have made use of diagrams to display this process and have referred to appendix items. The latter are included in order to support the description of the method used.

At the end of the chapter I would like to emphasise again that this process is not linear. Engagement with the data and its analysis was ongoing and involved understanding from the literature sources and from my writing of progress reports throughout the EdD. I started the chapter with a discussion about 'placing of self' in the analysis before describing and supporting the method used for the detailed coding of the data. I have ended by selecting three major themes for each group.

These themes will now be analysed in the following chapters where they will be related to the research questions, the literature and discourse theory.

# Chapter 5. Analysis of major themes: the need for a structured process

## Introduction

The previous chapters have described the context of the study, discussed the rationale and research questions, explored issues around methodology and explained the methods used for data collection and analysis. Chapters five, six and seven will analyse the three major themes already identified. Each chapter will focus on one of the themes and will discuss the similarities and differences expressed on the subject by the different groups. The analysis will, in addition, highlight any differences within groups. Quotes from the data will be used to support the analysis and reference will be made to the literature, including 'new' sources. The analysis undertaken in these three chapters will keep in mind the conceptual framework of discourse theory. This will be looked at in greater depth in the synthesis chapter that follows.

This chapter explores the theme of the *need for a structured process for support and supervision*. Aspects in each theme do overlap at times, but the use of general headings will help to retain structure and focus on what is included for this dissertation. The chapter will begin by exploring the need for support and supervision and views about its purpose.

## The need for support and supervision, linked to purpose

In considering the purpose of support and supervision for career guidance practitioners working 'intensively' in personal adviser roles, the data for the three groups was organised under the categories that emerged from the axial coding. These headings, linked to the research questions, were:

> ➢ Is there a need for support and supervision?
> ➢ Why the need (including definitions on purpose)?
> ➢ What do they need?

> Who needs to be involved?

> What are the wider influences?

A quantitative survey undertaken by the Institute of Career Guidance (Hulbert, 2000) asked 74 career guidance practitioners, representing 33 geographical areas in England, if they needed support and supervision for their work with socially excluded young people. The survey found that 94 per cent said they did. In my study, all the participants agreed that support and supervision was needed, although there were mixed views about content, process and purpose. In discussing the purpose of support and supervision there were similarities and differences across the three groups. For personal advisers the purpose was defined as the 'chance to offload' and to discuss how the work affects you, which would in turn increase their expertise. For line managers the purpose was to bring clarity to the role and to benefit work with clients. For the representatives of the professional community, the purpose was to benefit work with clients, to encourage the development of the reflective practitioner and to give the practitioner a 'chance to offload'.

There are many crossovers here, but noticeably there is a different emphasis between the line managers in the study and the personal advisers. The prime purpose for practitioners is closely associated with their direct experience of the work and the need to take care of their own emotional health and well-being: to offload and discuss feelings about the work:

> I think it's something that needs to be there all the time and
> not something that you just get because you're really up
> against the wall and feeling really desperate...I see [our PA
> meetings] as an opportunity for us to talk amongst ourselves
> about how it feels (Personal Adviser 'Norma', 1:8).

Another personal adviser, 'Anne', talked about the 'steep learning curve' that career guidance practitioners faced when they moved to the role of

a Learning Gateway personal adviser, and the need to get together as a group to discuss the work:

> We actually set it up and I think it was obvious we just had a cry- I think we all felt that we were failing, floundering and we just had a crying need to get together and say well what are you doing? And how do you find it? (Personal Adviser 'Anne', 1:7).

In our second meeting she discussed her need for one-to-one support and her use of the Core Care counselling service provided by the company. She described the view of other agencies about the lack of support and supervision for Learning Gateway personal advisers:

> I think really, and I know that some, I think social workers, have commented on this, that the company has been quite lax letting us go down this road without putting it in place...which is why I kind of agreed to be involved in this, and there's only got to be a big issue or something and then the company could be (*pause*)...I mean what if someone has a nervous breakdown and they sue the company? I think there could be a case, I don't know (Personal Adviser 'Anne', 2:47).

'Jane' reflected on how support and supervision would have enabled her to cope with her own feelings about a difficult client:

> I think it would have just taken the length of time out of the equation, so it's taken me some time to sort of chew it over, to think about it, to reflect on it, and perhaps as long as three weeks or maybe even a month to sort of get around to thinking that I wouldn't mind seeing him again. Whereas perhaps if I'd had the opportunity to get it off my chest sooner, to thrash it through then I would have been ready to see him again sooner (Personal Adviser 'Jane', 2:20).

'Jane' then went on to talk about a stressful situation with another client that she 'was anxious about', and again how she felt the opportunity to sit down with someone and be reassured was not offered at present.

In asking 'Kate' if she had thought about support and supervision she replied that 'it's very close to my heart actually!' (Personal Adviser 'Kate', 1:9). And, when asked directly about the need for support and supervision for the role she responded,

Kate:       But I think certainly from a personal point of view, I, I
            am desperate to get supervision! And I put it as
            strongly as that.

Hazel:      Desperate is a very strong word.

Kate:       Desperate is a very strong word, yeah and I think I've
            been desperate probably for about a year (Personal
            Adviser 'Kate', 1:38).

The issue about taking care of emotional health and well-being is closely associated with the theme of managing stress and avoiding burn out: it is difficult to separate these two issues for personal advisers. The two themes combined make up the core theme or central story for personal advisers when considering the purpose of support and supervision. The 'need for a moment of space to be listened to' (Personal Adviser 'Norma', 2:6) because personal advisers 'need to tell the story' about the work (*ibid*, 2:8), suggests a requirement for a specific process that does more than talk about caseloads and meeting targets. It was clear that talking about how the work affects them was one of the prime reasons for wanting support and supervision.

Whilst talking about feelings towards the work or towards a client is reasonable, it is important to recognise the danger of straying into areas here where the supervisor may not be competent to deal with the issues

that arise. In discussing the supervision of primary health care practitioners, Burton and Launer (2003:24) caution the desire for practitioners to be endlessly self-critical and to expose their feelings. Too much focus on feelings requires practitioners to sustain the emotional impact of the work. Taken too far this can lead to breaching the necessary psychological defences that practitioners develop in order to manage the work. Maintaining professional boundaries with clients is an ethical practice, and part of the defence structure needed for practitioner well-being.

Other professional issues were mentioned, such as how support and supervision benefits work with clients and develops reflective practice, but these were talked about with far less frequency. This is not the same as saying that personal advisers saw these aspects as unimportant, but that their own support needs had to be met in order to ensure they could, in turn, support the needs of their clients.

For personal advisers, then, the central purpose of support and supervision was to manage stress and avoid burn out. They wanted a structured process that included the following aims, to:

> give you a chance to offload
> discuss how the work is affecting you
> increase expertise
> talk about how you feel about the work
> meet a need for daily support
> give you formal support
> discuss workload.

Line managers viewed the main purpose of support and supervision as helping to clarify the role in terms of processes and activities. This clarification would help to ensure the quality of work with clients. For example, 'Liz' starts to define the benefits of support and supervision when she says,

I guess that they have a chance to say what's bothering them...

But then the purpose begins to sound less about emotional well-being, and more about meeting wider management needs,

> ...and to lay everything out on the table and look at it
> dispassionately and to see what the priorities are... and to try to get
> a sense of order about what's going on (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:18).

'Deirdre' described the purpose of support and supervision as having 'different aspects':

> I think for the member of staff, it's a way of checking out what
> they're doing, whether they're taking the right approach...to be able
> to talk through different approaches, get somebody else's view, that
> opportunity to kind of step back from the situation. I think from the
> client's point of view, it's really important that somebody, that the
> person they're working with has that opportunity to be able to, I
> don't know, not get **so** intense and **so** involved with somebody that
> it becomes very personal (Line Manager 'Deirdre',1:5/6).

Use of the words and terms 'dispassionate', 'get a sense of order', 'checking out ...and taking the right approach', 'to step back', 'not get so intense' is different from the personal advisers' talk of being 'anxious', of being 'desperate', having a 'crying need', being 'unable to sleep at night'. The language used by line managers here is probably linked to their desire to care for staff. There is a need for personal advisers to avoid over-close involvement in order to maintain their personal health and well-being. However, this concern is also placed within the wider constraints of other management tasks related to delivering a service. The third line manager interviewed used language that was closer to that used by personal advisers. 'Lorna' had worked as a Learning Gateway personal adviser before moving to her management role, and she felt that she had a real insight into the work:

Well I think the purpose is actually to support, to support the staff with (*pause*) the issues that they are having on a day-to-day basis, erm, and to have somebody to come to, to talk through caseloads, have somebody to share for, good and bad issues really. (*Pause*) And to offload to a certain extent. That is one of the main purposes I suppose, so that they are not in isolation, they can actually share what is going on in their day-to-day work, and the issues that arise (Line Manager 'Lorna', 2:17).

As will be discussed in a later chapter, 'Lorna' also operated within a management discourse that viewed support and supervision as one of many changes that were being implemented, however, she did not feel that using the issue of wider constraints was an adequate reason for not putting proper support structures in place sooner.

Then again 'Liz' noted,

But the work is draining after a while...people reach a point where it wouldn't matter what you put in place, they've had enough (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:35).

I did not 'read' this as a 'so why bother' comment in terms of support and supervision, but perhaps 'Liz's' thinking here is explained further in what follows:

I'm in a situation here now where I **know** there are people doing this work, professional staff, who don't want to be doing it and don't want to do it next year. But I need **someone** to do it...we do operate a system where people usually feel free to be able to say look it's time I had a change but nobody has said the other side – I really want this kind of work. Nobody's queuing up for it. Which means at the end of the day someone's got to do it, who isn't that keen (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:35/6).

All the line managers did mention how support and supervision would provide an opportunity to discuss the effects of the work and a chance to discuss workload. However, 'Liz' and 'Deirdre' paid great attention to the key theme of the affects of time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change. This will be developed further in chapter seven.

Line managers are speaking from a management perspective concerned with managing other staff and meeting wider demands on their energy and time. Nevertheless they did also pay tribute to the work of personal advisers, describing them in heroic terms, as 'staff that go that extra mile' (Line Manager 'Lorna', 1:11):

> I think those…that work with people who have such specialist needs are those people who have a trait in themselves that pushes them, and pushes, and pushes, and pushes them and they give everything that they can possibly give and then they find they've got nothing left for themselves at the end of it. And I do think that that's quite heroic in some ways. And if you can't recognise that then you, they're the people that you'll drive into the ground in the end (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:17/18).

So whilst there are differences in emphasis about the purpose of support and supervision it is important not to overstate these: line managers are very aware of the stressful nature of the work and the need for practitioner support.

One line manager and one personal adviser also said that the outcomes would depend on what was viewed as the purpose of support and supervision. This is closely linked to the rationale for the study and literature that suggests that defining purpose is both difficult and necessary to avoid misunderstandings.

According to the British Association for Counselling (BAC, 1988:1) the prime purpose of supervision is to improve work with clients. It is

assumed this improvement is an outcome of support and supervision. It is a potential outcome that managers and the professional representatives talked about more than practitioners in the study. Assessing the outcomes of supervision as it relates to work with clients is an area that is not well represented in the literature. The main focus of research studies is on defining purpose and process (Bambling, 2000:61), as it is here. With an increased focus on evidence based practice in the helping professions, the link with outcomes could become more important. However evaluating the effects of supervision from the client's perspective would have many ethical and practical difficulties.

Support and supervision has more than one function of course. Bronson states that supervision for career counselling has 'multiple purposes' (Bronson, 2001:223). Reynolds defines supervision in terms of its functions and also highlights how the literature stresses the importance of a professional relationship 'that aims to help the therapist and the client achieve better client outcomes' (Reynolds, 2001:33). She summarises the three main functions as:

> Monitoring – control, standards, managerial;
> Educational – theoretical and skills development; and
> Supportive – development of personal understanding and processing the client's impact on the therapist (Reynolds, 2001:34).

She goes on to note that the weight given to each of these activities will depend on the context and the level of experience of the practitioner. Certainly for the experienced practitioners in the study it is the supportive role that is seen as the primary purpose, rather than other functions given greater emphasis in the literature. Interestingly, Cottrell and Smith (2003:3) note that the frequently quoted work of Bernard and Goodyear (1998) in the area of psychotherapy makes no reference to personal support. Cottrell and Smith highlight the difference in emphasis

as to function that occurs across different professional fields. They write that in the field of nursing supervision, greater emphasis is placed on the function of **support** and less emphasis is placed on the control function of **supervision**. They conclude that 'there seems to have been little emerging consensus of definition over the last decade' (2003:4).

The supervision course tutor emphasised the importance of a shared understanding of the purpose of support and supervision for personal advisers working 'intensively' within Connexions. However, the central purpose was related to supporting clients, rather than support of practitioners:

> Well I suppose at the minimum, I would think about supervision in terms of its, its developmental purpose for a personal adviser...because it is critical that personal advisers are working safely and their duty of care to their clients erm, is being properly attended to (Professional Representative 'Matthew', 1:11).

'Matthew' then went on to talk about a continuum of function from 'softer to harder, slightly harder-edged purposes' (*ibid*), but again concluded that professional development was the prime purpose. The intensive support manager defined support and supervision with reference to a list of functions related to 'reflective practice', but emphasised the need for support for personal advisers in Connexions who are feeling at times, 'isolated, neglected and desperate' (Professional Representative 'Linda', 1:1).

The theme of professional development was very important for the representative of the professional institute. It needs to be noted that her professional perspective was influenced by a counselling rather than a guidance background. However, Sam felt that the Institute's view was 'very similar' to her own view.

'Sam' viewed support and supervision as an important vehicle for 'duty of care' to both clients and staff. She talked about the prevention of burn out and well-being of staff, but defined the purpose as,

> Erm, I'd probably go very much along the BAC guidelines. You know it's there to benefit the end person, the client. It is also there to safeguard the practitioner against things like stress etc. To assess benefits for both, primarily, I would say, the client (Professional Representative 'Sam', 1:2).

The Institute of Career Guidance briefing on support and supervision (ICG, 2003:7) quotes the report commissioned by the Connexions Service National Unit (Coleridge, 2002) who viewed the purpose of a model of supervision as being 'essentially... about development through critical reflective practice'. The primary purpose is to manage work with young people within ethical guidelines although the report notes, 'this process should be supportive so that personal advisers feel understood and valued in their work' (ICG, 2003:8).

It seems to be the case that support is viewed in a secondary role by managers and professional representatives, but is viewed overwhelmingly by practitioners in the study as the primary purpose of the practice. The importance of support needs for the personal advisers, rather than supervision of practice in relation to client benefit, suggests that the prime purpose for them is not the same as that expressed in codes of practice. In the code of practice for personal advisers (CSNU, 2003:8) supervision is directly related to competent practice rather than advisers' support needs. The British Association for Counselling (1988:1) states in its code that 'the primary purpose of supervision is to ensure that the counsellor is addressing the needs of the client'. This difference is reflected in other studies, for example McMahon and Patton (2000:347) in a study of supervision for career counsellors in Australia, found that,

Client welfare received little specific mention by participants, and was commented on by supervised guidance officers more than those from the other two groups.

As in previous studies (Borders & Usher, 1992; Roberts & Borders, 1994; Shanks-Pruett, 1991; Sutton & Page, 1994) support was cited as the predominant benefit of supervision. Many of the participants spoke of support in terms of emotional well-being, the reduction of stress and the prevention of burnout (2000:348).

Managing stress and preventing burnout was the key theme for personal advisers in this study and will be discussed in the next chapter

Having established the need and discussed views about purpose, this chapter will now consider **what** was needed. There are other minor themes related to 'who needs to be involved' and 'what methods were needed', that could form separate chapters, but word limits will restrict what can be said in this dissertation with its focus on the major themes.

## A structured process

What to call support and supervision was an issue discussed in the study. The consensus appeared to be that the words 'formal' and 'clinical' evoked images of appraisal, even where participants separated the definitions of support and supervision. As argued earlier, the preferred term in the study was structured. Copeland (1998:378) emphasises the need for a shared understanding of the meaning of supervision within organisational cultures and suggests that one of the first challenges to confront is the word 'supervision'. She suggests that in the context of counselling the connotation is one of 'collaborative working' whereas outside of a counselling context, meanings are more likely to be associated to hierarchical and managerial authority.

As part of a structured process, personal advisers viewed training for the role of supervisor as essential, 'because it's not a role that you can just pick up' (Personal Adviser 'John', 2:60). 'Kate' like 'John' is giving supervision without training and said,

> I'm working by instinct at the moment (*laughter in voice*). You know nobody's given me guidelines about what I'm supposed to be doing (Personal Adviser 'Kate', 1:26).

Line managers and the professional representatives also saw training for the role of supervisor as essential, and the latter group discussed the need for training for those in receipt of supervision so that they are properly prepared for the practice. However, like other professional development activities, training requires a large investment of time and energy. Managers are concerned about training fatigue for both new and experienced staff. As indicated by the line manager 'Liz' (1:40) personal advisers in Connexions may be coping with a new job, training for an initial professional qualification (i.e. the Qualification in Careers Guidance or National Vocational Qualification in Guidance) and for the Personal Adviser Diploma, simultaneously.

Line managers associated the need for a structured process to the management task of boundary setting for the role. This included clarity about the limits of expertise and when to refer to other agencies, in addition to boundaries around the amount of time that individual personal advisers could spend with clients:

> ...and whatever you feel ought to be happening, you've actually got to sit down and say look you've only got this amount of time, this is all you've got and if that means you've got to cut back on your meetings with young people, then that's what they've got to do (Line Manager 'Liz' 1:20/21).

Two of the line managers felt that a structured process was in place, because time had been made available for personal advisers to meet and discuss caseloads. There was recognition that 'the current activity was not working effectively' (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:25), but this was due to advisers being 'reluctant to build in regular meetings' into their work schedules. Where this 'reluctance' comes from will be discussed in chapter seven.

Another line manager expressed surprise and some confusion when I discussed the potential mismatch between personal advisers' views on the lack of support and supervision, and a management' view that provision had been made. Her management view was that the small peer group meetings for personal advisers provided adequate support. Personal advisers on the other hand, felt these meetings were about discussing client progress rather than how the work was affecting them.

We began this discussion by clarifying which Learning Gateway meetings were being criticised by personal advisers:

Deirdre:    I know where that's coming from, I think they're
            probably referring to a larger group which is a
            Learning Gateway Meeting for the whole company...

Hazel:      Well, no they're talking about those smaller meetings.

Deirdre:    Those smaller meetings as well, oh well that's
            interesting...The smaller meetings, well, I don't know I
            mean I know, I'm not sure...if they feel like that, I
            mean we can change that (Line Manager 'Deirdre',
            1:27/28).

When we returned to the subject later in the interview and I shared the view of personal advisers being 'desperate' (for example, 'Kate' 1:38) for support and supervision. 'Deirdre' responded,

Deirdre:    ...there seems, there is a kind of mis-match somewhere and I don't know what it **is**. Because I think from a management point of view, we want to be able to do what they're asking for and I **hate** the idea of people not being happy and feeling desperate for support, erm, so that kind of, it upsets me and concerns me (*looking very concerned and rather dejected*) and I do worry about that and how, I just don't know what to do about it because I don't really understand I suppose where, what they're saying, because sometimes I think well actually we **are** doing **that** erm...

Hazel:      Yes, but it's the perception...

Deirdre:    It's the perception...

Hazel:      I suppose of what support and supervision **is** and can do...

Deirdre:    And that, that's right. And I think if we're getting it wrong, then we need to get it right (Line Manager 'Deirdre', 1:51-53).

We went on to talk about how support and supervision is one of many changes to practice and that whilst practitioners understand the context of change, they are frustrated that structured supervision has not been put in place sooner. Deirdre reflected on the importance of support and supervision in line with other priorities:

Erm, you see I'm not even sure that it's being put off, if you like. Erm, I think we've got a problem. I think us as managers have got a problem in that we think that we are, we have delivered support, we

have provided something. I don't think we in this county have provided it in a very structured way but I think we are all doing similar things...erm, but if that isn't enough, then I think you know, we have a difficulty that we need to address quickly, because I don't know that it **is** on the agenda as such, so that makes it worse really (Line Manager 'Deirdre', 1:54/55).

In terms of structure, the literature supports the need for a negotiated contract for support and supervision (Bimrose and Wilden, 1994; Scaife, 2001; Bradley and Ladany, 2001; Holloway and Carroll, 1999). Shohet and Wilmot (1991:93) stress that it is **as** important to have a good relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. Without this they state any contract will not overcome an imbalanced power relationship between supervisor and supervisee, where the contract may conceal decisions about focus that are not, in practice, either negotiated or shared.

In discussing structure, personal advisers focussed on the need for clarity about what was available and for the process to be management led. It was clear in the study that personal advisers and their line managers viewed a mix of methods, which included one-to-one and peer group sessions, as desirable. Within this mix the need for *'ad hoc'* support and supervision was viewed as important as advice was often needed quickly. Overall the participants viewed group supervision whether facilitated by a peer or a manager as less helpful, although it needs to be stressed that their knowledge of methods was at the time of the study limited by their lack of experience of supervision practice.

**Who needs to be involved?**

There were mixed views about line managers giving supervision. Only one personal adviser viewed this as essential, other participants viewed supervision given by an experienced peer as preferable (experienced in the work and trained for the role). However all participants in the study

paid attention to the quality of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee.

A distinction was made by some between being a good adviser and being a good supervisor. Although many of the skills are the same, what makes a 'good' supervisor was seen to depend on a mix of personal qualities and training for the role. Both line managers and personal advisers spoke about the importance of a 'good' relationship in support and supervision to ensure safety and comfort. Without such a relationship difficult issues about the work may be hidden and not discussed.

In attempting to define what is meant by 'good' supervision, Weaks (2002:36) concluded that the supervisory relationship was fundamental to perceptions of what counted as 'good'. It was also suggested that not only did supervisees seek different things from supervision, but also the characteristics that led to definitions of 'a good supervisor' were also contested. It seemed that what was described as good supervision varied according to individual need and individual perceptions of the purpose of support and supervision.

Having a good relationship and a negotiated contract then does not remove the possibility of conflict. A range of factors, such as, anxiety, power, time constraints, social and professional backgrounds, can affect the development of the relationship. Shohet and Wilmot (1991:93) do not view conflict in the supervisory relationship as entirely negative as it can help to challenge both supervisor and supervisee, but this needs to take place within 'a clear agreement about styles of working' developed at the initial contracting stage.

**Summary**
The contested views about the function and potential outcomes of support and supervision, return me to the importance of sharing these different perceptions. Theory and policy will be informed by practice, as

the process of support and supervision is implemented and then developed. In the meantime what is put in place will be an improvisation based on this developing knowledge, with some enhancement from the Connexions supervision course. A sharing of understanding about purpose can help to inform the development of a structured process for the personal adviser role. That said, even where supervision is an established practice in other professions, there are many difficulties, well documented in the literature from other professional areas. Perhaps these difficulties need to be experienced for an informed practice to develop.

What is clear from an exploration of the need for a structured process for support and supervision is that differences in emphasis should be shared. In other words it should not be assumed that those that speak with a professional voice, or line managers of practitioners, or personal advisers, are all saying the same things. What they say and the emphasis they place on purpose or function is informed by their discursive position. Put another way, the particular work role influences the view about the purpose of support and supervision. For example when discussing conflicting views between practitioners and managers about the adequacy of what was provided, one line manager said,

> It is as if we're seeing it one way and they're seeing it a different way (Line Manager 'Deirdre', 1:56).

The next chapter will explore the theme of *managing stress and avoiding burn out*. As indicated earlier addressing the issues that arise from separate themes suggests these themes are distinct within the data. There are however no clear boundaries and there are times when what is discussed under one theme would fit as well into another. Part of the task of chapter seven will be to return to what appears to be the central story or key theme that emerged for each group.

## Chapter 6.  Managing stress and avoiding burn out

## Introduction

This chapter will consider the major theme of managing stress and avoiding burn out. This theme was important for both personal advisers and line managers in the study. The professional representatives made reference to the importance of this, but paid more attention to professional development and training issues. For the personal advisers it appeared as their central theme or story around which other secondary themes revolved. Line managers saw this theme as key but other issues linked to their wider management role influenced their view.

In describing the emotional impact of the work, personal advisers talked about 'sleepless nights' and 'walking the floor at night', as **real** physical effects. It was in discussions around these themes that participants also used evocative metaphors to explain their views about the impact of the work and the need for support. One personal adviser used a powerful metaphor about the weight of responsibility she carried for the role. The chapter will also refer to the sub themes of: *'am I doing enough or too much?'* and *'navigating unclear boundaries in a non-traditional guidance role'* (i.e. not career guidance). The discussion will begin by considering the themes of *stress and potential burn out* and *the emotional impact of the work.*

## Stress and potential burn out

Personal advisers use the term 'burn out' when discussing the stressful nature of the work. 'I've seen colleagues 'burn out', for lack of a better description' (Personal Adviser 'Norma', 1:17). 'John', in his role as lead adviser, talked about his concerns about colleagues and how he tries to 'keep on eye on how resilient the staff are.' (Personal Adviser 'John', 2:32).

In talking about the broad nature of the role, 'Kate' said,

I think there are, you know, I've come across PAs that really
haven't been able to cope and have left or become ill (Personal
Adviser 'Kate', 2:17/18).

In talking about her reaction to reading the transcript of her first
interview 'Kate' commented,

I actually used the 'D' word, didn't I, the desperate word.
(*Laughing*) Erm so and I was sort of quite shocked at my own
feelings surrounding that and last week I went on a really good
course. ... A lot of it was about dealing with stress and I didn't
realise until we sort of started getting really in to it and, and, talking
about issues, how stressed out I had actually become and we did
talk about supervision and the need to actually express your
feelings, to share feelings (Personal Adviser 'Kate' 2:21/22).

'Lesley' described reaching a point with the work where she felt
'saturated':

I'm still here obviously, I'm working with clients, I haven't gone
under yet, I've been close to it. Erm I've reflected and thought oh I
hope I haven't got burn out, er and then I'd bounce back, I'm OK
erm, but I don't know, I don't know (*voice trails off*) (Personal
Adviser 'Lesley', 1:19).

In the second interview, she said that at times she felt like a sponge that
needed squeezing out. Like other personal advisers in the study, she
viewed supervision as an opportunity for affirmation of her practice and
'for that squeezing'. Scaife (2001:50) notes that supervisors can play a
lead role in giving the helper 'permission' to take time to restore their
own well-being:

I do need a tap on the back to say yes that was OK. And OK let's
put that to one side because that's been dealt with. That's

squeezing it, that sponge. And that's what I see as supervision. I don't feel full to overload very often. In fact I haven't felt that way for a while now. It's interesting to hear you use the words burned out. Erm, because I have felt like that sometimes and have wondered what it was. I don't feel burned out at the moment so it must be a good day (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 2:82/83).

Personal advisers expect a certain amount of stress in the work but they do expect to be supported by the organisation. They all have informal networks that they use to 'de-stress' and many have, what they describe as, good working relationships with their line managers. Morrison (1993, in Scaife 2001) argues that practitioners in the helping professions expect to encounter some primary stress, but are 'far more distressed by the secondary stress arising from the organisation's response to them when this happens' (Scaife, 2001:31). In the study this is expressed as frustration that senior management have not put into place a structured supervision process. The Core Care counselling service is the solution offered, but this is counselling, not supervision and not widely used by 'stressed' practitioners.

Supervision on the other hand, can provide a 'restorative' function for personal advisers suffering from a sense of isolation and anxiety by offering a reflective 'space' in which to discuss these issues, so that they can be understood and ameliorated (Scaife, 2001:32). It needs to be noted that when helpers are experiencing stress this may affect their ability to 'think straight', both when working with a client and when working with a supervisor. Again this suggests the need for training for the role of supervisor in a profession where supervision is a novel practice.

'John' talked about resilience. It has been suggested in the literature that resilience is a core survival skill needed for the helping professions. For example, McMahon and Patton state:

Resilience, described as 'the capacity to adapt to a changing situation while maintaining and nurturing one's core self' [Miller, 1996:402], is clearly enhanced through participation in supervision (McMahon and Patton, 2000:349).

Burn out, performance fatigue, too much informal support and not enough formal support, all taking place in a target driven environment, will not enhance the development of lifelong learning or critical reflection (Bimrose and Wilden, 1994:382). If personal advisers operate without adequate support and supervision will they be resilient enough to manage the inherent stress of the work?

'Lesley' talked about the time she used the Core Care counselling service when she was feeling less resilient:

> I think my trauma was that I was concerned that erm, maybe I was weakening or not coping with this particular client group...the question was something like, you know, what's the process for supervision, who do you talk to about these things? And when I responded [to the questions asked by the Core Care adviser] we haven't got that in place yet, their response was that is something you need to get in place, this is why you are feeling the way you are (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 2:30).

'Lesley' is also supporting other staff although she has not received training for this role. She described this as an additional weight carrying the responsibility of, not just her own clients, but those of other personal advisers, 'I was carrying a lot of responsibility and didn't have anywhere to put it' (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 1:18):

> I do feel as though I've taken their concerns away from them and I've added them to my stock pile...I feel as though I take that and I add that to the pile but I don't give anything back...and I feel my pile starts to topple then...and that discussion often comes when

I'm already up to here (*touches forehead*) and I have a huge mountain that I have to do...there are times when I want to I suppose take a little chunk and say look I've got too much here can I just tell you about this/ can you deal with that? And I'll deal with this. I don't know, I think that's what I'd say. I often feel they're not all my clients but they might as well be (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 2: 42/43).

'Lesley' was one of the personal advisers where I felt it would be easy to stray into supervision rather than stay within the boundaries of research conversation. However, she did need to be listened to, she needed to tell the story of a colleague who was 'dumping' on her. Had she been trained to give supervision and had she been receiving supervision, she may have been better able to cope with her situation. At the time she did not have the knowledge or skills to supervise in a manner that, like work with clients, retained her separateness and well-being.

Line managers were aware of the stressful nature of the work and the potential for burn out. 'Liz' talked about how 'extraordinarily draining' it was 'working with people [clients] who are trying to move out of the downward spiral' (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:14):

Liz:        And I think there are times when sometimes people actually have to phone in and say they're sick. They need to rest and they need to sleep and, and that sounds a funny thing to say but they do actually need to sleep.

Hazel:      It's interesting that you say that because erm a personal adviser in the study said that 'I don't' her words were 'I don't think line managers understand that your clients can keep you awake at night'.

Liz:        I understand that perfectly but I know where she's coming from because to all intents and purposes (*pause*) er, I'm still asking people to carry on and...

Hazel:      Yes, because you have a bigger agenda.

Liz:        I would hate it to, to appear in any way shape or form, but at the same time I have said to people look, if you are not coping at the moment, then it's time you took a step backwards and that step backwards might actually be phoning in sick tomorrow or going home now and actually doing nothing for the afternoon except write down the things that are worrying you. And if you write them down then we come back and look at those another day when you're not so tired (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:14-16).

Whilst 'Liz' is clearly concerned about the well-being of her staff, the language of 'not being able to cope' and 'taking a day off sick' is negative and linked to images of competence and illness. It sounds like a last resort echoing the 'up against the wall' comment of one of the personal advisers. This does not sound like an organisation taking a thoughtful approach to, and active responsibility for, a 'duty of care' to their staff. For example, the Health and Safety Executive advocate that, with regard to work-related stress, employers should complete 'a suitable and sufficient risk assessment and then (to) implement any necessary measures identified by the assessment' (HSE, 2004:2).

'Liz' also talked about the previous lead personal adviser who 'has had burn out with the Gateway, has had enough. They didn't want to be that person anymore' (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:22). This personal adviser took part in the study and although rating the importance of support and supervision very highly, made no mention of their 'burn out'. This was surprising as we discussed the issue, but this may be an indication of

the unease that the personal adviser felt about this. It would be wrong to conclude this was due to 'shame' (Dryden *et al*, 1995:128) but nonetheless it suggests a lack of effective support processes which can help to deal with issues around competence and affirmation for personal advisers' practice.

In many helping professions supervision is part of the initial training programme where professional 'self-care' patterns can be established from the early stage (Dryden *et al*, 1995:128). This can help to manage harmful stress and prevent burn out. Personal advisers trained as career practitioners have management supervision whilst in training, but do not engage in the kind of support and supervision practice received by other professionals such as youth workers, social workers or counsellors. Dryden *et al* (1995:128) note that trainee and newly trained counsellors often do not admit even to themselves that they are experiencing stress due to work problems. They describe this as a 'shame-based' attitude. If an inability to cope is seen as a personal failing, this can continue to affect perceptions of competence even when people are more experienced.

McMahon and Patton (2002:224/5) cite a number of studies including their own, where the amount of time devoted to supervision was thought by participants to be inadequate and at times non-existent. In a study of school counsellors in Australia, they suggest that without supervision the stress of school counsellors was likely to increase and they question how school counsellors access support in the absence of supervision. The school counsellor model, where the role is wider than career guidance and encompasses broader guidance and counselling issues, is closer to the role of the personal adviser than the previous careers adviser role in England. In my study 'Deirdre' talked about a personal adviser who had been ill, burned out and had eventually left the company:

I had one person in particular who's left now, erm but who became very involved and took it all very personally and wasn't sleeping at night and you know, it was, it became very difficult and I think, you know we have to stop that somehow or another. At the end of the day this is a job not a lifestyle. And as much as, you know, the type of people that you employ, are those who really care about other people and desperately want to help but you have to maintain that kind of distance for it to work really (Line Manger 'Deirdre', 1:7).

'Deirdre' also talked about the importance of supervision for those giving supervision, 'so that equally the supervisor is not getting ever so involved with the practitioner...so that the supervisor doesn't go home and have sleepless nights' (Line Manager 'Deirdre', 1:44). A study of counselling supervision across a number of countries (Wheeler and King, 2000:287) noted that there is no known requirement for supervision of supervisory practice in the USA, Canada and Australia. It was found that ethical codes in New Zealand followed the British codes, which do include a requirement for supervision of supervision. At the current time supervision for personal advisers is not mandatory in England: the establishment of supervision for supervisors is likely to take longer.

That said it is discussed on the Connexions supervision course. The supervision course tutor emphasised the need for professional reflection and best practice, but added,

Maybe what is critical is that individuals have that space for that (pause) degree of facilitated reflection, which helps them to integrate what they are doing to deal with the stresses and strains, seek help and constructive feedback where they need it. Erm, I think ...not to support practitioners in that way would leave them quite vulnerable and open perhaps to the kinds of stresses and strains that could have adverse effects on both their practice and on them personally, if, if left unsupported (Tutor 'Matthew', 1:16).

The Institute briefing paper on supervision (ICG, 2003:12) quotes a chief executive of a Connexions partnership:

> But the process of review means you will have staff who are learning more, and going off less often because of stress. As an employer, the increased stress on staff is a considerable concern – we know that a good percentage of the days we lose through sickness can be put down to stress. If we can reduce that by bringing in support structures, it becomes more productive and benefits the service – as well as allowing personal advisers to analyse their approach and to change, adapt and improve the level of services to young people.

There is a focus here on learning, adapting and changing practice to benefit the client and the service. This may echo an organisational belief that only individually focused solutions for stress management need to be developed (Dewe, 2004:140). Responsibility for reducing stress should be a collaborative venture that takes into account the impact of the changes in working context that lead to stress for some individuals (Arthur, 2004:156). If it is to be a collaborative approach then support and supervision cannot be the sole responsibility of practitioners: the process would benefit from being management-led at a senior level. This leadership could ensure that time is given and 'ring fenced' for support structures to work effectively.

Elsewhere in the Institute briefing paper (ICG, 2003:13) the general manager of one of the geographical areas in my study claims to have 'peer support arrangements in place', which are viewed as 'very important', allowing discussion of professional issues. Much is made of the external support service (Core Care) for coping with stress. However the personal advisers interviewed viewed this as a **counselling** service, and only three of the ten had used it, and then 'when up against the wall'. Others who wanted support and supervision did not want to use Core Care, possibly due to the 'stigma' of

counselling. She also stated that the national Connexions supervision course 'will be helpful in developing the system we have and help us to explore whether we are spending adequate energy in that area or not' (ICG, 2003:13/14). This reads like 'talking up' the limited support that appears to be given in practice. The personal advisers in that area and the line manager did not feel that 'adequate energy' was being spent. The line manager in the study was referring to the whole company not just her geographical area, when she stated the organisation was 'just paying lip service' to the need for support and supervision (Line Manager, 'Lorna', 1:59/60).

**Emotional impact of the work**
It is difficult to separate a discussion about stress and potential burn out from talk about the emotional impact of the work, as the two are inextricably linked. Although separate codes in the analysis, combined they form the central theme for personal advisers and the second most important theme for line managers. Being affected emotionally by the work does not automatically lead to burn out. However, as Cooper notes (2003:57), 'truly emotionally engaged practice *is* exhausting' and practitioners need to have an opportunity to process their experiences, so that they can stay engaged.

The clearest indication of the way the work affects personal advisers emotionally, can be gauged from the repeated use of the expression 'not sleeping at night'. As stated earlier this is not a metaphor but a physical consequence of worrying about their work with clients. Line managers also recognised this effect of the emotional impact of the work, as in the quotes already used. Personal advisers however felt that many colleagues did not realise the degree of emotional impact involved in working with the 'harder-to-help' young people:

> I think it's the (*pause*) emotional impact that **is** hard. You can sort of see them thinking 'really'! Unless you do it erm, I don't say it is impossible to understand, but they don't seem to understand how

you can lie awake thinking about your clients (Personal Adviser 'Norma', 1:13).

'Jane' said that she didn't have a problem getting off to sleep but,

> ...usually it's first thing in the morning, you wake up and you, it runs through your mind, different things, that are obviously foremost in your mind, and that's when I think well, I must be under a fair amount of stress because I'm instantly thinking about work the minute I wake up (Personal Adviser 'Jane', 2:38).

'Mark' said,

> I think if you have an issue that you feel you can't resolve with a client, erm it sometimes leads to sort of stress in a kind of, you can't stop thinking about it...two cases, erm ones with particularly difficult issues that keep you awake or when you worry about it, erm... (Personal Adviser 'Mark', 1:15/16).

Lesley talked about 'walking the floor during the night' (2:24). She also described a difficult situation where she supported colleagues:

> Since I saw you last I think two complete Fridays, plus a Monday morning have been taken up with crises for different clients. You know that have involved the whole of the time, and not only the whole of the time but staying late Fridays as well... I had to ensure that the two people who had had to become involved until I got here erm, went home without it. But nobody made sure that I went home without it! (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 2:36/37).

'Kate' described a situation where she was working with a young client who was 'self-harming'. This was a new situation that she felt ill equipped to deal with, 'I had a complete lack of understanding about the issues'. She had to find out what to do very quickly because 'I was

frightened that this you know was going to lead to suicide and all sorts of things' (Personal Adviser 'Kate', 1:14).

Personal advisers will be emotionally affected by the stories their clients tell, and will need to understand that the impact of those emotions is not an indication of personal inadequacy (Morrissette, 2002:143). However, there will be times when personal advisers will need to consult others. Sometimes this may need to be immediate, but at other times this needs to be negotiated as part of a structured process for support and supervision.

'Lesley' told the story of work with one client that demonstrated how personal advisers are often working at the limits of their expertise. This story depicts the emotional impact and potential for stress in this 'intensive' work:

Lesley:     My problem [is] finding the right person to suggest that this young person does need some help and support. It's something that I find very difficult and I often find this with young people that I've been working with quite some time. The longer I've worked with them the stronger those vibes are, and I can only refer to them as vibes because I have no assessment tool to tell me otherwise, erm, but the stronger it becomes, and there was a time when I really did feel my young man had a quite severe problem, and I tried to encourage him to speak with his GP. I offered him support to do that, erm offered to write to his GP providing he gave me permission but, you know, brick wall all the way through and that young man was, erm, luckily it was a happy ending. That young man was actually lifted out of the river and diagnosed schizophrenic and that's the only time he got the help he needed. And yet for **weeks and weeks** I had been

carrying this and working with him to try and
encourage him, but I couldn't say he was at risk or
that it was a confidentiality thing I had to break, 'cos I
hadn't got anything to work with. No, I just had
feelings, vibes.

Hazel:      How did you feel after the event, when he was...

Lesley:     I felt victorious because my young man was in
            hospital and he, and he was arrested under the
            Mental Health Act.

Hazel:      He was sectioned?

Lesley:     He was sectioned, yes that's the word, erm, but he
            got the treatment he needed.

Hazel:      And was there an opportunity when you were going
            through that process erm, to talk that through with
            anybody?

Lesley:     The only person I talked it through with was erm a
            trainer at the training centre where he was
            participating in a Lifeskills programme at the start of
            the Learning Gateway...

Hazel:      But there was nobody to offer you support and
            supervision for that?

Lesley:     No, no (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 1:24-27).

The case of Anthony Smith, a man suffering from a severe mental
illness who killed his mother and half-brother, is discussed by King and
Wheeler (1999:215/6). The subsequent inquiry (SDHA, 1996) criticised

both the counsellor and the counsellor's supervisor for not recognising the problem in supervision. This raises many issues around the organisation's, the supervisor's and the practitioner's responsibility for the work and the 'duty of care' to both client and practitioner. Personal advisory work is not counselling but there are similarities (Westergaard, 2003). In discussing 'mentally unstable clients' King and Wheeler (1999:223) state that, 'difficult situations in counselling can best be avoided if counsellors are good at doing assessments'. But 'Lesley' felt that she did not have the experience or tools for that assessment work: she proceeded on 'vibes'.

Lesley's story illustrates the point made by Newman (2001:10) that personal advisers will find themselves working in challenging situations where 'challenging becomes a euphemism for disturbing and dangerous'. Similarly it highlights the claim made by Watts (2002:45) that the early development of Connexions did not pay enough attention to the support needs of the personal adviser when placed in such difficult situations. Lesley uses the word 'trauma', and is not talking figuratively when she says her client 'was lifted out of the river'.

Respondents in King and Wheeler's study saw it as the supervisor's role 'to help tease out some of the issues... they would ask pertinent questions to elicit more detail, if there was an element of risk or danger attached to the work presented' (1999:223). No-one was asking 'Lesley' pertinent questions. At the current time personal advisers consult others **if they need to**, rather than discuss issues within a structured process timetabled into their work schedule.

**Sub-themes: have I done enough?/ navigating unclear boundaries in a non-traditional role**
As mentioned previously line managers talked about the 'heroic' work of personal advisers where staff, 'go that extra mile' (Line Manager 'Lorna' 1:11). They see a need to monitor personal adviser 'over-involvement' to ensure practitioner well-being, standards of practice and to manage

the limited resources in terms of time. Personal advisers in the study reflect on their work and often ask the questions 'have I done enough / could I do more?' They do appear to have a clear sense of the boundaries of their own expertise, but some are concerned about trainee staff and whether they, the trainees, 'do too much'. These were significant sub-themes closely related to the major themes discussed above.

Looking back on the time when the Learning Gateway personal adviser posts were created, personal advisers talk about 'being on a steep learning curve'. The role is much broader than the traditional role of a career guidance practitioner: the professional role they trained for. In the interviews they talk of defining the role as they developed their work practices. It is clear that networking with agencies has been very important in enabling them to help their clients beyond their career guidance needs. However, it should not be assumed that this networking is without its difficulties as other agencies have different professional training routes, different working practices and cultures and different views of the client relationship. As shown in other studies of school counsellors (McMahon and Patton, 2002:225), informal support networks were also valued highly, even though opportunities to meet with colleagues in similar work roles were limited in the study.

Although the personal advisers in the study were clear about the need to refer a client when they were unable to help with a particular issue that was beyond their current knowledge, they often ask themselves the question 'could I do more?'. It seemed it was the 'have I done enough/ could I do more?' questions that often produced the sleepless nights. It was also clear that for many they were the expert in their centre. In other words, seeking help from a line manager was useful only to the extent they could confirm that action taken was fine in terms of a policy view:

I'm sure my line manager would be the first to say that you're much more experienced with this client group than I am (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 1:18).

My manager here is very approachable. I mean I know in fact that sometimes I just come in and let off steam to him and he'll you know, he'll give me time, he'll always listen to me. He says, you know, 'there, there' and he makes the right noises...And actually he makes it quite clear that he doesn't want my job! (Personal Adviser 'Anne', 1:15/16).

Whilst the 'letting off steam' is important, it sounds like reassurance rather than empathy born of an understanding of the work. Reassurance is less helpful and can feel like 'a mild rejection and may ultimately only reassure the reassurer' (Rushton and Nathan, 1996:371). Empathy is part of containment defined as,

The capacity of the supervisors to deal with the frequently intense thoughts and feelings the worker presents, and which arise from concern about [in this case] the maltreatment of children, without themselves becoming overwhelmed or paralysed. Containment is dependent on empathy: the ability to *hear and acknowledge* what the practitioner is saying (Rushton and Nathan, *ibid, emphasis in the original*).

'Anne's' manager also attended their Learning Gateway meetings but,

I think he doesn't ask enough [questions] actually...because he doesn't feel qualified to almost, I think if he went on a course on supervision he would be more effective...it's almost like I have to keep reassuring him! (Personal Adviser ' Anne', 1:19/20).

In a study of child protection supervision this lack of expertise of line-managers, in some cases, meant that front-line workers 'were deprived

of an authority figure they could rely on and instead had one they had to look after' (Rushton and Nathan, 1996:371). Hawkins and Shoet (1989) recommend that if line managers are giving supervision they should also have a client caseload, so that they have a clear understanding of the situations faced by practitioners, as well as the experience to guide supervisees appropriately.

Personal advisers in the study have encountered a range of boundary issues related to working intensively with the 'harder-to-help'. These include working with multiple problems beyond career guidance with its focus on education, training and employment. Problems can be related to general health, mental health, housing, finance, drugs, crime, sexual behaviour, family and other social relations. They have to negotiate between the individual and other agencies and often between the individual and their family and peer networks. They also have to work with colleagues in their places of work who do not fully understand their role, and with line managers who are not trained to give structured support and supervision. It seemed personal advisers were constantly navigating unclear boundaries in a non-traditional role.

## Summary

In this chapter I have looked at the theme of managing stress and avoiding burn out. I have used a number of quotes from the interviews that add the richness I was keen not to lose in the writing up of the analysis of those conversations. Participants had much to say about their relationship with line managers and how this would be affected if the line manager gave support and supervision. There are sections of the transcripts that could be discussed in terms of their views about keeping supervision separate from counselling and the Core Care service offered by the company.

These issues, related to line-management supervision, are linked to how they manage the stressful nature of the work and their need for 'safety, comfort and confidentiality' in the supervisory relationship.

Personal advisers talked about how support and supervision would be a way of 'affirming' their work, which is often carried out in isolation of other work at the centre. Support and supervision was viewed as offering the potential to celebrate achievement in a role where achievements with clients can be very small and will not meet the NEET targets (not in education, employment or training), which are becoming increasingly significant for Connexions' work (DfES, 2004a:10).

For personal advisers the theme of managing stress and avoiding burn out, whilst navigating unclear boundaries in a non-traditional role, is the central story that 'shines through' all the interviews. Maintaining ethical boundaries using professional common sense, codes of ethics and supervisory practice could form a separate chapter. Such issues were also very important for line managers, although set within a wider agenda of managing other staff and other work contracts. That theme of the bigger picture and associated time constraints is the subject of the next chapter.

Before moving to the next chapter I will conclude here with a reference to the theoretical framework of discourse theory. The professional representatives chose to speak more about issues linked to reflective practice, ethical maintenance and professional development. These 'discursive positions' taken on support and supervision will be the focus of chapter eight. In this analysis it seems that what participants said, regarding the purpose of support and supervision, was related to their level of engagement with practice. Personal advisers' view of their support needs was based on their direct experience of this difficult work.

Line managers, who did not have case loads, echoed this need but referred to other training, ethical (meeting standards) and management issues. Professional representatives, who are further removed from practice, used the language of professional development and reflective practice, and were more likely to make reference to ethical codes. It seemed that the professional representatives, who were furthest away

from practice, were more aware of, and likely to 'borrow' from, the discourses on supervision taken from other professions. These professional discourses often have a greater focus on the needs of clients than the needs of practitioners.

## Chapter 7. Time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change

### Introduction

This third chapter on findings will consider the theme of time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change and the effects on the provision of support and supervision. This was an important theme for both line managers and the professional representatives in the study. Personal advisers did talk about the constraints of time and how 'busy practice' meant that the time for support meetings became 'squeezed'. However, the emphasis placed on the theme varied between the groups, and this will be discussed in the chapter. Also discussed is the sub-theme for line managers of *meeting the contract* that is, servicing the wider contract for the whole service not just the Learning Gateway initiative.

The chapter will conclude with a summary of the three main themes that emerged from the analysis of the data with comments on validity and generalizability. The three main themes will be explored with reference to discourse theory in the synthesis that follows in chapter eight.

### Time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change

As discussed in previous chapters line managers supported the need for a structured process for support and supervision. They also acknowledged that the job is stressful and that support structures needed to be enhanced. However, time is an issue and one that exercised them in the study. A Connexions' chief executive stated that adequate support and supervision needs extra time built in to the working day, and therefore 'more personal advisers' (ICG, 2003:11) to deliver the contracted work.

Reflecting on what was already in place 'Liz', a line manager in the study stated,

**Liz:** The only thing that I can do is to say that there are afternoons, and... either on that afternoon or at a different time, that there has to be on a regular basis, smaller meetings so that, (*long pause*), it's difficult because I can't **make** more time, I can only **suggest** that they try to get a weekly/fortnightly meeting together and there are ways in which they can do that, but every single one of them is pushed. And I think my expectations are that these things will happen and it's not always the case that that does happen, or that it's a rushed meeting because of other work loads...they need to write some of these things into a, erm, a daily schedule so that they don't put something else in its place.

**Hazel:** Yes. What I'm thinking as you're saying this...from a practitioner's point of view, that for them it's a question of priorities... I suppose from a practitioner's point of view they may be looking...to higher management, may be, to say this **must** happen, rather than this **should** happen. I wonder what your view about that is?

**Liz:** I think that's a tricky one because (*pause*) there certainly needs to be time built in. It, it's not something that should be skipped over or left. Senior management will, will give, or **have** given over the last year an allocation of time. Not to the meetings but an allocation of time to centre-type work and Learning Gateway in particular. Erm, I have, I've been working without sufficient staff for the last 18 months and that's because of long-term sickness or because they've left and haven't been replaced yet. So what it's meant is that everybody in some way has their

time restricted, because they're **all** doing a **little** bit of somebody else's job (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:8-11).

Liz would probably agree with the chief executive that more personal advisers are needed, but to deliver the core contract; further time 'freed-up' for supervision would need to follow this. The reasons for 'long-term sickness' or retention problems was not explored in the above exchange, but needs further consideration. I questioned this use of allocated time with a personal adviser who worked in the same centre,

> Hazel:     Erm, how much of that time does get used to look at things in a reflective way? Or does that space get filled up with the 'rubble', for want of a better word, of other, you know, operational stuff?

> Mark:     Erm, I'll go for the latter (*laughing*) (Personal Adviser 'Mark', 2:18).

Mark's view was echoed by other personal advisers who felt the time was more likely to be used 'catching up with paper work and phone calls etc' than in support meetings. Reflecting further on the constraints of time within the wider agenda, 'Liz' commented,

> Most good staff believe it's the client that should come first and what they battle with is doing the admin that goes with it. However the admin is as important to **me** and to the company because without the admin, we can't prove the statistical data that supports the contracts and therefore the money to pay everybody's wages (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:12).

What is implied here is that being a 'good' member of staff means putting the client's well-being before your own. Personal advisers who

do try to engage in support activities state that if a client needs you, your meeting will be cut short or cancelled:

> I mean we had a session booked in with somebody on Friday, and we had to squeeze it in at 9 o'clock in the morning before the first client arrived at 9.30. As it happened the client arrived early, so we didn't get the supervision. It's kind of the last thing on the agenda... it's not seen as important enough (Personal Adviser 'Kate', 1:27).

The above is indicative of a culture within the Learning Gateway, dealing with 'harder-to-help' clients, that if you are there you are always available to the client. It would seem that to avoid this problem, time for support and supervision needs to be 'ring fenced' by senior management, along with a change in culture that views support systems as a right rather than an indulgence. Even when this takes place, Rushton and Nathan (1996:361) found in a study of managerial supervision in child protection work, that 'immediate pressures', emergencies, often took precedence so that the aim for targeted time was not met.

There is a concern in the careers company used in the study, expressed by its training manager, that time may be 'wasted in sessions when they might not be needed by the individual' so that 'the benefits to clients and staff would need to be very clear to justify this level of investment' (Duncan, 2001:11). The literature on evaluation of the benefits of support and supervision, as discussed previously, may not offer the degree of clarity sought here. Although there is evidence of personal benefit in the literature, it cannot be concluded that support and supervision is the only option for meeting requirements related to professional standards and personal development (McMahon, 2003:185).

Informal methods of support were valued by the personal advisers in the study. 'Kate' talked about the informal meetings with a peer, which she

viewed as providing her with a valuable element of support and supervision. However, this informality can result in personal advisers viewing this as an indulgence:

> I do feel a bit selfish taking up her time you know, talking about my things really, but she's more than happy to do it you know, and there are a couple of people that I'm dealing with at the moment who are very, very difficult so I do actually talk to her about those people...Traditionally you feel, you know, it's a bit self indulgent to be doing this (Personal Adviser 'Kate', 2:27).

This is part of a 'getting on with the job' discourse that is found in other time-pressured professions. For example, Cottrell and Smith (2003:5) in discussing supervision for nurses in the UK, refer to evidence that suggests that nursing seems to have difficulty with any practice that evokes 'indulgence'.

Finding time **within** busy practice is the issue of course. Inskipp and Proctor (1993) use the analogy of negotiating 'pit head time'. Miners had to gain agreement from their managers to be allowed time within the working day to 'wash off the dust of their labours' (Scaife, 2001:73). It requires a change of ethos within careers/Connexions companies to sanction that this time can be used not just for managerial supervision (i.e. looking at meeting standards and personal development – the *normative* and *formative* functions (Inskipp and Proctor,1993)), but also for expressing feelings, doubts, insecurities and mistakes. This is the third part of the model put forward by Inskipp and Proctor and is referred to as the *restorative* function of supervision.

The restorative function requires comfort, safety and trust, and is dependent on a good working relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Time pressures cannot be ignored however, and Scaife notes (2001:74) that sessions that are high on the restorative function are far less structured than those that focus on normative and formative

functions. In addition, the effectiveness in terms of measurable outcomes is likely to be less obvious. However, providing a restorative space within time allocated for supervision can help practitioners to deal with the strong emotions that they may need to express, and can avoid serious issues being hidden in supervision. They may struggle to express these emotions: the supervisor will need patience and good listening skills.

To manage the restorative function, a trained supervisor should be aware of the phenomenon of parallel process, where the supervisee may be acting out, 'mirroring', the emotions felt in work with clients within the supervisory relationship (Carroll, 1996: 203). One way of addressing this is to ask the supervisee to focus on what happened in the session with the client so that they can focus on the 'there and then', rather than the 'here and now' (Scaife, 2001:156), as the 'here and now' version is likely to be a modified account. These are complex issues, amongst many others, which emphasise the importance of a serious commitment to time and training if services are to do more than 'pay lip service' to support and supervision. Without this investment in time it will be even more difficult perhaps to see 'the benefits to clients and staff' (Duncan, 2001:11).

Personal advisers are aware of the time constraints on line managers and this is understood to be part of the reason why support and supervision has not been put in place. Even when they were highly critical of the lack of what they viewed as appropriate support structures, they often qualified their comments by reference to time pressures. The personal adviser who had given supervision in a previous work role acknowledged this and added,

> You know you can only take (*pause*) small steps forward because it's quite difficult to go from no supervision to building a support system (Personal Adviser 'Yvonne', 1:16).

During the course of the study, 'Eve' had moved from a personal adviser role working in the Learning Gateway, to become a Connexions personal adviser. She had youth work experience also and was aware of the process for 'proper' support and supervision. Although critical of the careers company and their tardiness in developing structured support, she ended her second interview by stating,

> I wouldn't want to leave anyone with the impression that I didn't feel I was getting supported by line managers or by colleagues, because you know that wasn't the case... I really hope what you're doing ...will enable, you know, an improvement to be made (Personal Adviser 'Eve', 2:33/34).

It might be thought that one time saving solution would be to offer more group, or peer, support and supervision opportunities. However, neither personal advisers nor line managers viewed this as an effective use of time for practitioners' **support** needs. Webb and Wheeler (1998:516) in a large-scale quantitative study found that counsellors were more able to discuss sensitive issues in one-to-one supervision. Alongside this practitioners may be concerned about 'the problem to claim space' and how they may present themselves to others in group supervision (Dryden and Thorne, 1991:139). However if one-to-one supervision is line-management led this can also send the practitioner 'into a state of hiding' (Dryden et al, 1995:118) if monitoring performance is perceived to be the main function. The need to share understanding of purpose is again paramount here, particularly in a profession where the managerial role of supervision for trainees has dominated (Bimrose and Wilden, 1994:378). In discussing the need for the understanding of purpose to be shared, Webb and Wheeler (1998:511) suggest,

> discomfort and conflict are likely if a supervisor's approach does not resonate with a supervisee's needs.

However, in the need to stress the complexities of the practice there is a danger that this can lead to further delays to implementation. What is suitable in terms of methods may take prolonged negotiation (Bimrose and Wilden, 1994:379). Therefore, offering a mix of methods would be a good place to start when introducing support and supervision systems.

'Deirdre' talked about how trying to introduce support systems gets 'caught up with' all the other changes that were taking place, where support and supervision 'gets pushed out' (Line Manager 'Deirdre', 1:36 /53). In her second interview I shared with her the metaphor used by another line manager, when explaining the process of time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change:

> Hazel: Somebody described it a bit like trying to set sail in the QE2, and every time you go in one direction something changes and something like support and supervision kind of slipped off the agenda...

> Deirdre: Yes I think that's right, it's not that people don't see it's important, we know that it is an important part, but when you have contracts to bid for, you know, we need to keep staff, therefore we need to make sure that everything is in place to enable us to do that, **then** we will look after them, and that's, I don't think people think it through like that, and if you asked any of the senior management team, they would say that supervision and care of staff is **absolutely vital**. But you're right it's slipped off the end of the agenda because other things are just, just...

> Hazel: In-your-face?

> Deirdre: ...**they are** and 'this has got to be done by the end of the week'... (Line Manager 'Deirdre', 2:6/7).

Although 'Deirdre's' frustration can be heard here, 'people don't think it through like that' it seems that the priorities are clear. The support needs of the personal advisers take second place to the need to gain and maintain contracts. This is arguably a pragmatic approach, but does not fit well with a 'duty of care' to staff and is ignoring the potential implications of unsupported practice in this area of work.

'Lorna', with her first hand experience of the work, also acknowledged the effects of time constraints in a bigger picture of constant change. However, her view was that senior management were paying 'lip service' to support and supervision, and this needed to change:

> I think as managers we **need** to make sure that that [time for support and supervision] is put into place. That we do it regularly, talk to them. I am a great believer though that whatever the resources, that we should be allowing, really, daily contact with a supervisor, and **whatever** our constraints are I think we are preventing a lot of problems in the future (Line Manager 'Lorna', 1:41/2).

'Liz', like all three line managers in the study, struggled with the need to be available for all staff, and could not envisage being able to meet the individual support needs of all personal advisers:

> Liz:        I mean I'm quite aware that what we do here in this area, or what I do here, could be done better. There's **no doubt** about that erm...

> Hazel:     Would you say it was adequate?

> Liz:        I would say that given the amount of time that I've got to deal with it, it **just** about fits the bill, but there are times when it doesn't and I **know** it doesn't. Erm, but there **is** a problem because I am, I try to be there for

**every** person who needs me and Learning Gateway
is only part of a very big caseload in a way (Line
Manager 'Liz', 1:42/43).

Line managers also placed an emphasis on the effective use of time
when discussing the work of personal advisers, as 'there are always on-
going developments, you've always got something else that you've got
to be aware of' (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:44). The recent evaluation of
Connexions (DfES, 2004a:6) calls for a greater analysis of interventions
by personal advisers to assess the effective use of their time.

In 'Liz's' area the new post of intensive support manager was put in
place in September 2003. I interviewed this person as part of the
professional community group but did not record the interview, however,
she agreed with my notes written after the meeting. She felt that it would
be some time before the role was functioning properly as her current
activity was confined to 'fire-fighting'. She stated that many Connexions
personal advisers in the area had been placed in jobs whilst still training
and had other more pressing needs, which did not allow them to 'free
up' time for support and supervision. My notes conclude,

It will be some time (6 months to 1 year) before formalised support
and supervision will be embedded for intensive [Connexions] PAs
in this area. Of necessity longer before this takes place for other
PAs, although Learning Gateway (or E2E) PAs would appear to be
near the head of the queue (Notes of meeting with Intensive
Support Manager, July 2003).

During the study, no such post, or immediate plans for such a post, was
evident in the other regions visited in this careers/Connexions company.

The professional representatives also paid attention to the theme of
time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change. 'Sam'
located her comments within a professional discourse that emphasised

'duty of care' to both clients and practitioners. She felt there was a need for employers to monitor what was happening in terms of staffing:

> There's already anecdotal evidence of people who are leaving, isn't there. Erm. It's interesting. I think unless you monitor that, it goes back to employers – do good exit interviews and pick that sort of trend up and you'll be able to manage it. It fits back in to, you know, it links to so many things [within a bigger agenda] (Professional Representative – ICG 'Sam', 1:5/6).

'Sam' was also critical of careers companies who claimed to have met the agenda and put support and supervision in place. Her comments reflect a view that sees support and supervision as concerned primarily with competence: she described this as a deficiency model:

> [At a conference] one of the interesting things that came out...one of the careers service companies...had actually put it in place, in their view, but it was **counselling** the practitioners because they weren't performing. And when you've got complications like that around it, well, 'so you're struggling; **you** must need some counselling, go off and get some'! (Professional Representative – ICG 'Sam', 1:8).

Part of the difficulty in implementing support and supervision for guidance practitioners, particularly in the move to Connexions is due to the diverse background of personal advisers. Some practitioners, for example with a youth work qualification, may have experience of the practice of support and supervision. Any model put into place will need to take account of these differences in experience. The tutor 'Matthew' agreed this was a difficulty, but cautioned against assuming those with some experience had received effective supervisory practice, as, '**what they are practising is an entirely different matter**' (Professional Representative – Tutor 'Matthew', 1:9)

The above argument could not be applied to the personal advisers in the study who are all, bar one, from a career guidance background. In the bigger picture, then, it seems in many companies, management think they have allocated time and provided access to supervision, but there is often confusion between what is personal counselling and what is work supervision. A similar picture is painted in the Institute of Career Guidance Briefing (ICG, 2003:10,12,13), although some services do make a distinction about allocating time for support, and the provision of an external counselling service as an **additional** structure (ICG, 2003:14).

The imposed constraints on time were also felt in the design of the Connexions' supervision course:

> But the facts are that the course was really changed by CSNU [Connexions Service National Unit] as originally the course planning team wanted a course that would extend over seven and a half days, and CSNU made a judgment, as I recall, that that was excessive in terms of the operational impact that that would have: given everything else that was happening with the diploma and UCX [Understanding Connexions] courses and so on, and they were restricting it to four days (Professional Representative – Tutor 'Matthew', 1:1).

It seemed that even at the training stage the message is that support and supervision can be too time-consuming. The tutor believed the course needed the full seven days,

> The decision… to turn the seven day course into four brought new constraints, er…four contact days for a 20 credit course is minimal to put it mildly (Professional Representative – Tutor 'Matthew', 1:2).

'Ethical watchfulness' (Reid, 2004), through the understanding and application of ethical codes (CSNU, 2003) was of less importance to

personal advisers than professional common sense. Line managers talked about 'ethical watchfulness' in terms of standards and codes, but the professional representatives placed greater emphasis on the use of codes in practice. That said the professional representatives balanced the need for codes with a need for 'professional common sense'. The following excerpt from 'Matthew's' interview highlights the need for practitioners to have access to support and supervision, in addition to common sense, and for time to be invested in the practice. His words may also echo the concerns of Bradley *et al* (2000:356) who question how common sense can be evaluated as consistent across a professional group:

> Well I think that everybody needs professional commonsense. I don't think it's an either/or ...The question is I think, when personal advisers, whether they are career specialists or not, are working with young people and for er, their families or carers... and getting involved in complex situations er, is it sufficient in terms of supporting them, **only** to give them recourse to their commonsense, their professional commonsense, if they, if they have it?... Erm, I think if there is to be a real commitment to achieving best practice, and safe practice in terms of working with young people, **not** to support practitioners in that way would leave them quite vulnerable, and open perhaps to the kinds of stresses and strains that could have adverse effects on both their practice and on them personally if left unsupported (Professional Representative – Tutor 'Matthew', 1:15/16).

**Meeting the contract**

The professional representatives recognised the constraints of time but did not discuss the pressure faced by line managers of meeting contractual requirements. As is shown in some of the quotes from line managers above, this part of the bigger picture is a priority for them and their senior managers. All three line managers talked about this in specific terms as part of managing time constraints in the bigger picture

of constant change. They are all concerned about career guidance practitioners that want to remain within a school careers adviser/personal adviser role, and what will happen when the contracts change and staff will be forced to move into wider roles. An excerpt from 'Lorna's' transcripts will illustrate this:

> ...the people that I've got doing the Learning Gateway PA work now are the ones that actually want to do it. The others just don't want to touch it with a bargepole ...it's going to be difficult with Connexions...At the moment they are in a nice cosy position in being able to, to stay doing their school work but it's not going to go on (*laughing*) for ever (Line Manager 'Lorna', 2:64, 66/67).

Or as 'Liz' stated,

> I'm in a situation now where I know there are people doing this work, professional staff, who don't want to do be doing it and don't want to do it next year. But I need **someone** to do it (Line Manager 'Liz', 1:35).

Whilst acknowledging the impact of time constraints, constant change and the need to gain and maintain contracts for 'survival', it is important not to lose sight of the benefits at an organisational level of structured support and supervision. These are recognised by line managers and their senior managers, but the day-to-day reality for them makes these 'bigger issues' more pressing. The benefits are summarised in the Institute of Career Guidance briefing paper on support and supervision (ICG, 2003:3), which quotes from an earlier Institute of Career Guidance' survey (Hulbert, 2000).

> 'The findings overwhelmingly confirm the need for support and supervision in order to reduce health problems associated with the work environment...' ...costs could be set against the savings that would accrue from reduced staff turnover due to 'burn out' and

absences from work caused by stress. It would also help guard against 'the ever increasing risk and cost of litigation'.

Wider issues connected to 'risks and cost of litigation' were discussed in terms of record keeping in support and supervision. The initial reaction from all but one personal adviser and all three line managers was that records, however brief, should not be kept. In the case of Anthony Smith, discussed previously, (King and Wheeler, 1999:216) there was no supervisory record. This meant the inquiry although critical of the supervisory practice in the particular case, had to leave the question of culpability open. If an incident in the Learning Gateway or Connexions led to litigation, under the process of vicarious liability the organisation would be called to account in any legal proceeding and may have to produce records. Moreover, Morrissette notes (2001:27) that a complete absence of records increases the likelihood that a supervisor will be summoned as a witness. These are issues that need to be considered in any contractual process for support and supervision.

Returning to the Institute of Career Guidance' report, it concluded that support and supervision is high on the agenda and that supervision training courses 'should result in the support available to career and personal advisers working with hard to help clients improving over the next few years' (ICG, 2003:15). When considering the complex issues discussed in this chapter, the professional institute that represents the majority of career guidance practitioners in the statutory sector, could have adopted a harder and more critical view. The next few years, sounds like a long wait for personal advisers who claim they are 'desperate for supervision' ('Kate' 1:38): after all 'desperate' is a very strong word!

**Conclusion and summary of chapters five, six and seven.**
In this chapter I have explored the theme of time constraints within a bigger picture of constant change, and how this has affected the

provision of support and supervision for career guidance practitioners working as personal advisers in the Learning Gateway.

Chapters five, six and seven have been devoted to a discussion of the three major themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. I have also related the findings to the literature reviewed in chapter two, and to 'new' literature sources on the topic of support and supervision. To summarise, the diagram 7:1 shows the central theme for each of the three groups. I have related the central theme to the *formative, normative* and *restorative* functions as defined by Inskipp and Proctor (1993). As said earlier in this dissertation, these themes **appear** to be the most important, although I acknowledge that what participants chose to talk about to some extent will have been affected by the questions posed. It also needs to be noted that support and supervision systems are being developed, and participants' thinking will have developed since completion of the study. That said the introduction of adequate systems for support and supervision is a long way from being implemented within **all** services, and even further away from being implemented for **all** personal advisers.

Finally, in terms of validity I would concur with Bassey's point (1999:74) that, 'The concepts of reliability and validity are vital concepts in surveys and experiments – but not in case study research'. I have however, aimed for 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: chapter 11) and rigour. Bias cannot be avoided in qualitative research, but this does not mean a rigorous approach cannot be adopted (Ezzy, 2002:51). The central story for each group does not **merely** emerge; selection has taken place about what was most meaningful for the participants. The writing up of findings is itself an act of constructing meaning. With more time (and had I thought about it earlier) I could have shared parts of this final report with participants. Hopefully, my 'trustworthiness' can be confirmed via the inclusion of quotes used in an attempt to provide a 'richness' that will enable readers to recognise the 'truth' in the stories presented.

**Diagram 7:1 The central story for each group**

For Personal Advisers:

The <u>central</u> purpose of support and supervision is to:

Manage stress and avoid burn out.

*The emphasis is on the 'restorative' function.*

For Line Managers:

The <u>central</u> purpose of support and supervision is to:

Manage stress, avoid burn out and monitor performance. But, provision is affected by time constraints within a bigger picture of organisational change.

*A mix of 'restorative' and 'normative'*

For the Professional Representatives:

The <u>central</u> purpose of support and supervision is to:

Enhance professional development within the bigger picture of organisational change.

*A mix of 'formative' and 'normative' functions.*

The study was based on a single case, bounded by profession, geography and time. I cannot make claim to wider scientific generalizations, but, as discussed in chapter three, have sought to make 'fuzzy generalisations' (Bassey, 1999:12). I have also tried not to make unsupported assertions based on what is a relatively small database. Stake (1995: 7/8) expressed concerns about generalizations,

> Case study seems a poor basis for generalization... the real business of case study is particularization.

Conclusions arrived at are the results of my engagement with this particular case study: different findings may have been apparent to another researcher. Within a post-structuralist framework the term 'findings' is problematic, as it suggests outcomes that are fixed rather than provisional. Although I have endeavoured to 're-present' as closely as possible the perspectives of participants, I recognise that the categories chosen and themes presented here are of my own construction. That is not an apology however; in looking in some depth at what is *particular* to this case, I hope to provide insight into what *may be universal* for others.

The three main themes explored in chapters five, six and seven, will be examined further with reference to discourse theory in the next chapter.

# Chapter 8. Synthesis: discursive positioning and the purpose of support and supervision

## Introduction

The major theme for each group, explored in the preceding chapter, can be viewed as the central story or discourse that influences understanding of the purpose of support and supervision. This chapter explores the central story or prevailing discourse for each group using a Foucauldian approach to evaluate how these discourses arise. This evaluation will be achieved by asking a number of questions that will shape the chapter. The questions are:

> ➢ What are the circumstances that give rise to the idea that support and supervision is essential for 'intensive' personal adviser work?

> ➢ How is this linked to definitions of purpose and whose definitions are/will be more powerful?

> ➢ What are the power-knowledge relationships that govern what can be said about support and supervision?

> ➢ What other voices need to be heard?

> ➢ What are the alternative practices that can support personal advisers?

> ➢ To what extent is discourse theory useful in explaining the views on the purpose of support and supervision?

**To conclude, the chapter will also consider:**

> ➢ What are the implications of the above for practice?

In exploring discursive positions I will also reflect on my own 'location' within this evaluation. Before addressing these questions, I will discuss the relevance of Foucault's work, and clarify the use of discourse theory as the conceptual framework.

## Use of the term Discourse: working towards an understanding
*Poststructuralism and discourse*
The Labour government's focus on inclusion and the implementation of the Connexions service in England, has 'opened up' dialogue about support and supervision for career guidance practitioners and for personal advisers. The emergence of this dialogue has become a discursive event. Previous to this 'historical' event, i.e. inclusion and Connexions, the call for support and supervision for careers advisers (Bimrose and Wilden, 1994) was thought of as a luxury and largely ignored. The reason for the current interest in support and supervision is, in part, practical. The work has changed and careers/personal advisers now find themselves in increasingly, more challenging situations (Newman, 2001; Hughes, 2002). Careers advisers working in more generic roles have always worked with 'disadvantaged' clients and yet support and supervision was not viewed, generally, as necessary.

Rather than accept that practical issues and 'common sense' can explain the 'need' for support and supervision, a use of Foucault's work on the emergence of discursive events, appears to offer a more critical approach. The approach suggests a need to examine the context, of the evolving language about the purpose of support and supervision. Foucault makes a distinction between language and context:

> The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other statements be made? The description of the events of discourse poses a quite different question: how is it that one

particular statement appeared rather than another? (Foucault, 1972: 25).

My study has set out to capture the meaning of the language around the purpose of support and supervision for those involved, as the discourse is being formed. In time further research would be required to analyse how, and if, 'one particular statement appeared rather than another'. That said, the study does make tentative suggestions about which group has the more powerful voice at the current time.

Having discussed the relevance of the concept to my study, I will move on to define the term 'discourse' further. As the heading indicates, I am working towards an understanding of discourse theory and make no claims to be a Foucault scholar. Although the concept has been outlined in the literature chapter a further discussion, as a precursor to evaluating the concept, now follows.

Any attempts at defining discourse will inevitably be partial and reductive. In terms of Foucault's use of discourse this is ambitious if not impossible when what we mean by truth and meaning is itself highly contested. My attempt at a definition feels like chasing butterflies with a torn net, but is made in order to clarify the different uses of the term and how the term is applied in this synthesis. MacLure (2003: appendix) offers a useful overview that I have found helpful in making this distinction.

Discourse can be discussed within the notion of poststructuralism. Poststructuralism is located in a critique of the Enlightenment faith in *reason,* where reason is seen to be so deeply embedded in Western culture that it is beyond question (Barker, 1998:48). Knowledge is viewed as located in specific events, related to particular historical and social circumstances.

The humanist idea of a thinking, self-aware and truth-seeking individual who, through the exercise of reason, can 'master' both the external psychical world, and the internal psychological world, is opposed by poststructuralist thinking. Poststructuralists argue that individuals - subjects - are formed within discourses that establish what social roles are possible and impossible. This is closely linked to what is counted as truth, knowledge, cultural values and socially defined norms of behaviour. Discourse, in terms of how to speak and who can speak, and what can be said, are constrained by discursive boundaries.

> Discourses authorize what can and cannot be said;
> they produce relations of power and communities of consent
> and dissent (Britzman, 2000:36).

Further, these boundaries are not fixed but are redrawn in times of social change. The study aimed to foreground how participants speak about support and supervision, at a time of significant change to career guidance practice, and to discuss the apparent boundaries of that 'talk'. As suggested earlier, what is being discussed here goes beyond an analysis of language as practised within linguistic approaches.

*Linguistic discourse analysis*
In brief, in order to distinguish it from other uses of the term, linguistic discourse is less interested in a macro-analysis of social institutions and more interested in the micro-analysis of actual language in use, in speech and within texts. Within education this might be concerned with classroom talk. From a poststructuralist viewpoint this micro focus would be criticised for not taking into account the way classroom talk is governed by wider political, ideological, cultural and economic influences (Luke, 1995:11). On the other hand linguistic discourse analysts would criticise a Foucauldian approach as being too macro and not grounded in day-to-day experience.

However the counter argument would be that failure to contextualise meaning within its historical, political and economic relations, ignores the

influence of power-knowledge and its effects on both the researched and the researcher. Foucault's approach on the other hand,

> does not offer just a textual analysis, nor just a critique of
> the forms of discourse, but an account of how discourse is
> shaped, and how discourse shapes everyday existence
> (Olsen, 2003:195).

## Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis does attempt to integrate the micro-analysis of linguistics with the macro-analysis of a poststructuralist account of discourse. The aim of this approach is to identify the influence of power within discursive practices as evidenced in the use of language, with the further aim of facilitating 'emancipatory social change' (MacLure, 2003:186). Then again, with a quest to 'interrupt everyday common sense' (Luke, 1995:13) critical discourse analysts can be criticised for covertly seeking a 'real world' that is somehow hidden beneath common sense.

## Foucault and discourse

Foucault's use of discourse is always linked to social institutions, such as education, law and the family, and to disciplinary practices such as psychology, medicine, science, psychotherapy and pedagogy. The latter practices *discipline* the conduct of those who come within the influence of the social institutions that sustain these practices (MacLure, 2003:176). The work of personal advisers traverses a number of these social institutions. For example, the work is linked to education, social work, youth justice and counselling. The above definition would suggest that the practices linked to these social institutions *discipline* personal advisers and their clients. In a similar vein, Besley (2002b: xvii) discusses how school counsellors need to consider such power-knowledge relationships for their work with clients, in order to 'develop a more self reflexive form of counselling' and to question humanistic assumptions about identity.

Power is central to the notion of discourse. However, the view of power is relational, not one that sees power as located only in the hands of a powerful elite. For Foucault power was not a substance that could be handed from one to another, as power can only exist in relations between individuals. Power is diffuse, fragmented and operates in networks through institutions, which is not the same as saying that power does not become concentrated in the hands of the more powerful; who are more powerful due to social class, gender, ethnicity and the like. Then again, even though power dominates and subjects through its circulation and operation in localities, it always leaves open the possibility for resistance (Besley, 2002b:18).

For example, in relation to the mandatory practice of supervision within counselling, Feltham argues that the 'must' imperative is likely to lead to some practitioners taking a negative view of supervision (2002b:335). This can lead to a form of resistance where the practitioner postpones appointments for supervision, or attends, because they 'must', but engages in withdrawal activities. In this way the resistance is constrained by the imperative to attend, but undermines the **purpose** of supervision, particularly where this is imposed 'from above' and not negotiated with the individual practitioner.

Power, then, is not just repressive it is also productive. It produces disciplined subjects, some of who may have more *agency* than others; that is, they are more able to exercise freedom of choice to act as they wish. Power in this view, cannot be separated from knowledge, and Foucault writes this as power-knowledge. They are not one and the same thing but each brings about the production of the other.

> It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power (Foucault, 1980:52).

Knowledge is required of subjects (for example, via government statistical surveys, medical notes, educational reports and so on) in order for power to be exercised. In this sense power governs through knowledge of the population but is internalised by individuals who are culturally socialised within cultural institutions. This socialisation leads to mechanisms of self-surveillance where practitioners consent to the operations of governmentality. Atkinson, considering how this functions in education, calls this 'the collusion in our own oppression' (2003:9). In relation to the study of support and supervision this brings me back to questioning the 'need' for the practice. Is support and supervision a form of governmentality and a self-disciplining practice? Personal advisers were unenthusiastic about imposing support and supervision for personal adviser work, but felt that the need for a structured process overcame their doubts about 'oppression', or loss of autonomy:

> I suppose when you start using words like 'compulsory', erm (*pause*) but I **still** think I would prefer something that was regular – scheduled into the diary (Personal Adviser 'Norma', 2:6).

The view of power-knowledge described above is not static as each epoch or each society, has its *regimes of truth*; in other words types of discourses that are accepted and function as true rather than false (Foucault, 1980:131). A 'regime of truth' in my study would be that the central purpose of support and supervision is to benefit work with clients. Evidence from my data suggests that this is not the central purpose from the practitioner viewpoint. Discourses define what can be said and who can say it, but, by definition, they also define what cannot be said, as they 'rule out other ways of thinking and acting' (MacLure, 2003:178). This suggests that the practitioner viewpoint where it differs from the common sense *regime of truth*, may be 'ruled out' and not 'heard'.

At the start of the study support and supervision was not on any agenda for career guidance practitioners; or personal advisers working in the

Learning Gateway; or personal advisers created by the Connexions service. During the course of the study support and supervision has become a practice viewed as essential for personal adviser work; it has become a 'discursive event' (Foucault, 1972:25). The Connexions Service National Unit, via its training course for supervision practice, is currently leading the definition of the purpose of support and supervision. This unit has now become part of the Supporting Children and Young People Group, although some aspects e.g. training, are part of the new Children's Workforce Unit.

What are the alternative definitions for a practice that is not yet embedded? What other voices need to be heard? In terms of career guidance and personal adviser practice, the study is positioned at a moment in time when the discourse is being formed. The findings would hope to have some influence on that formation.

To conclude this opening section of the chapter, it is (generally) Foucault's use of the term discourse that is applied in this dissertation. In employing discourse theory I will strive to retain a critical attitude: in Foucauldian terms, to try to think differently.

Postmodernism and poststructuralism may not be in the business of providing certainty, but they are, fundamentally, in the business of asking questions (Barker, 1998; MacLure, 2003). In taking a Foucauldian approach the questions posed are not seeking definitive answers, so rather than 'why?' questions they are posed as 'what and how?' questions.

**What are the circumstances that give rise to the idea that support and supervision is essential for 'intensive' personal adviser work?** The development of the personal adviser role and the changes made to the provision of careers education and guidance in the UK has, as discussed in chapter two, been heavily influenced by government socio-economic and educational policy.

The need for economic competitiveness, the development of occupational competencies and an emphasis on employability skills (LSC, 2004; DfES, 2004b) has driven a learning agenda that places the individual, rather than the state, at the centre of this enterprise. The discourses that emerge from such circumstances are not neutral but construct a particular view of inclusion, which places the responsibility to act on the shoulders of individuals thought to be lacking in motivation and skills (Edwards, 1997:11).

Knowledge about young people 'not engaged in education, employment or training' has to be increased in order to help them move from a position outside of the mainstream to a position where they are seen as contributing positively to society's goals (Levitas, 1998:7). This assumes that government sanctioned education, employment and training opportunities are central to young people's lives (Williamson and Middlemiss, 1999:16). This knowledge is gained via the processes for claiming benefit payments for those over post-compulsory school age, and the tracking of young people through statistical counts and the issue and use of various 'cards', currently the Connexions card. Changes in policy and the development of the Connexions service have been built from the knowledge supplied by agencies working with young people.

An administrative and 'policing' technology provides concrete and measurable knowledge that enables the state to govern youth, particularly those young people viewed as problematic, i.e. the excluded (Besley, 2002:137). The recent government evaluation of the Connexions service, recommends enhancement of this 'governmentality' via,

> the development of a unique identification number for young
> people, making it easier to track their progress (DfES, 2004a:11).

With an emphasis on skills (LSC, 2004), the lack of employability skills has been viewed as the biggest source of poverty by the current Labour government (Levitas, 1998:136). The Labour government moved from a discourse centred on equality of outcomes in terms of opportunities, to one centred on a reinvigoration of what was viewed as a declining work ethic in many young people. At best, policy demonstrated recognition of the social inequalities experienced by disadvantaged young people and the difficulties they faced in every encounter with diverse youth and helping agencies. On the other hand the moral tone of inclusion programmes has extended the enforcement of accountability and 'tracking' for clients and professionals.

Equality, or justice and fairness in New Labour thinking (Levitas, 1998:136), is based on access to employment opportunities as work is seen as central to individual fulfilment. This constitutes a discursive shift in government thinking with policy that cannot be separated from the need to reorganise state welfare systems and the need to be competitive in the 'globalised' market. This move is not about what government can do for the individual through redistribution of wealth in society, but more about what the state can do to enable individuals to help themselves (Levitas, 1998:135).

Educational opportunities and skill development are set in this context of individual responsibility for employability, which can ignore the very real circumstances of poverty that affect an individual's access to lifelong learning and employment. Although poverty is recognised as multi-dimensional, the assumption in new Labour thinking is that employment is the solution. Poverty is often defined in moral terms, linked to family breakdown, criminality, drugs and homelessness (Levitas, 1998:135). The focus on these terms can ignore the real effects of economic poverty through the use of moral underclass discourses: for example, homelessness is after all a practical issue 'not a moral shortcoming' (Levitas, 1998:135). Finding work is difficult in those circumstances, but that difficulty should not be assumed to be indicative of a lack of

motivation for work. Young people want good jobs and may resist what they perceive as 'slave labour' (Roberts, 2002:6). Or as 'Lesley' described it,

> I find that the opportunities available for these young people are not the opportunities they want...so the **greatest** challenge is to encourage the young person to accept what is on offer (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 1:5).

This sounds like a 'disciplining' discourse where the adviser is 'normalising' the young person (Foucault, 1979:308). Besley discusses how counselling becomes a disciplinary force for both clients and advisers and warns:

> Therapists must always assume that they are participating in domains of power and knowledge and are often involved in questions of social control. On this view, therapists must work to demystify and unmask the hidden power relations implicated in their techniques and practices (2002a:134).

The development of a discourse on exclusion has replaced earlier discussions on social disadvantage centred on 'Old Labour' discourses. It moves the focus away from social class and wealth distribution, to one that centres on employability and individual responsibility:

> Exclusion is a fiction, a politically convenient fiction in that it replaces discussion about real problems, like unemployment, and real people, like the poor. It suggest that the excluded are the problem rather than the overall shape and state of the economy and the distribution of jobs, income and wealth. Class analysis is blocked out (Roberts, 2002:3).

The circumstances that gave rise to the introduction of the Connexions service can be located in New Labour's view of the causes of exclusion and in their policies for inclusion. The socio/historical circumstances that

have led to the role of the personal adviser and the Connexions service, are not confined to New Labour policy making, but are also affected by some of the wider discourses touched on in this discussion. Many of these, for example global competitiveness and lifelong learning, pre-exist the current government, but have formed the foundations for a raft of Labour policies connected to 'inclusion'. The provision of career guidance in schools since the implementation of Connexions has been criticised in recent reviews (CEGS, 2003:13, DfES, 2004a:3). Nevertheless, whatever the future of Connexions, work with young people viewed as 'harder-to help' will continue to be troubling for many career guidance practitioners and personal advisers, particularly as they remain subject to the ebbs and flows of policy change.

In the circumstances outlined above, careers advisers working as personal advisers with the 'harder-to-help' have now to develop a 'formidable array of skills' (Roberts, 2002:9). In new roles, developing new skills, whilst employed in a 'boundary less' career, their work appears to be at times both unsupervised and unsupported. All three groups in the study viewed the development of support and supervision systems as essential for 'intensive' personal advisers working solely with 'harder-to-help' young people, although views about the purpose varied.

**How is this linked to definitions of purpose and whose definitions are/will be more powerful?**
For personal advisers the purpose was to manage stress and avoid burn out. This view arises from their direct experience of work that challenged their existing skills and experience. They had moved to a role that was being defined as it was being developed and it was the practitioners who were doing most of the defining. Careers advisers with a case load of 'special needs' clients work in similar environments but with more flexible targets. They are able to work with their client up to the young person's 25th birthday and do not work towards meeting the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) targets. 'Intensive'

personal advisers, on the other hand, are expected to achieve their targets by the young person's 19th birthday. Personal advisers in the study emphasised the importance of networking with other agencies but in doing this they were constantly navigating unclear boundaries for the work. Being clear about the limits of expertise is essential for effective helping (Edwards, 1998a:23) and being placed in a position where these limits are regularly challenged is troubling.

What personal advisers appear to want is a 'restorative' space to unburden the weight of responsibility they feel for their clients: pit-head time to 'wash off the dust of their labours' (Scaife, 2001:73). During the course of the study 'small group monthly support meetings' took place in some but not all centres, but these seemed to be concerned with 'policing' standards and meeting the accountability demands of management. It seemed they were often working in isolation in challenging and 'potentially dangerous' situations (Newman, 2001:10). Help is available from approachable line managers but this often sounds like remedial help in a crisis, rather than planned intervention and support. Some personal advisers use, and are used by, colleagues for mutual support, but expressed concern about the lack of training for this role. This use of time is often seen as an indulgence and secondary to other work, whether this is direct work with a client or other administrative tasks related to the role.

For line managers the purpose of support and supervision was also viewed as managing stress and avoiding burn out. In addition they viewed monitoring of performance as a central function of support and supervision. However, in discussions about current or future provision they were unable to divorce provision from the time constraints that affected delivery of the service within a bigger picture of constant change. They clearly recognised the need for a restorative space but also saw the benefits of supervision in its function as checking that standards are being met: the normative function. Line managers however, made more use of a professional discourse that placed the

needs of the client at the centre of the purpose of support and supervision. It seemed that line managers were more knowledgeable about the existing discourses on supervision, taken from other helping professions. In this way their 'voice' in the transcripts appears to be better informed, albeit they acknowledge the limitations of their understanding and experience.

It could be assumed from the above that line managers might be able to determine 'what could be said' (Britzman, 2000:36) about supervision. Conversely, it seemed that the line managers in the study were caught between conflicting discourses. All three managers were trained as careers advisers and one had worked as a personal adviser in the Learning Gateway. Although not working with a client caseload they understood the stresses experienced by the practitioners they managed, but they were also influenced by a managerial discourse that is outcome focused. In other words they viewed support and supervision through a lens that must consider accountability and use of the resources of time and personnel. Resources are dependent on meeting the contractual demands of providing services to clients. This takes place in circumstances where frequent policy changes or 'developments' do not allow for periods of stability that permit support and supervision to be placed higher up the management agenda.

These demands focus the attention of line managers who are then not able to give the attention, an attention that they view as important, to the support needs of personal advisers. This leaves personal advisers to 'fend for themselves' which can be thought to lead to greater autonomy (Edwards, 1998a:33), however in the study it appeared to lead to greater stress.

For the professional representatives the purpose of support and supervision was to 'enhance professional development within the bigger picture of organisational change'. The group made greater use of their knowledge of professional discourses about support and supervision

from other helping professions. All had an investment in training opportunities and professional development (the formative function), which revolved around a need for the individual to be involved in continuous learning and development of new skills for new working situations.

Careers/Connexions services that responded to the professional institute survey on support and supervision (ICG, 2003) recognised the stress involved in the work. Then again, support and supervision was often viewed as a way of 'counselling' personal advisers where stress becomes viewed as the inevitable consequence of the work, and 'stress management' is viewed as the solution. This sidesteps the negative effects of the intensive nature of the work by placing the solution in the hands of the practitioner who needs to access support, some of which is external to the organisation. Then again like any form of stress management intervention, such support mechanisms can often be experienced as a 'sticking plaster' approach to work overload that locates the cause of the stress with the individual who needs to 'manage' the stress in more effective ways. Mann (2004:205) links such 'emotion management' to work stress and sees this as a vital skill for counselling and guidance professionals.

Also with the focus on continuous learning and professional development, support and supervision can be viewed in terms of how it helps the organisation to achieve wider goals. The function of support and supervision can be linked to ensuring personal advisers develop and maintain their practice in ways that meet the standards, codes and outcomes demanded of the service by its paymasters: the formative and normative functions of supervision. The rhetoric of 'reflective practice' employed within a professional and managerial discourse on support and supervision, then takes on a new meaning when it is linked to a number of functions. For example these may include appraisal, performance monitoring, professional development planning, reflective logs and journals during training, and measurable outcomes in

'cost/benefit' thinking about the value of support and supervision. When this is set within a context of constant change and trying to do more with restricted and now reduced (DfES, 2004a:7) resources, there is little space for reflective practice. From this perspective on purpose, reflective practice and support and supervision risks becoming a process of 'governing' personal advisers rather than one that allows them a 'restorative' space.

The study set out to explore the meanings given to the purpose of support and supervision by the groups involved. Its rationale was based on the premise that these meanings needed to be shared for effective support and supervision to take place. The analysis identified many shared views about support and supervision, but noted a different emphasis in terms of function. Despite the many overlaps in terms of views, a central theme was found for each group. To say there are many similarities is not the same as saying that all views will be equally powerful in determining the purpose of support and supervision. The formation of a discourse on support and supervision in a new profession, or a profession where this is a new practice, is likely to be determined by those whose voices are viewed as the most authoritative. These thoughts link with the next section where the powerful discourses that operate in career guidance work are considered.

**What are the power-knowledge relationships that govern what can be said about support and supervision?**
There are a number of powerful discourses in the field of career education and guidance in the UK that shape what is said about support and supervision in the study. One of these is an instrumental discourse that states that theoretical knowledge and reflecting on the work are of limited value. In the professional institute journal, Closs (2001) criticised an article written by a career guidance student in a previous issue, on the development and use of theory for the role of careers adviser. Closs (2001:37/38) concluded that, 'Advisers should concentrate on getting on with the job, which can be increasingly difficult these days'. This is a

pervasive view where theory and research is seen as irrelevant to day-to-day practice (Edwards and Usher, 1994:12), and one enhanced by the government's distrust of what are viewed as self-protecting professional bodies.

However, this demeans careers guidance and, along with competence based training, weakens its value as a separate expertise within Connexions. It suggests that all that is needed for competent performance is that knowledge which is immediately useful (Edwards, 1998a:27). Whilst this may be acceptable in routine guidance interviews it is unlikely to meet the challenging demands that work with the 'harder-to-help' brings.

It might be thought that the professional institute would oppose this view. The Institute of Career Guidance however found itself in danger of being crushed between a rock and a hard place in the early development of the Connexions strategy. The institute focused on the need for career guidance to be one of the specialist services required in Connexions rather than a role that was consumed by the new service. This was more than just getting on with the job: it needed to work to ensure there was a job to get on with. This response to the implementation of the Connexions strategy could be viewed as a form of compliance, where the professional body positioned itself to meet the blueprint for Connexions rather than opposing the initiative. Rowland (2003:13) argues that 'compliance, rather than rational debate' has become the response to government strategies within educational settings.

However, like the practitioners it represents the institute is not in a position of power. The careers service was directly funded by government, unlike for example the youth service, which managed to avoid whole-scale involvement in Connexions. The Institute of Career Guidance may represent the majority of careers advisers in the statutory sector, but there are other professional organisations for career

education and guidance practitioners working in other sectors. In addition beyond initial training on the Qualification in Careers Guidance, membership is not compulsory.

'Getting on with the job', and complying with government policy demands, is a dominant discourse for managers in the careers and Connexions service, as it is in other public services. It is closely linked to a common sense and pragmatic view that non-compliance with government policy will lead to redundancy and a further loss of identity for career guidance practitioners. Resistance may be possible 'at the edges': for example there is some evidence that agencies have resisted partnership working at the local level (DfES, 2004a:6/8). Resistance is most likely where subjects are positioned within more powerful discourses (Fairclough, 1995:24). For instance, the careers services in Scotland and Wales are positioned within a more powerful discourse related to devolution, which gave them the resources to resist the Connexions policy. The effect of this 'getting on with the job' discourse can be seen in the study where time constraints determine what is received for support and supervision. This also affects what is viewed as appropriate or likely to happen by the groups involved: as ultimately 'getting on with the job' refers to the job with clients, and not support for practitioners.

If 'getting on with the job' is a management-led discourse, 'working for the benefit of clients' is a management **and** professional discourse that is closely related. It is enshrined in standards and ethical codes of practice for guidance work and for support and supervision. Ethical codes place 'benefit to the client' as the prime purpose of support and supervision (BAC, 1988:1). This is a discourse that fits with career guidance practitioners' concerns about impartiality and client-centredness.

The principles of impartiality and client-centredness position the interests and needs of the clients over those of the guidance provider

and are considered core for career guidance work (Harrison, 1998:238). These principles are challenged when getting on with the job in a target-driven environment leads to short, pragmatic interviews with 'low risk', realistic decision-making being the desired outcome (Stacey and Mignot, 2000:37). The target driven environment leads to the gathering of more and more information about the group seen as outside the 'norm' (DfES, 2004a:10/11). Careers advisers, working as personal advisers in this context, become the implementers of disciplinary strategies aimed at 'normalising' those seen as different. In so doing careers advisers trained to value the principles of impartiality and client-centredness are themselves disciplined in the disciplinary action taken towards their clients. The adviser becomes, in Foucault's terms (1979:308), the normalised subject that also normalises others.

For 'intensive' personal advisers in the Learning Gateway this challenge to core values is less evident, as extra time has been allocated for them to develop their relationship with clients. Career guidance is often a distant goal as more immediate help with other problems is required. However, in Connexions the measurement of success is closely related to meeting NEET targets (ICG, 2002:11; DfES, 2004a:10) and the amount of time spent with individual clients is coming under increasing scrutiny. In this pressurised environment 'giving permission to take time out to reflect is essential' (ICG, 2004b:5).

A focus on realistic decision making and working towards measurable outcomes is linked to another powerful discourse in education and guidance: that of 'what works'. It is one of the principles of the Connexions policy where research should provide evidence of what works in practice (DfEE, 2000). It is not unreasonable to suggest that this discourse may pervade views about the purpose of support and supervision and the methods employed to 'deliver' it.

Simple truths about 'what works' linked to 'common sense' are hard to challenge because they make asking opposing questions difficult. The

hardest thing to 'see' and question in any policy statement is that which claims authority based on common sense with its appeal as natural and unquestionable. In postmodernist thinking the discourse of 'what works', 'shuts down the trouble' (Britzman and Dippo, 2000:32). It also assumes that what works in one context can be generalized and applied to another situation. As argued in an earlier chapter, the UK government is wedded to a utilitarian discourse of what works and immediate effectiveness. This remains a challenge to reflexive researchers who do not believe in the certain truths imbued in a policy-led agenda that views itself as supremely rational. However, remaining in this position would be viewed as an academic luxury not helpful in the need to 'get on with the job'!

These powerful discourses, which are difficult to challenge, constitute what Foucault described as a society's 'regime of truth', 'the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true' (Barker, 1998: 93). Although there may be opposing voices, in the end it is the group that can command the greater power whose version of truth becomes dominant. This is nicely summed up by Mehan (1999:573),

> All people define situations as real: but when powerful people define situations as real, then they are real *for everybody involved* in their consequences [*emphasis in the original*].

If the powerful discourses of 'getting on with the job', 'working for the benefit of the client' and 'evidence-based practice into what works', prevail and dominate the development of support and supervision systems, where is the voice of practitioners? In the study their central story around the purpose of support and supervision was sited in their need for support 'to manage stress and avoid burn out': the restorative function of support and supervision. At the current time within career guidance and the new profession of personal adviser, the discourse on support and supervision is in the process of being formed and practitioners' voices do not appear to be evident in policy documents.

For instance, a recent evaluation of the Connexions supervision training programme makes reference to a series of aims, objectives and outcomes (CSNU, 2004:16) none of which could be described as 'restorative'. The report does acknowledge the time investment needed for training and recommends,

> at all levels of Connexions partnership that supervision holds a central position in organisational and individual development [this] would provide support for course trainers and participants and also provide the context for a much more effective programme (CSNU, 2004:14).

Nevertheless this is a recommendation only. As argued earlier, power is productive and makes subjects of personal advisers who are regulated by more powerful discourses. If pastoral rather than coercive or disciplinary power operates at a distance (Usher and Edwards, 1998:215), this view of power creates a space where individual judgement and action is possible. This space can open up opportunities at the local level for personal advisers to adopt their own strategies and negotiate their own positions in terms of what they want from a system of support and supervision. In the Foucauldian view power is not monolithic but operates through a network of productive relationships: it is in the local spaces that personal advisers may be able to resist and negotiate their own needs from a system of support and supervision. This view of power and resistance helps to avoid overly structured views that ignore the 'agency' negotiated by individuals who struggle with policy at the local level.

So it may be that personal advisers will need to struggle to ensure that their view of the purpose of support and supervision is heard. One possibility is that dissemination of this study could assert their position. If alternative discourses can be heard on support and supervision it may help to balance the potential for support and supervision to become a 'technology of the self'. For Foucault, governmentality has to do with the

disciplining and normalising of populations (Foucault, 2001:219-220), via the social institutions which exercise power through their disciplinary practices: educational institutions are a prime site for this 'discipline at a distance'. Education is now dominated by an economic and managerial discourse, which aligns its function to the promotion of economic growth over other goals (Hursh, 2003:49). This promotes the view (an old but appealing 'common sense' argument) that the purpose of education needs to be wedded to the needs of the economy, and should produce workers with the right attitudes and skills for the future.

The social process of producing citizens with the right attitudes and skills was termed the 'techniques of the self' by Foucault (1994b:87). In other words the procedures, such as support and supervision and reflective practice, which shape identity through processes of 'self-mastery and self-knowledge' (*ibid*).

Foucault argues that techniques of the self help to generate compliance with the *status quo* and produce docile subjects through the operation of power at a distance. In Foucault's analysis of power in modern society, power is effective when it is divorced from coercion and repression. The combination of power-knowledge, where power is exercised through knowledge of subjects, and knowledge of subjects produces power, becomes regulatory in its effects (Edwards and Usher, 1994:4). In other words regulation is not about coercive power but about self-regulation through the practices of self-discipline that exist in our culture.

In this way the panoptic gaze, real or virtual, becomes internalised through the 'normalising' processes of institutions whose practitioners 'police' themselves (Edwards, 1998b:384). From this viewpoint support and supervision can be seen as operating as a practice of surveillance, as personal advisers are disciplined into reflecting on their practice in order to understand themselves and their work better (Edwards and Usher, 1994:9).

Self-surveillance and a 'know thyself' discourse are closely associated in guidance to the humanistic work of Carl Rogers (1961). In a post-modern and secular age guidance and counselling are described as confessional practices (Usher and Edwards, 1998:212), and part of the self-governing process where individuals 'bear public or private witness against oneself' (Foucault, 1994b:242). Guidance interviews that focus on realistic decision making within a humanistic focus on individual development, can be viewed as part of a disciplining process in a western, white, Anglo-Saxon culture. In a similar process support and supervision can be viewed as a disciplinary form of governmentality, particularly if the 'formative' and 'normative' functions predominate. And yet the 'restorative' function through its confessionary nature is perhaps a more powerful form of self-regulation: empowering on the one hand but potentially invasive and self-perpetuating on the other.

Career guidance work is dominated by humanistic assumptions of self-improvement and by theories related to 'finding self' (O'Doherty and Roberts, 2000:149). Similarly support and supervision can be seen to mirror this approach, and similarly the power-knowledge relationship needs to be problematised by questioning whose discourse does the practice serve. How vulnerable do practitioners make themselves by engaging in self-regulatory and confessional practices? Do they become architects of their own governmentality? Foucault stresses the importance of the confession in modern society:

> The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, in love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling with the greatest precision whatever it is most difficult to tell (1981:59).

But, where there is power there is resistance, opening up spaces for negotiation (Harrison *et al*, 2003:61). This leads me to the next section where other voices do sound cautionary notes on the practice of support and supervision.

**What other voices need to be heard?**

In including 'other voices' here I return to the criticisms of support and supervision from Feltham and include more general criticisms of therapy. This is in the spirit of questioning what 'has already been said' and what 'is not said' about social practices, in order to 'disturb the tranquillity with which they are accepted' (Barker, 1998:106). In that vein of 'thinking against', Feltham reminds us that 'supervision is at least partly a form of surveillance' (2002a:27) that heightens the mistrust of professionals and denies them their autonomy. He lists a number of problems with supervision which include:

> ➤ Ritualised practice
> ➤ Inability to cope with diverse theoretical traditions
> ➤ Formalised and imposed practice
> ➤ Lack of evidence of its effectiveness
> ➤ Assumptions about always protecting clients
> ➤ Assumptions that it serves the needs of practitioners
>    (Feltham 2002a:26).

Feltham views supervision as useful but warns against the often unquestioned assumption that it is essential and even obligatory (2002b:328). This highlights the importance for personal advisers to be able to negotiate a mix of support and supervision methods and to avoid the tendency of imposing a 'one-size-fits-all' model.

There is general consensus in the literature about what should be included in a contract for support and supervision, and Holloway and Carroll (1999) for example have worked this up into a training manual. There remains a tension, noted by Feltham (2002b:332), related to the

purpose of support and supervision. On the one hand it is seen as a collaborative enterprise being non-judgemental, empowering and supportive of the practitioner, providing 'somebody who is available to...make me feel as though I've done all I can' (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 1:28). On the other hand it is concerned with professional standards, monitoring, accountability and potentially discipline of the practitioner, providing 'somebody who ensures that what I'm doing is OK' (Personal Adviser 'Lesley', 1:27). The policing element of supervision fits nicely into a Foucault analysis where surveillance becomes a key issue.

The criticism of the social control elements of supervision can be placed in a wider criticism of therapy. Smail views therapy as a normalizing technique which governs through pastoral power, or power at a distance. Therapy can self-discipline subjects: this emphasises a view that fault lies with the individual rather than a society that can pathologise (treat as ill) its citizens. In a culture of evidence-based practice he concludes that 'therapy does not work' and yet the practice has become too important to refute its benefits (Smail, 2001:ix, x):

> Until we change the way we act towards each other, and the social institutions we have constructed, we shall not get much relief from the symptoms of anxiety, depression and despair which beset all of us at some times in our lives, and some of us nearly all the time (Smail, 2001:8).

In Smail's view all therapy can do is smooth the edges of anxiety, depression and despair and its success in doing this depends on the relationships and personalities of the people involved. There are many echoes of Foucault's work in Smail's criticism of therapy, and the link with Foucault's work on psychiatric 'illness' and the *Birth of the Asylum* (Rabinov, 1984:141) is substantial. Smail employs the terms 'panopticism' and 'self-discipline' when considering the acceptance of

surveillance and the productive nature of power (Smail, 2001:302/314). He notes,

> The most perfect form of social control is that which is accepted by those it oppresses as necessary and inevitable (Smail, 2001:319).

If related to the practice of support and supervision it reminds us to question whose needs support and supervision serve. If imposed without negotiation of a mix of methods deemed appropriate by the practitioner, it is unlikely to be empowering. Empowerment is of course an abused word, fashionable within the discourse on inclusion: from a Foucauldian perspective empowerment is not really the aim of government – but social control is. The criticism of therapy illuminates the potential for support and supervision to become limited to a method of self-discipline and social control.

In many organisations counselling, which has its roots in therapy, is now used as an alternative to more obvious forms of control. This can result in drawing people's private lives into the domain of work (Fairclough, 1995:81). There are issues of power and governance here that can be hidden within what is portrayed as an empathic and neutral practice. Support and supervision, like guidance and counselling, is not a politically neutral activity.

Hayes is also critical of what he terms a 'therapeutic ethos' in education with its self-regulation and self-discipline tendencies and related practices (Hayes, 2003: 30\31). He believes that the Connexions strategy 'provides the strongest evidence of therapeutic policy-making that results from the anxiety about ordinary people' (2003:33). He asserts that retrained professionals, from a range of helping agencies, working as personal advisers will focus on the more therapeutic elements of guidance practice. As an example of this focus, 'Norma' compared the role of a personal adviser to that of a careers adviser:

It's very different from ordinary careers advisers. Erm, we say to them [clients]... you can have one of us as a personal adviser and you can see us on a regular basis. We'll try to help you with, whatever really – whatever you need (Personal Adviser 'Norma', 1:2).

Hayes' criticism of a therapeutic ethos is similar to the criticism of humanistic guidance given by Usher and Edwards (1998) discussed earlier:

The social expression of this takes the form of a victim culture in which we see people as constantly at risk and unable to cope (Hayes, 2003:40).

By extension it is worth examining whether support and supervision can lead to the victimisation of personal advisers. This is a real dilemma where their central story about the purpose of support and supervision is to 'manage stress and avoid burn out'.

Cautionary views are important but it is vital to avoid oppositional views in this discussion. Debates about issues in practice are hardly ever resolved if presented as dichotomous. In emphasising cautionary views about 'infantilisation', 'social control', 'self-disciplinary technique' and 'victim culture', there is a danger that the complexities involved can lead to further delay in implementing a system that also has many positive benefits for the practitioner. This is also a question of audience. A focus on the dangers and limits of supervision will seem to many practitioners and their managers as academic posturing which opposes the need to 'get on with the job': the job here being the introduction of support and supervision systems. In the next section I will discuss alternatives to a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to support and supervision.

**What are the alternative practices that can support personal advisers?**

Whilst highlighting the limits of supervision, Feltham sees the practice as prudent for new practitioners (2002a:26). In careers/Connexions services where this is a novel practice it seems sensible to extend this beyond initial training. To avoid 'collegial cosiness' (Feltham, 2002b:333) and to take seriously the capacity for experienced practitioners to engage in creative reflection on their work, Feltham (2002a:27) suggests a number of possible alternatives.

For example, changing supervisor after a maximum of two years and using a mix of methods is thought advisable. Second, as well as individual, facilitated group and peer group supervision, including in this mix periods of intermittent supervision (which may include an agreed break from supervision). Third, use of other forms of professional training and re-training. Fourth, distance supervision as an alternative to face–to-face. Fifth, meaningful forms of self-supervision (Morrissette, 2002). Sixth, specifically targeted supervision or consultation with an expert in a particular field of knowledge, for example, on eating disorders or specific phobias. In this mix he also suggests taking the risk that some practitioners may practise best without supervision or can develop their practice if left to their own resources. And, most radically of all, stopping the requirement for supervision altogether after a period of five to ten years of practice.

In terms of the study none of the participants spoke against support and supervision, as reflected in the quotes used in this dissertation, all viewed it as essential despite the variance as to purpose and process. However, the costs of implementing support and supervision cannot be ignored and some of the alternatives above merit consideration. Then again, there is a risk that alternatives on the grounds of cost may lead to processes that do not meet the needs of personal advisers found in this case study.

For personal advisers 'taking care of yourself' was thought necessary in order to equip them to 'take care of clients'. In a criticism of humanism and the moral principles of the Western world, Rabinov notes that for Foucault 'know yourself' has obscured 'take care of your self'.

> We find it difficult to base rigorous morality and austere principles on the precept that we should give more care to ourselves than to anything else in the world. We are more inclined to see taking care of ourselves as immorality, as a means of escape from all possible rules (Rabinov, 1997:228).

To varying degrees the personal advisers in the study viewed support and supervision as a 'bit of a luxury', not really believing in some cases that time would be made available, or feeling that where they took this time it was rather self-indulgent. However, being client-centred is a deeply-held construct linked to the powerful discourses within the career guidance profession discussed earlier: as such it is an ontological view where career guidance practitioners working as 'intensive' personal advisers view meeting the needs of clients as the core focus of their working lives. Foucault would view 'care of self' as an ethical position (Rabinov, 1997:287). Prioritising 'care of self' over 'care of others', could be a mechanism for countering any negative effects of a power imbalance discussed earlier in relation to the disciplinary forces of self-regulation. In turn, it may enhance a practitioner's ability to take care of their clients.

What we can learn from Foucault, Feltham and the counselling field is the lesson of not adopting whole scale models from other professions. There is a need to negotiate 'best fit' with the personnel involved and avoid the oppressive 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Also, it is important to recognise the competence and skill of personal advisers and the possibility that they can self-regulate much of their work via their professional common sense. At the same time cautionary tales should not lead to an either/or situation that ignores practitioners' needs for a

restorative space. How that space is used however, should be part of the negotiated process that is not static but develops over time.

**To what extent is discourse theory useful in explaining views on the purpose of support and supervision?**

Alongside the benefit of a macro, historical analysis of the rise of social discourses offered by Foucault, there is an absence of an application to micro practices. This can lead to a rather monolithic view of discourse that portrays power, even 'productive' power, as all encompassing and limiting the opportunities for agency, albeit that Foucault held there is always choice even *in extremis* (Barker, 1998:38). Harrison *et al* (2003:60) state that this monolithic view is particularly noticeable in Foucault's earlier writings, whereas his later work has a greater focus on how power works within and between discourses and the contexts in which they operate.

In the study, there were differences of group emphasis about the purpose of support and supervision. The findings suggest that the different groups took different discursive positions on the topic. It was not the case that each group spoke only from their functional (work role) discourse position. In other words practitioners also understood and were influenced by managerial discourse and professional discourse. Similarly line managers tacked back and forth between practitioner, management and professional discourse. A monolithic approach to competing discourses, with nothing further added to the commentary, would ignore the complexity and ambiguity inherent in their search for meaning about the purpose of support and supervision.

It is in these struggles, this search for meaning, that the opportunities for defining a range of purposes may emerge. This is closer to Foucault's later work where power is viewed as a 'hindrance' to other ways of thinking, and also by the way it is produced within networks of relationships, less monolithic, more fragile and open to resistance (Harrison *et al*, 2003:60). In this sense discursive positioning, and by

association identity, is something that is not fixed, but fluid. This resonates with the development of the role of the personal adviser and the shifts in identity of career guidance practitioners who are in a process of identity transition. There are of course both positive and negative effects of this transition and support and supervision can be a space to articulate these. However, what was brought to the study by the participants is both complex and contextualised, as making sense of the purpose of support and supervision inevitably draws on each individual's prior history and circumstances.

My discourse position, like the participants in the study, and by definition I must allow that this can apply to policy-makers also, is not fixed but is socially constructed in the ambiguous spaces of my work and my thinking. From this view subject positioning in relation to discourses about guidance and support and supervision, are not static but dynamic. What this study has found is a particular interpretation, affected by its particular place in the **current** development of support and supervision as a new practice for career guidance practitioners working as 'intensive' personal advisers.

That said, accentuating that meaning is transitory and determined by context and time, can result in a view that denies the development of knowledge. But, acknowledging that truth is something that is difficult to be definitive about is not the same as saying that the search for a better understanding of social practices is pointless. Discourse theory is helpful; it is both useful and truthful in terms of understanding the macro context in which the meanings given to the purpose of support and supervision develop. However, it does not capture the nuances of the everyday actions, struggles and experiences of participants in their day-to-day encounters with busy practice. In employing the principles of grounded theory to the analysis of the data I hope I have managed to catch that lived reality of active rather than passive participants in the study.

I am not however rejecting discourse theory. Exposing the power of dominant discourses and how support and supervision can be a 'technology of the self', can help to provide a space to think differently and to negotiate alternative views about its purpose. I like Helen Colley's notion that this naming of 'regimes of truth' has liberating possibilities.

> Naming a discourse can challenge unconscious acceptance of it, and enable resistance to its disciplinary function (Colley, 2003:98).

**Conclusion: what are the implications of the above for practice?**
To conclude this chapter I will summarise what appears to be the significant contribution of the study to the theory and practice of support and supervision. If the practice is to be effective it needs to be acknowledged that there are different views about its purpose. There also needs to be space for those involved in the process to negotiate a range of methods that they view as appropriate. Flexibility extends to the on-going practice of support and supervision in order to recognise that needs and purpose will change over time. It would seem essential to ensure time for the restorative function of support and supervision and to avoid the narrow doorway to 'what works'.

It seems important also to avoid a therapeutic approach that either 'pathologises' or makes victims of practitioners. In enhancing the nature of a collaborative approach, clarity is needed about the aims and process for the practice. There needs to be a recognition that imposing support and supervision can be counter-productive in some cases and can lead to participation without engagement. Managers, supervisors and supervisees will need to be sensitive to the ways in which power is used, abused or hidden in the practice and to the ways in which support and supervision can de-skill and 'infantilise' practitioners. It needs to be seen that support and supervision can extend the low-trust, surveillance culture that professionals have to navigate. It also needs to be

recognised that many will resist an approach that pushes them to expose feelings that may make them feel vulnerable.

The key story for the personal advisers in the study was the need for a restorative space to manage stress and avoid burn out. This discourse on the purpose of support and supervision was positioned above the function of benefiting work with clients. This needs to be heard and valued. Providing time for restorative conversations, alongside the formative and normative dialogue in supervision, requires a change in ethos where 'care of self' takes priority over other functions.

*Conversation* in Latin means 'wandering together with': the restorative space for wandering cannot be constrained by a rigid structure that is outcome focused. It requires an investment in time and a flexible attitude to content and methods to be meaningful, purposeful and restorative for those involved.

With this in mind, when introducing support and supervision for the 'new' role of the personal adviser, careers/ Connexions services will need to protect that restorative space and fulfil Feltham's wish,

> that professional bodies may possess the wisdom and courage to create flexible, open structures and to avoid prematurely tight, over-prescriptive structures and policies (2002b:336).

# Chapter 9. Conclusion

## Introduction

This final chapter will reflect on the doctorate and consider areas for further research. It will also pose a number of questions to consider the relevance of the work for my own role as an academic and a researcher. The questions will constitute headings for each section of this concluding chapter, and are:

> ➢ What could have been done differently?

> ➢ What else could be done?

> ➢ How will the findings be disseminated?

> ➢ What was learnt and how does this relate to my professional identity?

The chapter will conclude with final comments on the use of methodology, theory, the findings from the study and implications for practice.

## What could have been done differently?

Initial problems related to finding guidance practitioners working as 'intensive' personal advisers were discussed at the start of the dissertation. More problematic was locating participants that could represent a 'professional' discourse; in particular the lack of a professional institute' (The Institute of Career Guidance) position statement on support and supervision, coupled with the resignation of both the professional development manager and the chief executive. I was directed later to the briefing on support and supervision (ICG, 2003) as the Institute's response at the time of the study. An interesting development is that the Institute has now produced a positional

statement (ICG, 2004b) to be disseminated to members in the autumn of 2004. I was asked to review a draft of this document.

Contact with a representative of the Connexions Service National Unit was interesting. Numerous emails promised answers to questions but in the event no answers were given and I was directed to the Connexions Service National Unit's Supervision course as 'their position', hence the interview with the course tutor. Although not available at the time, an evaluation report of the course was sent to course centres by the same contact in June 2004 (CSNU, 2004). The outcome of the search for interviewees is a loosely structured group with resulting data that is perhaps less coherent than I would have liked. However, the findings indicated that participants stride a number of discourses and this is perhaps not as worrying as I first thought.

In terms of triangulation of the data, I could have searched further for personal advisers that were receiving structured support and supervision, although there were none in the wide geographical area of the study. It may also have been useful to interview career guidance practitioners not working in 'intensive' roles, to compare different views. In addition I might have tried to locate 'intensive' personal advisers and line managers who were not interested in support and supervision, since the participants who volunteered did so because they were interested. All of the above would have extended the data and would have added further depth to the findings, and might have avoided any bias.

However, what is the methodological reason for triangulation? It is used to eliminate ambiguity and resolve conflicting meaning, and it appeals to 'real world' discourses attempting to generalise findings across professional populations and this was not the aim of the study. The study aimed to explore the complexities within and between participants rather then somehow render complexities down to generalisations. Indeed the main task of discourse theory is not to reach conclusions

that are certain, but to disrupt or interrupt 'commonsensical' and 'taken for granted' assumptions about the social world. The aim of the study was to open up powerful discourses to further questioning, as achieved in the previous chapter.

I might have used quantitative methods to extend the findings. For example a questionnaire on the findings with a wider group of personal advisers could seek to verify the results: perhaps this is a follow up activity. What would have been more useful would have been to extend the use of grounded theory and a collaborative approach. For example, I could have undertaken more analysis of the transcripts between each interview, and shared the findings of the study with participants. The latter would achieve respondent validation. Each participant did receive a copy of a report of initial findings sent before the detailed analysis, but no additional comments were raised in response. This, more descriptive account, was thought useful by the training manager, 'so that we understand what practitioners think about support and supervision'. Subsequently the training manager asked me to attend a line managers' training event to disseminate the findings. Unfortunately the request was at short notice and the date was not convenient, but I will follow this up in the new academic year.

In terms of the analysis I wanted to use a more narrative account but had to accept that this was not possible at that stage of the research. The approach, which looked for themes and categories, does reduce the material and simplifies the richness of the interviews. I had real struggles at this point but in the end made the pragmatic decision that I needed an approach that was 'transparent', if not perfect.

Another methodological area that I would have liked to develop was the use of metaphor, for example, 'Lesley's' use of 'sponge' in chapter six. Metaphors used in the study helped participants to express their views on a practice that they were able to talk about, despite having little direct experience. This aspect of forming a discourse, a language for support

and supervision, would have been an interesting issue to explore further.

At the point of moving from coding and finding themes to writing about findings, what is finally offered cannot be taken as definitive or even stable. As the discourse on support and supervision is being formed it is being changed. The views of participants were not fixed and developed within and between interviews: their identity as personal advisers or managers and representatives of personal advisers was also developing. So, in that regard, their discourse positions cannot be fixed by one piece of research at a particular point of time. However, the activity of engaging in that process was beneficial, they said, and the findings and dissemination of the study will form part of the on-going conversation about the purpose of support and supervision.

## What else could be done?
The findings have concentrated on the main themes from the analysis of the data based on those aspects that were discussed with greatest frequency. There were other themes that would also prove useful for further investigation. For example for personal advisers this could include views on the role of line-management supervision, the content of training courses for support and supervision, views about the different methods for implementing support and supervision, the gap between policy and codes and their application in practice. For line managers, similar issues were raised and in addition future studies might explore, how the reporting of concerns and confidentiality is negotiated in support and supervision, whether systems should be imposed, producing action plans from supervision and the use of external support systems. In addition, from the professional representatives, views about duty of care to staff and clients, a discussion about skills and personality traits required for the role of supervisor and the need to separate the functions of support from supervision.

As indicated above, by reducing the data to key themes what emerges is a focus on what appears to be of particular importance. That said it is necessary to interpret the results with caution as the study was based on a small group of participants, many of whom knew each other. To that end the findings cannot claim to reflect either the experience or views of 'intensive' personal advisers in other career/Connexions partnerships. Further research would be required if the findings were to be generalised beyond this case study. Hopefully, the study has captured what was important for the participants and related this to a growing interest in discourse theory for the field of careers counselling and guidance (Besley and Edwards, 2003).

Other areas for further research include an examination of work role stress and the part support and supervision plays in alleviating this (HSE, 2004; Dewe, 2004). Future studies could also look into viable alternatives for support and supervision, and the role of informal support. The benefits of support and supervision have not been researched widely in other fields and assumptions about the benefits to both clients and practitioners need to be researched. It seems likely that personal advisers will experience benefits in terms of their personal support needs: beyond this it is less evident that wider managerial and professional needs can be guaranteed.

## How will the findings be disseminated?

Whilst the doctorate has been a work in progress the imperative to write about this new practice for the career guidance profession in the UK was immediate. I have published two articles in the Institute of Career Guidance journal *Career Guidance Today*: one a review of the literature and the other on lessons to be learnt from other helping agencies. I contributed a paper to a collection used by the group formed by the Connexions Service National Unit to prepare the supervision course referred to earlier. I have a book chapter on support and supervision as a route to ethical watchfulness for personal advisers. I am also editing and contributing to a book on support and supervision for personal

advisers and youth support workers. During the course of my interest in the topic I have presented papers at seminars and conferences.

In terms of the findings from the detailed analysis I have presented an abstract for a paper for a refereed journal, which has been accepted and is being considered for publication in 2005. There will be other opportunities to write on the findings and to share these with colleagues in my institution and in the profession.

## What has been learnt and how does this relate to my professional identity?

Beyond the findings and further questions generated by the study, I have learnt how to engage in in-depth research. The doctorate has been an apprenticeship, which, if the dissertation meets the criteria, is an indication that I will be able to conduct research in the future without supervision. As an academic working in higher education, the qualification is an asset to me personally and my employer.

The learning has helped immeasurably with my own teaching, both generally and for the research methods course on our Master's programme. We are also developing a programme for support and supervision to replace the current course. In addition, we are in consultation with our local careers/Connexions partnership, planning to offer support meetings for supervisors: I will be directly involved in these developments.

A further period of time, beyond the writing of the dissertation and the *viva voce*, is needed to reflect further on the learning achieved.

## Conclusion

Without repeating the advantages and limitations in this final section I want to conclude that the use of a case study approach, the principles of grounded theory and the application of discourse theory has proved a fruitful combination. In terms of case study and grounded theory I have

a clearer understanding of the methodology. In terms of discourse theory I remain fascinated, excited and a little confused, but less overwhelmed. There are clear links between the use of discourse theory and my interest in narrative approaches for career education and guidance practice, and for research. I look forward to developing this interest further.

The findings from the study provide provisional evidence or 'fuzzy propositions' (Bassey, 1999) that the key purpose of support and supervision for personal advisers is to manage stress and prevent burn out. However, these findings cannot be presented as conclusive in a context where meanings are not fixed and discourse positions will continue to shift. In addition the notion of 'voice' in post-structuralist research is problematic: many voices inform the discourse positioning of the participants in the study, and the researcher. There will be contrary evidence that will also form part of the conversation on the development of our understanding of support and supervision for this new profession. Small studies, such as this, help to make sense of the bigger picture painted by quantitative and statistical knowledge. Dissemination of the study adds to the knowledge as, even if tentative, it aids the understanding of what are complex social situations where meaning is central to understanding. Without that understanding, effectiveness for any system put in place is less assured.

There is a need for a framework for this knowledge beyond that offered by refereed journals. These are rarely read by practitioners and viewed as part of the moral high ground of academia with little relevance for 'messy' practice. 'Evidence based research into what works' demands dissemination that focuses on usefulness. As co-chair of the research committee for the professional institute I will actively seek, with others, ways of creating that framework, possibly via the National Guidance Research Forum to be launched in September 2004 (Guidance Council, 2004).

## A final word on immediate implications

Although the study sought the views of different groups my empathy is clearly located with the practitioners in the study. As 'intensive' personal advisers some, but not all, will now have received training on support and supervision. Their primary need for support – pithead time to wash off the dust of their labours – may have been recognised. The language they used was not tentative when they talked about feeling neglected and 'desperate for supervision'. This dissertation has argued that the 'noise' of more powerful discourses on the purpose of support and supervision may silence practitioners' discourse. Apart from the dissemination activities mentioned earlier I have an ethical debt to give voice to their needs. How to do this most effectively needs further consideration.

At the current time understanding about the purpose and provision of support and supervision across careers/ Connexions partnerships, varies considerably (ICG, 2003; Ofsted, 2003). In many cases, and in the geographical area of the study, what is offered feels like remedial help in a crisis. In discussing work with clients and the importance of understanding the social context of such work, Egan and Cowan (1979:3) use the metaphor of upstream versus downstream helping:

> The story goes that a person walking alongside a river sees someone drowning. This person jumps in, pulls the victim out, and begins artificial respiration. While this is going on, another person calls for help; the rescuer jumps into the water again and pulls the new victim out. This process repeats itself several times until the rescuer gets up and walks away from the scene. A bystander approaches and asks in surprise where s/he is going, to which the rescuer replies, "I'm going upstream to find out who's pushing all these people in and see if I can stop it!"

Connexions has moved to upstream helping for 'harder-to-help' clients who face multiple problems or are 'in danger' of entering this group. It

has sought to change the conditions that create circumstances that require remedial help. A 'duty of care' for these clients is being met and the recent evaluation (DfES, 2004a:9) indicates the service has been successful in reducing the number of young people not in education employment and training. The findings in this study suggest that in order to meet personal advisers' stated needs in this challenging area of intensive work, what we need now is some structured 'upstream helping' for personal advisers. There is a need to intervene before they risk drowning or need artificial respiration: after all, 'desperate' is a very strong word.

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**Appendix 1: Coded extract from Personal Adviser interview transcript**

**Ref: page 75**

*[handwritten notes at top:]*
... read article on S~S in ICG journal
Had paid for S&S & used Core Care Service
Very experienced CA - PA since start of LG.

- private room
- very interested n S&S
- lead role 'supervise' other CA/PA in LG

## Interview PA IV 1a "Norma"
*(Pages 1-10 - except)*

Hazel: Erm so I've said a little bit about what the research is about. What I've got here is some erm clues for me. It's mainly, erm my approach will be unstructured rather than a structured interview. But it's just – just some things to remind me. So I wonder if to start you could say a little bit about erm the context of your personal adviser work - you know where you work; who you work with – that sort of thing.

PA: I wonder if it would be worth saying start off with that my role is one of   **R**
Lead Community Careers Adviser.


Hazel: Right


PA: So I'm erm the lead for our little team of Personal Learning Gateway Advisers erm. So part of my work is that and the rest of it is working still   **C**
with young people who are still in education – or officially in education
(laughs) they tend not to be.   *(So more like PA role than CA role)*


Do you want me to say where I am as in 'here'?


Hazel: Erm it's the sort of clients that you're working with and what you do with them I suppose is the interesting bit!


PA: Okay, right well as with all the Learning Gateway clients 16-19, they're young people who are not engaged in any form of learning, as the jargon goes. Around here they are often young offenders, because we have close   **N/R**
working ties with the youth offending team. Erm they tend to be young people who fell out of education early on. Or just didn't do very well, or that sort of thing. They haven't the basic skills, not very good. That's maybe because they've got some learning difficulty or just that they've missed out on their education.
Hazel: Yes


PA: There's – I mean the way we've decided who to help on the Learning Gateway erm we tend to use - very sort of rule of thumb - that they've got   **NB / ⊅**
more than one issue, so these youngsters often do have poor home

*[handwritten notes at bottom:]*
R = role
C = context
✗ - networking relationships

NB - unclear / sometimes no boundaries for the work
⊅ - defining the role as role develops

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backgrounds. They've been kicked out of home erm other things, they're just not very effective. Erm the drugs thing is around, we don't always know about that.

C

Hazel: Yes, yes. No

PA:    You name it really that's been likely to happen.

Hazel: And what sort of work do you do with them?

PA:    Well our aim is to get them in to some form of learning. Erm (*pause*) I suppose we kind of befriend them. (Does not resort to jargon/ no 'professional speak' here)

⊅

Hazel: Right

PA:    That's where it's different from ordinary careers advisers. Erm we say to them, well this is the Learning Gateway and what that means is, is you can have one of us as a Personal Adviser and you can see us on a regular basis, we'll try to help you with whatever really – whatever you need. Erm and that's what we do. We tend to see them once a week, but sometimes they pop in and out. But as none of us is doing this role full time, we're not able to be – you know just there...

NT

⊅R R

Hazel: No.

PA: ...for them, erm and so we do have to work within confined spaces really. In any case if they're going to get into anything they've got to (*laughs*) learn to be, to be at places at agreed times.

T ( Time constraint? )

Hazel: Right, right.

PA:    Erm and we do – kind of do anything that we can. Although having been doing this work for 3 years now, we realise that we set out with this kind of rosy notion of you can do anything, but of course you, there is a limit to what you can do. Erm but we do take them to things; take them to interviews; take them to see other agencies – or put them in touch with other agencies like the local erm accommodation people, because that's often an issue and erm the local young people's drug and alcohol support system. Erm (Pause)

⊅

L

NR

- non traditional role ( not like CA work)
- dual role - not just time PA (becomes PAe)
- issue related to the constraints of time

L- limits to the role

Z

20Y

down to the benefits office, or just helping them with that here you know by phoning up and helping them to sort things out. People have got involved in helping them with medical problems. I mean quite often there are mental health issues of course. But we never know for sure. Because how can you, when you're not erm – but there is a local young person's counselling project. We don't have much joy getting them there, but it is there and we'll suggest it (*laughs*). Erm – all those sorts of things!

Hazel: Right, so what sort of barriers do you come up against then? You said that the help that you can give is limited, although you might want to give more help.

PA:     Well I think what I mean is, that most of these young people come to us with 15 or 16 – well obviously 15 or 16 years of life experience and they've already encountered a lot of difficulties, you know sometimes with the family or whatever. And we can't solve those things.

Hazel: No.

PA:     You can't solve stuff that is historical.

Hazel: No, no.

PA:     Erm, so even with the best will in the world, you can't always move them on because they've still got all this baggage...

Hazel: Yes

said with A raised voice

PA: ...with them that erm (*pause*) well [who knows] what's behind that . So that's what I meant.

Hazel: Mmh. So there's some major differences there to the work of a generic Careers Adviser – whatever that is these days (*laughs*). And you qualified first of all as a Carers Adviser. And when you're erm – out of interest, when you're interviewing young people do you still use an interview model tool?

PA:     {*Laughs*} No.     — so definitely not (laughter at 'idea')!

Hazel: You don't use one at all?

PA:     Well, not consciously.

Hazel: No.

PA:     No, I mean I suppose there is the good old thing about well this is where you are, this is where you're going to get to, this is how we're going to do it. I mean that...

IV - so maybe yes but not for career guidance

Hazel: Yes – and so it's in the very simple kind of 3-stage structure?

[said with 'well of course!' tone )

PA:     Well yes but – I mean very often the interviews are nothing much like an interview anyway!

Hazel: No.

PA:     They've turned up. There's some crisis they want sorting. It's not an interview, it an intervention I suppose.

crisis ▷

Hazel: Yes, quite.

PA:     You just do what needs doing there and then.

Hazel: Right, right.

PA:     And often they don't want to stay.

Hazel: No.

as did he professional support manage

PA:     They're off out again as soon as you ...

Hazel: Yeah – so it's kind of fire fighting, quite often?

(another IA used his metaphor of fire fighting – Hazel using it here!)

PA:     Yes

AS – work she involves dealing with immediate crisis (did not become code) – ▷

∫

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Hazel: Okay.  Erm so I mean with the lot of the things that er, could be happening to these young people, and I imagine at times you do get some fairly erm – not sure if traumatic is the right word – but some, some stories are told you, that are quite difficult to deal with.  Would that be the reason for support and supervision or do you have another view of the purpose of support and supervision?

PA:    Well I think that because the work is so different from ordinary careers advising and because you do encounter all sorts of things, erm that it should be a part of what we do.

*NT*
*SS!*

Hazel: Right

PA:    You know I don't think it should be something that you get because there's the crisis, personally, erm because everybody is very different about that. I mean you know you can see that someone is having a really hard time with something, but they may say, ooh no, it's alright, it's alright.  Erm and so my personal point of view (*laughs*) is that it's something that it should be part of what we do on a regular basis, and not something you slot in (*pauses*)

*SSr*

*Key Quote*

Hazel: Right

PA:    Because you're just about to – (*laughter*) ?

*(return to tape --- 'burn out'?)*

Hazel:  Because you've just experienced something or you're about to experience something...

PA:    Yes.

Hazel: ...rather than that it should something that is there on a regular basis on your timetable.

PA:    Yes, yes.

Hazel: So for all Personal Advisers?

*- yes should get support + supervision*
*- and it should be regular*

PA:     Yes, I think so. Well yes I think so. That's, that's my experience. And I suppose actually I've been doing it as long anybody in this company – in this part of the company.

Hazel: Right

PA:     As I came into it before the Learning Gateway actually emerged from wherever it was it did emerge from (laughs)   (from the re-pos...in agenda)
1998/9

Hazel: Yes, quite. Erm and you said erm because of the nature of the work that you're doing in the Personal Adviser role, because it is so different from careers work it needs support and supervision. Erm so what would be the purpose of support and supervision then, in, in that way?

PA:     (Pauses) Well, I don't know whether we need to separate out the support from the supervision?

P

S&S

Hazel: That's one of the questions I was going to ask you! (Laughter) You're already there, so you can do that if you like.

PA:     Okay

Hazel: So, the difference between support and supervision?

PA:     Mmh (pause) Well to talk about supervision first and obviously you have had loads of discussions with people about this. But my understanding is, is that that's an opportunity for the Personal Adviser to talk to someone in confidence in a safe setting where they can speak about how, how they're feeling, how they're being affected by the work they're doing. Erm so that it's separate from issues of caseload numbers and management stuff. Erm and that work does impact on your own emotional well being without any doubt. Erm even if people don't want to acknowledge that.

S
&I

\what people are we talking about here?

Hazel: Right.

significant hesitation – thinking here.

PA:     And that for me – that's what supervision is about. The support I guess is, is more about erm – well we give each other support within our little (A) SSpg team, because we meet on a weekly basis and I get everybody to talk about

purpose of S&S
Separating support & supervision
Safe section for S&S

I - emotional impact of rework
X- activities for S&S in place
recode w/ts SS (...classs w/, SSpurgroup :Sp
SS1-1 (SS one-to-one)211

who they're working with and what's going on. Erm so that's about sharing ideas and you know giving each other a good pat on the back, because you don't get much positive feedback from (laughs). But that's different. I mean you know I'm sure somebody might say well that's a kind of supervision but that's how I differentiate. And then what happens with our line manager is another issue.

*[handwritten: 'meanings' not clear here? Confusion?]*

*[handwritten right margin: Af S+S]*

Hazel: Right. I mean it's interesting isn't it – because in some Services they don't like the terms support and supervision at all and they're going to call it something else like 'reflective practice' or erm elsewhere it's just called 'supervision', because that's the title that's erm known if you like, that's the one that's in counselling and people use that. And there are people that see the supervision side as the looking on your practice...

PA:   Oh I see!

Hazel: ...from an ethical – so it's – so here we are! (Laughs.) This is part of what I'm interested in...

PA:   Yes

Hazel: ...That there are all these different definitions. So some people see supervision as the looking at your work in terms of 'ethical practice' if you like and the support being the sharing of caseloads. So there are a range of different erm perspectives on the support and supervision. But I mean clearly, you see different functions of whatever you want to call it, support and supervision. Is that a fair summary of how you see that?

*[handwritten right margin: DH]*

PA:   Yes! And I think I've gleaned that from, as you say, contact with the counselling role.

*[handwritten right margin: P]*

Hazel: Yes.

PA:   Erm Social Services, to some extent the Youth Service, because that seems to be their use of the term. So I've never thought of supervision as somebody looking over my shoulder.

*[handwritten right margin: NR]*

*[handwritten: (does not view S+S in a negative or threatening way)]*

Hazel: No

*[handwritten bottom left: Need for affirmation different meanings]*

*[handwritten: π]*

PA:    Quite the opposite. It has been a much erm (*pauses*) safer thing – erm.

Hazel: Yes, and erm (*pauses*) another issue, certainly when I first started looking into this, was erm if there were a stigma attached to support and supervision - erm and that seems to still be there with some people.  That erm some might view it as being unable to cope rather than...

PA:    Well that's right!

Hazel: ...improving their practise.

PA:    I think it's something that needs to be there all the time and not something that as you say, you just get to because you're really up against the wall and feeling really desperate.  Because then that does kind of, well can feel as if it's, oh I'm not coping.

*(handwritten, right margin)* Stig (introduced by Hazel but PA agrees)

*(handwritten)* SS!

*(handwritten)* Key Quote

Hazel: And you've said a little bit about erm how you work as a team.  So can you say a little bit, about what you're actually getting now in terms of support and supervision for the role?

*(handwritten)* & smiles!

PA:    (*Pause*) It would be easier in a way for me to say what I'm giving! But no, I have erm 3 other staff who are Personal Advisers part-time.  Erm and I see part of my role is to meet with them regularly and to support them as best I can.

*(handwritten)* GivR

Hazel: Right

PA:    And we do that as a little group.  We would just go through the cases each week and say well what's happened with so-and-so this week.  Erm I see that as an opportunity for us to talk amongst ourselves about how it feels.  So I do ask them you know – how do you feel about that?  Are you okay with that?  Erm is it too much?  Do we need to change round? - Erm which seems about as much as I can do, and obviously I get that from my colleagues in that context.  Erm (*pause*) I don't really get anything much else...

*(handwritten)* (A) recode SSPg
*(handwritten)* F

*(handwritten)* GivR

Hazel: No.

*(handwritten, bottom)* Stigma – some view S&S as a stigma 'unable to cope'
R – giving but not receiving support & supervision
need to discuss feelings

*(handwritten)* 8

*(handwritten, bottom right)* 219

PA:  ...within the company.

Hazel: Right

PA:    I mean I can talk to my line manager, but <u>one of the issues we have</u> of    *LM no X*
course, is there are no line managers who've done this work.

Hazel: Right.

PA:    And erm whilst she's sympathetic, she's – at times she's said to me,
well I've never done this, so she's really just likes the fact that I get on with it.

*(no problems if you just get on with it without making a fuss)*

Hazel: So, and I think that that's erm a universal problem that line managers –
erm some don't even have a case-load.  And a lot don't have a – this *(laughs)*
case-load!

PA:    No!

Hazel: So they don't and, and they say themselves, they don't have you know
the understanding of the work in order to erm provide that support and
supervision.   So you're not getting any one-to-one erm?

PA:    Well what I do – and did from the start of the role, because when this    ▷
came in we just kind of got on with it.

Hazel: Yes, quite.

PA:    There were <u>very few boundaries or guidelines</u> and that's the time I said    *NB*
to my manager well look there's something different there, <u>and I'd like to meet</u>    ✗
with you on a fairly regular basis just to talk through what I'm doing, because    ▷
<u>I'm making this up as I go along.</u>  So I continued that I suppose for every 6-8
weeks.
Hazel: Right.                                           *initiated by PA!*

PA:    But, and that's mainly for me to say well look, this is what I'm doing.
Erm because there has to be a fair amount of juggling in terms of what there

*– line managers have no experience of [fieldwork]*
*lack of structure (becomes NB)*                                          ∅

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is to do and how I use my time.  And I'm just happier to know that (*laughs*) she knows what I'm doing really!

*T*
*RES/CL*

Hazel: Right, right.

PA:    Erm I occasionally talk to her about the individual young people but that's not really (*pause*) what it's about.

Hazel: No

PA:    In actual fact I've been paying to get supervision from an external source.

*This PA is paying for Supervision!*

Hazel: Right

PA:    For the last 2 years

Hazel: You're paying yourself?

PA:    (silent affirmative) — *with head nod, eyebrows raised!*

Hazel: How do you feel about that?

PA:    Well, I feel it's my choice. — *but should you be paying for it?!*

Hazel: Yes, yes.

PA:    Erm - (*pause*).

Hazel: And how helpful has that been...

PA:    Erm

Hazel: Presumably it is, you've been doing it for 2 years

PA:    (*Laughs*) Yes!  It's been good in – well obviously it's changed because now – well things do change don't they.  Erm, it's been good for me to be going somewhere else and knowing that, that time is entirely mine and that

*who takes/shares resp ausibility for work with clients?*

*(------- ami )*

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**Appendix 2: Open coding board for Line Managers' interviews - exhaustive list**

**Ref: page 76**

Line Managers' Interviews.

Exhaustive list (especially) 65 mins (reduced to 50 mins)

**Context**

**Role**

**Prof**

**Barriers**

**Benefits of SS**

**Management of**

**Policy & Practice**

**SS Activities**

**HT & Co in SS**

**Appendix 3: Axial coding board for Professional Representatives, with frequency count**

**Ref: page 81**

**Context**

(PRsd1 ×3+1 (41 report))

- NB - unclear, confused or no boundaries PRs work 2×3
- U - need for others to understand role 1×1
- RES - need to make reports to MS 2×2
- Env - decide training given 1×1
- local - implements decision at local level 2×1
- Diff PAs - have diff needs/ideas 2×3
- Feed - use of feedback given — pilots 1×2
- Supr - SS accountancy broad but little depth 1×2
- Quals - needed for PA role 1×1
- B - broad nature of PA role 1×2

**Wider Influences**
- LMCon - confused of wider role of LM 3×1
- MEET - need to meet Healthcontract 1×1
- BP - SS in bigger picture constant change 4×10
- T - time constraints of role associated w/ PA/LM work 3×10
- PAG - gap reviewed - between regard - policy - practice 1×5
- Appsd - QA via Qsystem 1×1
- AL - SS appraisal system 1×2
- Amrotes PRs x4 not in PA GF
- LM vs

---

**Need/Why?**
- SS. legitimate need for SS 4×25
- BO - stress + personal 3×10
- DqC - daily/core beliefs/pracs 3×4    T - emotional impact of work 4×1
- EW - for ethical back/future 2×1
- ED - for ethical dilemmas 1×1
- GNR - giving + receiving SS 1×1
- RoI - SS right of indulgence 7 (×1)
- Wrong - for use PRs spoaking 1×1

(55)

**Who needs to be involved?**
- LM/S - views about LM involvement in SS 3×12
- LM/R - views about LM relationship issues 1×1
- FTO - forced to relate Qs 1×2
- KALS - lead adviser SS 1×1
- † how many PRs talked about this
- † how many have this mentioned

**Doing What?**
- Sk - particular skills needed for SS role 3×4
- CC - case case solution 2×8
- SSI - thoughts about WSS 2×1
- SS.P3 - thoughts about PA SS 3×4
- Agen - nav giving PA 2×3
- AP - need for AP in SS 1×2

- All 4 high
- All 3 high
- 3 medium/low - twice
- 2 × 36 more, & at least once

---

**Need | What?**
- SC - separate screening 2×6
- SS - need to approve as SS 3×4
- Tr - training for role of SS 4×9
- GP - model of good practice 2×1
- RP - b incorporate reflective model in work 2×3
- Name - what you call it? 2×4   SSin - need for formals S 1×1
- Mix - a mix of models/approaches 3×8
- BS - boundaries in SS 1×1
- SV - really structured process/time 3×11
- SfyS - SS for supervisors 3×1

**Purpose**
- DM - different meanings 2×1
- P - defining purpose given 4×22
- C - work with clients - 5
- A - how use effective yn - 1
- RP - reflective P - 5
- Bs - boundaries negative - 4
- UV - understood valued - 1
- OL - of lead chance to - 2
- ? - 3nd one of SS - 2
- HANM work (monthly) - 1
- †† how many PRs talked about this
- †† how many have this mentioned

Feelings of group about PA/Stress/SS

- Ado - is current SS provision adequate? 1×1
- Stigma - negative in using SS 1×1
- PA - feelings about professional autonomy 1×1
- CS - role of common sense 1×2
- S - need for safety, confor V1 trust in SS 1×1
- Pt - part-time in SSG? 1×1

**Preferred Reps Grap**
2 × IVS
1 × report
1 × ICG briefing
..... 3×

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**Appendix 4: Example of code list to identify key themes and patterns for further analysis**

**Ref: page 81**

| Code | Description | PA number | PA Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| SS! | Definite need for support and supervision | 10 | 54 |
| Str | Need for a structured process | 10 | 53 |
| BO | Role leads to stress and potential burn out | 10 | 53 } * |
| I | Emotional impact of the work – sleepless nights | 5<br><br>Combined with B O | 46 } * |
| E | Doing enough or too much | 10 | 45 |
| NB | Unclear, confused boundaries | 9 | 45 |
| NT | Non- traditional role – not CA | 10 | 42 |
| NR | Importance of networking relationships | 9 | 40 |
| LM/S | Views about line manager supervision | 10 | 39 |
| Tr | Need for training for supervision | 10 | 37 |
| D | Defining the role of PA as work developed | 9 | 34 |
| S | Need for safety, comfort and trust in supervision | 10 | 34 |
| Quals | Discussion on the need for qualifications for PA role | 8 | 32 |
| SSpg | Thoughts about peer group supervision | 9 | 32 |

(cont...)

| CinP | Codes in practice & gap between policy and practice | 8 | 30 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| * Combining BO and I | **Avoiding stress and potential burn out / the emotional impact of the work** | 10 | 99 |
| | | | All 30+ |
| | | | (Continues 20+...) |

**Appendix 4: PERSONAL ADVISER CODE COUNT TO IDENTFY PATTERNS**