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# How do Social Work Students Develop their Professional Identity?

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University of Plymouth

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**How do Social Work Students Develop their Professional  
Identity?**

**By Julia Mary Wheeler**

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University  
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Professional Doctorate of Education**

Plymouth Institute of Education  
Plymouth University

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**Author’s Declaration**

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

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During the early days of the Doctorate I attended lectures, talks and research skills seminars and study days.

**Work has been presented at the following conferences:**

**2015** How do Social Work Students Develop their Professional Identity? - Narratives, Identity and Praxis. 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Sociology and Social Work: University of Chester

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Signed .....

Date .....

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## **How do Social Work Students Develop their Professional Identity?**

### **Abstract**

Professional socialisation is a key aspect of social work pre-qualifying training and the final practice placement has long been viewed as one of the most crucial elements of social work training, in enabling students to transfer learning on the course into practice (Parker, 2007). Whilst there has been substantial research into how students develop their skills in social work education, very few studies have focused upon the student's development of professional identity and the process of professional socialisation (Valutis, Rubin and Bell, 2012). This study explores this gap, particularly the impact of the placement supervisor and agency context upon the student's development of professional identity.

An autobiographical style and social constructionist approach is employed by the author, alongside the use of a theoretical lens which incorporates Bourdieu's (1993) work, particularly the concept of 'Habitus', Jenkins' (2008) use of three orders concerning 'Social Identity', and the work of Lave and Holland (2001) regarding 'History in Person'. The data was generated from semi-structured interviews with final year postgraduate students and placement supervisors. These narratives were analysed through the use of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

The findings of this study contributes four main areas to the understanding of how professional identity is developed. Firstly, the importance of prior and current personal experiences in the development of professional identity, especially first-hand service user experience. Secondly the value of informal reflective spaces to discuss identity, particularly with peers. Thirdly the significance of the student establishing a reciprocal relationship with their placement supervisor. Finally, the impact of the agency/placement environment upon the student and their supervisor in supporting this process of professional socialisation. Further research of a longitudinal nature is proposed by the author, to include a wider range of students and supervisors in order to build upon this understanding of professional identity development and how to best support the professional socialisation process.

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## List of Abbreviations and Glossary

### Abbreviations

|      |   |
|------|---|
| ASYE | Assessed and Supported Year in Employment   |
| BA   | Batchelor of Arts                           |
| BASW | British Association of Social Workers       |
| CQSW | Certificate of Qualification in Social Work |
| DFE  | Department for Education                    |
| DH   | Department of Health                        |
| EdD  | Professional Doctorate in Education         |
| GSCC | General Social Care Council                 |
| HPC  | Health and Care Professions Council         |
| HEI  | Higher Education Institution                |
| IFSW | International Federation of Social Workers  |
| MA   | Master of Arts                              |
| PCF  | Professional Capabilities Framework         |
| PEP  | Practice Educator standards                 |

### Glossary

**Capability** – one’s capacity to perform the work of a profession and a sense of continually developing one’s practice (Eraut, 1994:208).

**Competence** – normative criteria which is used to judge that a person is competent to undertake a particular occupation/profession (Eraut, 1994:186/7).

**Identity** - often described as one’s ‘self’ or ‘sense of being’. It is made up of our experiences over time and is influenced by our age, gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity and so on. Identity is not fixed, it continually develops throughout our lifetime during interaction with others and our environment (Burr, 2003:106/7).

**Identification** - is the process by which a student identifies with the values, norms and behaviours of the social work profession (Weiss *et al.*, 2004:14). It is the ongoing process of ‘becoming’ a social worker and further developing one’s identity (Jenkins, 2004:5).

**Placement** (Field Practicum/Field Instruction) - The setting in which the student completes the practice element of their social work studies (currently 170 days). Placements can be in a variety of agency settings where students undertake tasks and roles to develop their practical experience of social work.

**Placement Supervisor** (Agency Supervisor or Practice Supervisor) - The person in the same placement setting as the student who supervises and manages their day to day work.

**Practice Educator** (Practice Teacher or Practice Assessor) - The person who takes responsibility for the student's learning and assessing their progress in placement. This person could be an off-site practice educator, where they are employed through the agency or social work degree course to undertake the role of a practice educator who is not located in the same work site as the student (Doel, 2010).

**Professional Identity** - there is no clear definition of social work professional identity (Staniforth *et al.*, 2011 and Webb, 2015). The most widely accepted definition of social work is the International Federation of Social Work's global definition (2014). Social work appears to borrow its knowledge base from a number of disciplines, but the value base of social work is its most distinctive feature (BASW, 2012).

**Professional Socialisation** - is often reported as the internalisation of a set of values and the culture of a profession (Zarshenas *et al.*, 2014). It is also considered to be the process whereby students develop a sense of self as members of a profession, internalise the values of their profession, and exhibit these values through their behaviour.

**Resilience** - one's ability to adapt and cope with the everyday demands of social work practice, often in the form of developing strategies to manage the stress and tensions of practice (Kinman and Grant, 2014).

## **Chapter One**

### **Introducing the Context of Social Work and Social Work Education**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This study is concerned with my interest in how social work students develop their professional identity. Given the personal nature of identity I have chosen to write this thesis in a way that incorporates some of my own experience and identity, thus taking an autobiographical/auto-ethnographical approach. I made this decision because as a social work educator I have encouraged and prompted students to explore and explain their own identity and use of 'self' in their written work. Therefore, given the topic of this study, it seems only appropriate and in the spirit of partnership with respondents within my research, that I should do the same. This style of writing and research is supported by a number of academics, but in particular, Sparkes (2002) and Ellis and Bochner, (1996, 2002). Although this approach has been criticised by some for being self-indulgent and narcissistic (Sparkes, 2002), Ellis and Bochner argue that an autobiographical approach enables:

“writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural”.

(Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:739).

This was a highly attractive approach to take as I have been explicit about my own identity journey and experience within this thesis, as I was conscious of how these have impacted upon my research and my analysis of the data. In taking an autobiographical approach I found that the timescales of the Professional Doctorate in Education programme (EdD) did not allow for a comprehensive exploration of my own experience. Instead I have made use of Brookfield's (1995) 'four lenses', the first lens being an autobiographical

reflection, where I have maintained a reflective journal throughout the process of completing this study. Within this journal I have continued to explore my own on-going identity journey and experiences. In particular I have used my journal to explore and record how my own identity and experiences have impacted on my research and my analysis of the data, which I have then further utilised to write my analysis in chapters five, six and seven. The second lens concerns viewing my research through the student's eyes, in effect my interviews with students. The third lens refers to the support of colleagues as critical friends, thus within my own research this constitutes the thesis supervision I have received and discussions with my work colleagues and during presentations at conferences (see list of conferences attended page iv). Finally, the fourth lens involves locating my research within theoretical frameworks which I have explored throughout this thesis, but especially within chapters two and eight.

I have structured this thesis so that I initially explore the social work profession and current social work context at the time of writing, before exploring my theoretical understanding of identity and professional socialisation. Within the second chapter I present a distinctive combination of theories that have assisted me with my analysis of identity. In my third chapter I directly apply my theoretical understanding to social work with a literature review that identifies the gaps within the literature. In chapter four I explain the fieldwork that I have undertaken, including the aims of my research and methodology. The next three chapters (five, six, and seven) explore my analysis of the data and the final chapter discusses the contribution and importance of my research for social work education. Before I embark on the above, and consistent with my autobiographical

approach, I will briefly explain how my own experience and interest in social work professional identity have evolved.

## **1.2 Autobiography**

My motivation to undertake social work training originated from my childhood experience as a young carer of a mother who experienced chronic mental health, which required continuous and intensive psychiatric intervention. This experience inspired me to pursue a career where supporting and working with people was a prominent feature. Although I was a young carer, I strived to encourage my mother to be independent and take responsibility and make decisions whenever she was able to do so. This has also been an important aspect of my social work practice and in my continuing role as a carer.

I applied to complete a social work course at the earliest opportunity, which meant I commenced my social work training immediately following college at the age of eighteen. Reflecting back, I view this now as my former self embarking upon the opportunity to develop my own independence, free of my caring role, in order to secure a career.

The social work course I undertook was completed in tandem with a sociology degree at a reasonably prestigious university in Southern England. The majority of my peers were from what I perceived as privileged middle class backgrounds, in stark contrast to my own working class background, where my childhood had been spent on a council estate in an ethnically and culturally diverse city in the Midlands.

I was one of the youngest students on the programme and I found that my age was one of the main challenges that I encountered on the course, particularly during placements. Partly this was because I was conscious of my age, and often felt the need to prove that I was 'mature enough' to be on the course, and later 'experienced enough' to qualify as a social worker. For example, I did receive comments from placement personnel, academic tutors, service users and carers and at times my peers concerning my age. Therefore, I have a good deal of empathy for younger students on the programmes I work with and have some understanding of their experience of this within placement and with placement personnel, as explored in chapter five (5.3.3).

I was fortunate to experience three placements within a local authority setting; the first in a learning disability team within a health environment, the second in an inner city children's service and the third in a community mental health team. In all of these placements I had a practice educator who also acted in the dual role as my placement supervisor. My memories of placement are mostly positive, where I was well supported and gained new skills and confidence in my abilities. My third placement was the most challenging, in part as this was my final placement before qualifying, and as mental health was a significant element of my personal experience and motivation for becoming a social worker. During this placement I made the decision to embark upon a career in social work where I focused upon work with children and families, although many of the parents I worked with during my practice experienced mental health issues.

I qualified as a social worker in the early 1990s with a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW), thus I was part of one of the last student groups to complete this particular qualification in social work. Since graduating I have worked mostly within children's services and then more recently as a lecturer, working with undergraduate and postgraduate social work students. Prominent throughout my career as a social work practitioner has been my work with social work students. From my very first social work post in a residential children's setting I worked alongside social work students, supporting their skills and confidence in practice, attempting to emulate my own positive experiences of placement during my social work training. During my years as a child protection social worker in local authority settings, I was fortunate to have the opportunity and support of my managers to undertake practice supervision with social work students and later to train as a practice educator. Consequently, I have seen many students develop, succeed and at times fail within their training. This experience as a placement supervisor and practice educator influenced my decision within this study to seek the views of placement supervisors, who are crucial to the development of students during placement as explored in chapter six (6.4). In my current employment as a lecturer, much of my teaching has focused upon the importance of placements and preparing students for placements, which has been a career decision and a natural progression from my work in practice with students.

As a direct consequence of these experiences, my research has focused upon social work students' development of identity within their placement. In particular, the final practice placement has been of most interest to me, having long been viewed and supported by literature (see chapter three 3.4), as one of

the most crucial elements of a social work programme in enabling students to transfer theory learnt at university into practice (Parker, 2007:765). Whilst there has been substantial research into how students develop their skills in placement, there has been limited focus upon their development of professional identity (Clapton, 2013, also see discussion in chapter three). This is surprising as social work education promotes the importance of the use of 'self' in social work in enabling students to successfully complete their qualification. In addition, like my own autobiography, most students have a clear motivation and desire to embark upon a career in social work (Cree, 2003, 2013), which I have endeavoured to explore in this study. My research capitalises upon these gaps in the literature, including the lack of research on the impact of the placement supervisor on the student's development of professional identity, which I will explore further in the body of my thesis.

Having explained about my personal motivation, the remainder of this chapter focuses upon the wider context of social work and social work education within England as this is where my research was conducted.

### **1.3 Social Work Context**

Social work is a relatively new profession compared to counterparts in the health occupations, such as doctors. The most widely accepted definition of social work is the International Federation of Social Work's global definition, which was last updated in July 2014:

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

(IFSW, 2014).

From examining this definition, social work appears to borrow its knowledge base from several disciplines, but the value base of social work is its most distinctive feature. This value base is described in detail by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW, 2012), in a firmly established ‘Code of Ethics’. I propose that this difficulty of clearly identifying the actual nature of social work can be further extended to the challenges social work has experienced in defining social work professional identity (Webb, 2015), which is much more than social work values. As Staniforth *et al.*, (2011) discovered there are variations in what is perceived as professional identity within social work; for instance, between children and adult social workers and those who work in mental health and learning disability settings. Kelly *et al.*, (2012) explored this within teaching and found that whilst there are some differences (such as in teaching different subjects), since schools are centrally controlled, teachers across disciplines do share many similarities (2012:20). I would argue that this is analogous with social work as a state mediated profession.

Social work can be distinguished from other professions by its particular code of ethics (BASW, 2012), HCPC (2016) standards of proficiency, the use of a Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW, 2016a) and like other professions it is regulated and inspected (see 1.5). A profession is

essentially defined by a shared set of values, and a shared community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Students learn about their profession through socialisation as is explored in chapter six. For example, this socialisation is illustrated by Freund *et al.*, (2016) in their study of BA social work students in Israel, where they found that students had a high commitment to the profession of social work if they wanted to bring about change (2016:20).

“The research findings indicate that students’ identification with the desire to bring about social change, together with the desire to assist individuals and families and deal with community practice, maximize commitment to the profession”.

(Freund *et al*, 2016:21).

Social work as a profession is constantly changing and becoming increasingly managerial in nature (see 7.2), thus students are faced with an ever-changing landscape, where they learn about the profession through ‘doing’ social work in placement and later in qualified practice. The profession of social work, like other professions is shaped by policy and law (Baxter, 2011:31). For example, teaching is also increasingly shaped by policy, as Sachs (2001:150) found in her research concerning the professional identity of teachers in Australia. Sachs (2001:150) argued that there is no singular version of what constitutes a profession, but that it is impacted upon by managerialism and reform agendas, namely policy. In summary, social work professional identity is influenced by wider policy, law and the media presentation of social work, as explored in the following section and previously in assignment one (appendix four, 4.1).

#### **1.4 Policy Impact upon Social Work as a Profession**

The emergence and history of social work has been much explored by writers within the social work academic world such as; Payne (2014), Jones (2014), Parker and Doel (2013) and Moriarty *et al.*, (2015). The majority of these publications acknowledge that development and change within the social work profession is mostly politically driven. I fully concur with this view, as the impact of policy and government initiatives can be easily observed in the implementation of recommendations following serious case reviews concerning the deaths of children and investigations into failings of adult safeguarding. For example, the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003) and Peter Connelly (Laming, 2009) prompted a series of significant changes in social work practice and in the education of social workers at both pre and post registration.

Following the death of Peter Connelly and Lord Laming's report (2009), a Social Work Task Force (2009) was established which made a series of recommendations, followed by implementation and yet further recommendations by the Social Work Reform Board (2010, 2012). As a direct result of these recommendations Eileen Munro (2011) was appointed by the former Coalition Government to review child protection processes in England. This report has had a significant impact upon social work practice in both children's and adult's services, but also upon the perception of whether social work education is 'good enough'. For example, the Coalition Government focused upon social workers not making effective decisions and the need for social workers to be more accountable. The Coalition Government blamed many of these shortcomings upon a lack of training and preparation for newly qualified social workers. This resulted in measures described later in this

chapter, such as the implementation of the Professional Capabilities Framework, appointment of two Chief Social Workers (one for children and one for adults) and the establishment of the College of Social Work. More recently the Children and Social Work Bill (2016) has made proposals for the introduction of state regulation of professional standards for social work. Although the final outcome of this bill was not known at the time of writing this study, there has been much speculation within the media. For example, McNicoll and Stevenson (2016) stated that the bill allows for the government to initiate a range of criminal offences for the misconduct of social workers.

## **1.5 Regulation**

Social workers in England were statutorily regulated for the first time with the creation of the General Social Care Council (GSCC) in 2001. Following on from this, in 2003 the title of 'social worker' became protected with the introduction of mandatory registration with the GSCC, which also included the registration of social work students. With the closure of the GSCC, this regulatory function later transferred to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) in 2012, alongside the approval and monitoring of pre-qualification social work education (HCPC, 2016). However, under the HCPC's new regulation, social work students were no longer registered. Many have perceived this change in a negative light as the GSCC was a social work body, whilst the HCPC is a generic regulator (Wiles, 2011). Therefore, independent social work bodies such as BASW and Social Work Action Network have strived to promote a positive view of social work as a profession and argued for the creation of a social work body to regulate the profession, especially following the demise of

The College of Social Work (2015). Their campaigning has continued particularly as it was announced on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2016 that a new body for social work would be established. Although replacing the College of Social Work, the new organisation would no longer be the 'voice' of social work. Instead this would be more of a regulatory body, eventually replacing the role of the HCPC in social work (Stevenson, 2016). The proposed impact of these changes would be more robust regulations and training of social workers, with proposals for more funding to 'fast track' social work programmes within agencies and to implement the Knowledge and Skills Statements (DFE, 2014, DH, 2015) in qualifying practice in the form of examinations or a 'test' for social workers (Schrear, 2015a). Furthermore, the Children and Social Work Bill (2016) has recommended that social work becomes state regulated, which could also include social work students.

## **1.6 Professional Capabilities Framework**

The College of Social Work was launched in January 2012, and one of the main tasks of the College was to accommodate and support the implementation of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF). The intention of this framework was to promote the abilities and capabilities of social work practitioners, rather than focusing upon a prescriptive and competence based framework, which was utilised previously by the National Occupational Standards (TOPSS UK Partnership, 2002). The Professional Capabilities Framework consisted of nine domains of practice such as; Critical Reflection and Analysis, Rights, Justice and Economic Wellbeing, Values and Ethics. Each of these domains comprised of levels which acted as descriptors of the expected ability of social

workers or social work students, at various stages of their careers (College of Social Work, 2012a).

The College of Social Work advocated that the Professional Capabilities Framework was a 'professional' rather than an 'occupational' framework. The PCF's first domain refers to 'Professionalism', and states that social workers should both 'identify and behave as a professional social worker' (BASW, 2016a). This description by the Professional Capabilities Framework suggests that students could be socialised into the profession, an area that this thesis aims to explore, however the actual nature and professional identity of social work remains heavily contested (Webb, 2015)

There has been a growing amount of research into how social work practice has altered in recent years, in particular the impact of bureaucratic systems (Jones, 2014). The impact of this bureaucracy has been commented upon by Munro (2011) who offered a series of recommendations to reduce the amount of bureaucracy within social work, and ensure that social workers are adequately trained for the job of protecting children. Conversely, Munro (2011) utilised a number of 'prescriptions' within the Professional Capabilities Framework that could unintentionally restrict and disempower social workers, rather than encouraging them to use their own judgment and expertise. For instance, the introduction of 'capabilities' rather than 'competencies' or 'skills' (see glossary, pages xi-xii) and the appointment of a Chief Social Worker, could serve as a means of maintaining state regulation of social work rather than liberating social workers from bureaucracy. Moreover, the implementation of the Children and

Social Work Bill (2016) is most likely to result in further state regulation of social work.

The future of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) at the time of writing this thesis is unknown, following the announcement of the closure of the College of Social Work in June 2015 (Nosowska and Templeton, 2015). This unexpected closure resulted in a number of the functions of the College of Social Work being devolved to other organisations. Most importantly for my own research the PCF was delegated to BASW, but not before a consultation concerning proposed changes to the PCF was implemented. At the time of writing this study, although this review has taken place (BASW, 2015), it is uncertain how any changes to the PCF will be implemented. However, I have no doubt that any changes to the PCF will have a profound impact upon the social work profession and particularly the training of social workers.

### **1.7 Context of Social Work Education**

These policy changes over the years have also impacted upon social work education. Historically formal regulation of social work education began in 1962 with the Council for Training in Social Work, which was renamed the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work in 1970. As already stated the statutory body for ensuring the quality of social work education was replaced in 2001 by the GSCC and later replaced by the HCPC in 2012. Following the creation of the GSCC, social workers have been required to achieve minimum qualifications on entry to training, and the social work qualification became a degree rather than a diploma in

2003 (HCPC, 2016). Hence this means that most undergraduate degrees are completed within three years and a postgraduate course is undertaken in two years.

Currently social work students are required to undertake 170 days in practice, resulting in a first placement of 70 days and 100 days in their final placement. Traditionally in England placement personnel include; a Placement Supervisor (Agency Supervisor or Practice Supervisor), who supervises the day to day work of the student and a Practice Educator (Practice Teacher or Practice Assessor) who provides a more academic role of assessing the student and assisting the student with linking teaching undertaken in their social work course with their practice (Doel, 2010). Individual academic institutions have various methods of implementing these roles and means of supporting students in placement, and sometimes assign different names for the roles of personnel, but largely their function and support of the student are comparable. For the purposes of this research and clarity for the reader, I have used Placement Supervisor and Practice Educator throughout, as detailed in my glossary (pages xi-xii) but also further explained below.

The placement supervisor will normally provide an induction to the placement and a small workload for the student. The aim of this supervision is to ensure that the student is clear about their role and purpose with their work and to ensure the quality of the work the student undertakes, which crucially includes the safety of service users. The placement supervisor will offer shadowing opportunities and provide a role model for social work practice, some of which was discussed by

supervisors in their interviews within this research and is further explored in chapter six (6.4). The placement supervisor is often a qualified social worker, indeed this is a requirement explained within the guidance of the Practice Educator Professional Standards (College of Social Work, 2012b). However, the placement supervisor role is sometimes undertaken by a social care professional who has a great deal of experience within the organisation, but does not hold a social work qualification, a feature that is more common in non-local authority placements. In my own experience of the role, although not a formal requirement, the placement supervisor often observes the student and offers feedback on their practice. The placement supervisor can joint work more complex work with the student, thus offering an opportunity for the student to experience how risk is managed within the organisation and in practice with service users. Finally, the placement supervisor is usually a professional who is employed within the organisation/team that the student has been placed within.

The practice educator is currently required to be a qualified and registered social worker who has met, or is undertaking training at level two of the Practice Educator Professional Standards (College of Social Work, 2012b). They might be a professional employed within the organisation that the student has been placed within, but often are a 'long-arm' practice educator employed to undertake the role independently. They complete formal direct observations of the student in practice and offer both an assessment and feedback on the student's performance. The work of the practice educator is often accompanied by sessions with the student that

facilitate critical reflection and application of knowledge to practice. This could take the form of group supervision with a small group of students. In addition, some practice educators will undertake the dual role as the placement supervisor (as in my own experience of placement as a student described earlier in this introduction). In the final placement, the practice educator will complete an assessment and report upon how the student has met the PCF for the final stage of their studies.

## **1.8 Final Placement**

It is this final placement of 100 days that has attracted the most attention in social work education, where there is a dominant view that the final placement should be in a statutory setting, most likely a Local Authority (Narey, 2014 and Croisdale-Appleby, 2014). It has been argued that a placement within a statutory setting would best prepare students for qualifying and commencing their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE, Skills for Care, 2014). The ASYE is similar to a teacher's first post in employment, where the graduate completes a transitional year where they receive more frequent supervision and support than a social worker would normally receive. They also undertake written reflective work and are observed in practice to evidence they are meeting the PCF for their level of capability, as a newly qualified social worker. I have had a good deal of experience in working with those undertaking the ASYE, both in my current post in delivering a short module of ten credits to support the ASYE portfolio and in my previous practice post, where I coordinated a Newly Qualified Social Worker Programme. Here I observed how some graduates experienced this transition to qualified working more smoothly

than others. As a consequence of this interest I have explored within this study, the impact of a student's final placement on how they developed their professional identity and are socialised into the profession, particularly in preparation for their ASYE and in securing employment as a qualified practitioner.

A number of studies have been conducted to appraise this new degree, such as Hussein *et al.*, (2008) and Orme *et al.*, (2009). This research has extended to how the degree prepares newly qualified social workers for practice (Jack and Donnellan, 2010), and was a response to the concern from employers regarding the recruitment and retention of social work staff and that graduates were unable to 'hit the ground running' (Galpin *et al.*, 2012). Another concern of employers has been whether graduates are resilient and prepared for the stressful nature of social work (Collins, 2008, Lee and Miller, 2013), in order to improve the recruitment and retention of social workers, which I will explore in more detail within chapter three (3.6) and chapter seven (7.3.2 and 7.5). In response to these concerns the former Coalition Government appointed Sir Martin Narey (2014) to review social work education for children's social workers. Narey made a series of recommendations, some of these directly linking to social work as a profession. For example, Narey found that social work is ill-defined and recommended that the newly appointed Chief Social Worker for Children, offer a single definition of social work and clarify what a newly qualified social worker should know on graduating from the course. Narey also highlighted the friction between the College of Social Work and the HCPC, in providing too many regulations and identified that there was no unified agreement on the role and tasks of social workers. Narey's report

(2014), also promoted that social work students need to be based with other social workers in order to develop their skills and therefore their professional identity. An alternative report was published by Croisdale-Appleby (2014), which further highlighted the challenges of educating social workers. What these two reports agreed upon was the centrality of practice placements to the education and socialisation of social work students.

### **1.9 Placement Partnerships**

Prior to the introduction of a degree in Social Work in 2003, there had been formal partnerships between agencies and social work programmes. Meaning that both the course providers and agencies were accountable and responsible for the quality of placements and resourcing programmes with placements. Following this implementation in 2003, Bellinger (2010:604) argued that there has been an erosion in the numbers of placements offered by local authorities, as they were no longer contracted to provide them. Consequently, there has been a recent drive to promote formal partnerships between course providers and employers to establish 'teaching partnerships', in order to increase placement numbers within the local authorities (DH, 2014). These partnerships have been slow to develop and in my own institution, this has directly led to a need to develop more placements in the independent, private and voluntary sector. Moreover, this has resulted in bestowing more power to reports such as Narey's (2014) to enforce change that does not necessarily advocate for the development of social workers, but attempts to establish and recruit a workforce that is 'ready to practice', or 'hit the ground running' (as

explained earlier in this chapter) within the local authorities. For example, Donovan (2016) recently reported that there is a 27% shortfall of children's social workers within local authorities and McNicoll (2016a) reported a 10.5% shortfall of social workers in adult services.

This has further encouraged the use of new programmes where students can train within an organisation or in employment, such as 'frontline' and 'step up to social work'. This has resulted in a potential threat to the social work bursary that students currently receive, such as students enrolled on employer led courses are in effect 'paid employees' and do not require a bursary. A similar bursary has been phased out within nursing and there was recent controversy regarding the possibility of the bursary not being made available to social work students this academic year (2016/17).

Fortunately, the bursary for social work students has been continued this year, but there is an ongoing consultation regarding the bursary and fears that it will not be available in forthcoming years. The daily placement fee is also rumoured to be ending in the near future, which currently assists Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in resourcing placements for students, this is a fee that follows the student to their placement agency at a cost of £20 per day. Again, this fee has been continued this academic year (2016/17).

Overall the developing picture of social work training is one where more social work training could take place within agencies and the potential diminishing role of HEIs to provide courses (McNicoll 2016b). This might have further repercussions on the availability of statutory local authority

placements for students registered on HEI programmes, as employer led courses absorb these placements into their own programmes.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

Thus the debate concerning the nature of the social work profession and the regulation and frameworks governing social workers is continually evolving.

The implementation of the Children and Social Work Bill (2016) will significantly change the landscape of social work as a profession and these changes are likely to further promote the current government's preference for fast track employer led social work courses and more rigorous government regulation of social work. Whilst this paints a rather negative picture, I remain hopeful about the future of social work, as my rationale for undertaking this thesis has always been to assist and improve the training of social work students and adequately prepare them for the realities of social work practice.

Before exploring the literature concerning my chosen area of research, I will explain my theoretical understanding of professional identity and professional socialisation within the next chapter.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Theoretical Understanding of Professional Identity**

#### **2.1 Research Paradigm**

The proceeding theoretical analysis has provided me with a foundation concerning my understanding of how identity is formed and how social work students develop their professional identity. Logically to begin this process, I have identified my ontological and epistemological position to knowledge, or my 'research paradigm' (Guba, 1990). This is an area that I have explained in considerable detail within my fourth assignment (see appendix four, 4.4), although since this submission I have further refined my position as now outlined.

Firstly, my ontological standpoint; that is my understanding of 'being' (Crotty, 1998) and position on "what is the nature of the knowable" (Guba, 1990: 18), is best described by Blaikie (2007) as 'Idealism'. By way of explanation, in relation to identity, reality is constructed by human beings; "the external world consists of representations that are creations of individual minds" (Blaikie, 2007: 16). This ontological position significantly impacts upon my epistemological stance, and my view of how identity is developed, which primarily promotes a social constructionist perspective.

However, I have come to understand that this is not entirely straight forward, as I have a keen interest in the work of Bourdieu (1979,1990) who was a 'Realist' where "realities exist outside of the mind" (Crotty, 1998:10), which has encouraged me reconsider my position. Whereas my epistemological view of "what it means to know" (Crotty, 1998:10) continues to be social

constructionism. That is to say, I believe that identity is socially constructed therefore; “recognises that social actors are engaged in both producing and reproducing their social world” (Blaikie 2007:163). Here there is much complexity and tension, as constructionism and realism are viewed by Guba (1990) to be in direct conflict with one another. Whilst Crotty (1998:11) argues that although realism is viewed as ‘objective’ and accepting that things exist independently within the world, he believes that the two are compatible. For example, Crotty (1998:11) states that realism does not imply that the ‘meaning’ of things exists independently of the consciousness:

“What is said to be ‘the way things are’ is really just ‘the sense we make of them’.....We need to recognise that different people may well inhabit quite different worlds. Their different worlds constitute for them diverse ways of knowing, distinguishable sets of meanings and separate realities”.

(1988:64).

As Houston (2002:154) argues, realism promotes that organisations and structures exist, “beyond the lives of individual actors who constitute them”. I would argue that this realism and a constructionist outlook correspond with my interest in understanding the experience of students on the course, as well as their identity development whilst in training. I evidence use of this position within my analysis of the data I collected from interviews with students in chapters five, six and seven.

## 2.2 Social Constructionism

Crotty (1998) also makes a distinction between constructivism (individual) and constructionism (collective). However, I would argue that I am interested in both how the individual constructs their identity (as explored in chapter five) and how they achieve this in relation to others (see chapter six), such as the student group, placement supervisors and practice educators. My reasons for utilising constructionism are summed up well by Crotty (1988) in the following quote:

“It is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context”.

(1988:42).

Therefore, within this thesis I have sought to understand how students develop their professional identity from their individual perspective through the narrative of their interviews (see chapter five). I have also explored how the student’s identity develops in relation to interaction with others, in particular, service users and carers, their peers, placement supervisors, practice educators and other professionals (see chapter six). I have found the following explanation of identity formation by Burr (2003) useful in establishing my own theoretical stance:

“Our identity is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us, and which we draw upon in our communications with other people. A person’s identity is achieved by a subtle interweaving of many different threads. There is the thread of age, for example they may be a child, a young adult or very old; that of class, depending on their occupation, income and level of education; ethnicity; gender; sexual orientation and so on. All these, and many more, are woven together to produce the fabric of a person’s identity”.

(2003:106/7).

Thus, I was interested in understanding the experience of students as they embarked upon the course, as well as their identity development whilst in training (chapter five, 5.2). For this reason, 'identification' was of more relevance to my work rather than simply 'identity', as identification allows for identity to be viewed as a continuous process throughout an individual's lifetime, as supported by researchers such as Miller (2010, 2013), and explored within my literature review (see chapter three, 3.3).

In order to further expand upon my use of identification I have found that Jenkins (2004) usefully explains how 'identification' promotes the idea of one's identity evolving:

"Identity is a constant process of 'becoming', never final and not an actual 'thing'....Identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others.....negotiated and not fixed".

(2004:5).

Therefore, within my context, 'identification' is the process by which a student identifies with the values, norms and behaviours of the social work profession (Weiss *et al.*, 2004:14).

### **2.3 Social Identity Model – Jenkins (2004, 2008)**

I have found Jenkins' theory of social identity useful in my own thinking concerning social work identity. Jenkins (2008) claims that identity consists of differences and similarities to others, and it is the interplay between these two that forms an individual's identity (2008:21). Jenkins creates a practical theoretical model for exploring and analysing identity, but stresses the

importance of avoiding reifying identity and identification (2008:10). For instance, like other writers he explains that identity is not a 'thing', instead it is complicated and unpredictable (Jenkins, 2008:9). I fully agree, as this could be a potential hazard, including the danger of oversimplifying identity by proposing a concise model of my understanding of identity.

Jenkins (2004, 2008) explains that it is useful to think of identity in three broad areas: individual, interaction and institution. This is because we often view identity as either individual or collective, whereas he proposes that they are 'entangled' and interact with one another through identification (Jenkins 2004:16). For Jenkins (2004, 2008), the individual is the embodiment of 'self' and is developed through socialisation "what-goes-on-in-their-heads" (2008:39), whilst 'interaction' is how the individual's identity is further formed through experience and "what-goes-on-between-people" (2008:39). In relation to 'institution', this is where practises are exhibited and identity is reinforced by society and structures and "established-ways-of-doing-things" (2008:39). However, to achieve this, institutions need to be legitimated. Jenkins (2004, 2008) usefully relates his 'identification' to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his theory of habitus, 'habitus is simultaneously collective and individual, and definitely embodied' (2004:20), thus we identify others and are identified by them in turn.

Jenkins' model has been used specifically within social work by Houston (2014). In his application of Jenkins' model to social work with service users, he found that Jenkins did not take into account the impact of wider society on identity formation (Houston, 2014:10), thus adding his own fourth order, 'societal order',

which I have utilised within my seventh chapter concerning the impact of the organisation and wider society upon the development of a student's identity. Within this fourth order Houston makes use of Bourdieu in terms of the allocation of capital, where capital is distributed unequally according to gender, race, class and so on. Bourdieu did explore what might happen when people are uprooted within habitus and field, which he called 'Hystereis' (Grenfell, 2008:131), which could be used to explore significant changes that people could experience. In applying this fourth order to social work, students mostly appear to share similar experiences and motivations to undertake a career in social work. From interview data in my sample students did explain challenges with navigating the course and placement as a result of prior experiences, but particularly first-hand experience as a service user (see chapter five, 5.2). I have applied the concepts of habitus, field and capital to my own research as explained later in this chapter (2.4.2 and 2.4.3).

I have found Jenkins' model and Houston's (2014) fourth order useful in my own research and understanding of identity, so I have utilised this to further expand upon and explore my understanding of the four orders, and how they apply to my own research, as now explained.

## **2.4 Individual Order**

There is no single universal definition of self or identity, as Leary and Tangney (2012:3) highlight:

“From the beginning, the topic has been bogged down in a conceptual quagmire as muddy as any in the social and behavioural sciences”.

In the literature 'self' and 'identity' are often presented as interchangeable (Day *et al.*, 2006:602, also see later discussion in chapter three: 3.2) and there is a generous amount of literature concerning this thought provoking and challenging topic. In exploring the roots of the concepts of 'self' and 'identity', the term 'identity' originates from the Latin *idem*, meaning "sameness and continuity" (Scott and Marshall, 2009:330). This definition implies that identity concerns both similarity and difference, consequently involving the categorising of things and people. It would then follow that a person will attach themselves to a group or activity where they share similarity (Jenkins, 2008: 17). Whereas 'identification' originates from the Greek word *oikeion*, meaning "belonging" or "being part of" (Webb, 2015), 'identification' can be perceived as the act of aligning oneself with a group, where one shares similarity and a shared interest, such as in the case of this thesis, with the profession of social work. Therefore, identification is a process, not a product, but something that is done and acted upon (Jenkins, 2008: 5). As defined by Ashforth and Mael, (1989: 34).

"Identification is the perception of oneness with or belongingness to a group, involving direct or vicarious experience of its successes and failures".

Social identity theory supports this definition of identity and identification, where individuals classify themselves into categories (Terum and Heggen, 2016: 840). Consequently, one's identity and self can be viewed in relation to a category or classification (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). However, to reiterate, that is not to say that identity is fixed or ever fully realised, as identity constantly changes and evolves. Likewise, a person may have multiple identities and at times these could be contradictory, and result in an individual affiliating themselves with several groups (Sfard and Prusak, 2005:12). Essentially I would concur with the following definition of identity by Dent and Whitehead (2002:11):

“Identity is neither stable, nor a final achievement. It is a process, never-ending and only fixed in that it exists and draws its meaning and ontological anchor in relation to the ‘other’, that which it is not, or which it does not desire to be”.

Having completed a degree in sociology (chapter one,1.2), my own understanding of the self and identity is very much grounded within a sociological perspective, similar to Jenkins (2008), who refers to the work of Mead (1934), Cooley (1902) and Goffman (1969). Mead (1934) utilised the term ‘self’, and distinguished between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’. Crudely, the ‘I’ is the internal processes within the individual, whereas the ‘me’ is how the person views themselves through others, making use of the ‘generalised other’. Consequently, the ‘self’ is often viewed in two parts, the external and internal, although I would argue that these are enmeshed through identification, as suggested by Jenkins (2008:51) and already discussed in this chapter. Cooley (1902) took a symbolic interactionist approach, arguing that the ‘self’ was influenced and consists of the individual’s interactions with others, which produces the ‘looking glass self’. Whereas Goffman (1969) believed that there were a number of selves which an individual can adjust and utilise, when necessitated by the situation.

Some writers view these theories of self and identity as somewhat dated, and as a result Mead, Cooley and Goffman, have been criticised for not taking into account contemporary living and working practices (Giddens, 1991), such as emotion, passion, conflict and unpredictability (Jenkins, 2008:65). However, personally I have found the work of Mead (1934) useful, especially concerning his use of the ‘generalised other’, and Goffman’s (1969) view that an individual has a number of selves that they can adjust. For example, in my own research,

students and placement supervisors have explained that they have needed to negotiate different settings and situations in practice. As a result of this students were very much concerned with how they were perceived by other professionals, as well as those who would be assessing them (see chapter five, 5.2.5). For instance, I have found that students within predominantly health settings strived to explain their role and professional identity to health professionals, this in turn assisted them to feel more confident in their practice (see chapter six, 6.7). Furthermore, I was interested in how a student's professional identity develops in interaction with others, particularly within the placement setting (see chapter six). Other social work authors have taken this theoretical stance as I have explored in chapter three (3.4), such as Dunk-West (2013), where she took the opportunity to establish a guide for students in successfully navigating their placements.

I have found the following theoretical discussion concerning embodiment and habitus to be key to developing my understanding of how a student develops their professional identity.

#### **2.4.1 Embodiment**

Returning to the perspective that students and professionals are concerned with how they are viewed by others, I have become curious about the notion of the embodiment of 'self'. During the process of collecting and analysing the data for this thesis I have found that it is important to remember amongst this theoretical debate, that the way in which we are perceived by others is often based upon our physical appearance (see chapter five, 5.3). In addition, how

we view our own physical appearance also impacts upon our identity and perception of our 'self', much of this physical appearance is fixed, such as our age, gender, race, and physical disability. These characteristics impact on how we interact with others, such as with our colleagues, peers and people that we work with in social work. For instance, from a personal perspective I qualified as a social worker in my early twenties, and even if others did not view me as a 'young' social worker, this was at the forefront of my mind (as explained earlier in my introduction, 1.2). Thus I sought to utilise my perceived age in my practice with younger people, or navigate this with professionals by 'proving' I was worthy of the title of social worker, through my actions and practice.

The embodiment of identity is not an area extensively explored in detail within social work, but is emerging in the work of some writers (Tangenberg, 2002, Northcut, 2014, Cameron and McDermott, 2007). For instance, Chambon (1999) advocates for a Foucauldian perspective, where she views the body in social work as being:

“invisible – taken for granted, unproblematised 'for itself'. The human body is certainly not the theoretical centre, despite the fact that 'the person' has traditionally been placed in the foreground of social work theorizing”

(1999:58).

In addition, Cameron and McDermott (2007) have edited a book exploring the use of the body in social work and offer a view that the body is crucial to the way in which social workers communicate with others, demonstrating empathy and generally how they make use of their skills within practice. This exploration and use of the body draws upon similarities with Goffman's (1969) use of the 'generalised other', so how we view ourselves and how we believe others perceive us. As explained in my literature review (3.2) I have found that there is

an emphasis in social work publications concerning 'skills' and how these are used in practice, rather than taking more account of the 'self' (Frost, 2013). This view of embodiment became increasingly important within my own research, which I have explored further in chapter five (5.3).

#### **2.4.2 Habitus**

Similarly, to Jenkins, I have viewed socialisation and childhood experiences within this thesis as playing a crucial role in developing a person's identity. This would constitute the 'up-bringing' one experiences from primary carers, including attachment to care givers, as well as the cognitive development explained by psychologists like Piaget and Vygotsky. Many perceive identity and self as developing throughout one's lifetime, an area capitalised on by Erikson in his 'life stages' model of development and akin to Mead (1934) and Foucault's (1988) view of the self as an ongoing project. I have found this perspective important in my own research, as I was keen to understand more about a student's prior experiences to commencing the course and their motivation for undertaking a career in social work (see chapter five, 5.2). Therefore, I have viewed the 'self' and 'identity' as neither rigid or inflexible, although like Jenkins (2008:41), I have based my research on the position that there are durable foundations of the self, which is where Jenkins makes use of Bourdieu's theory of Habitus. This again is applicable to my own understanding of identity, whereby the student's prior experiences of family, work, upbringing and so on, are important elements of their identity and students use these to negotiate and find their position amongst other social workers and other professionals (see chapter five, 5.2).

According to Bourdieu, habitus is embodied within the individual and is acquired through socialisation and experience, which resonates with my own view as described above. However, this is not a conscious process, so often without an individual's knowledge. Bourdieu also viewed habitus as a product of history, and collective practices. Therefore,

"It is the mediating link between the individual's subjective world and the cultural world into which they are born and which they share with others".

(Jenkins 2002:75).

Bourdieu (1979:214) states that habitus consists of a set of 'dispositions', which is much broader than simply 'attitudes', as it is a 'way of being':

"The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices - more history - in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms".

(Bourdieu 1990:54).

Crucial to habitus is that social structure is 'deeply ingrained' in us and how we interpret the world. Although this does not result in habitus controlling the individual, instead it offers us guidelines which can be adapted. Bourdieu argued that it is through socialisation that an individual's habitus mirrors social divisions and surrounding culture (Houston, 2002:157).

Habitus has been central to my own research, as a student's habitus will shape the way in which they view the world and so affects choices they might make, and the opportunities available to them as an individual. For example, social work students might share similar values, such as a concern for equality and

human rights and this influences how they view the world and act within the social space. To fully understand habitus, I have explored Bourdieu's theory of field and capital, as an individual's practice or actions are a result of the relations between habitus, capital and field (Grenfell, 2008:52).

### **2.4.3 Field and Capital**

A field is a social space of struggle for resources such as class, employment and power. For example, fields will overlap and within the boundaries there could be conflict and power struggles between individuals and institutions.

Consequently, the field is structured in terms of internal power relations:

"A field, therefore, is a structured system of social positions - occupied either by individuals or institutions - the nature of which defines the situation for the occupants".

(Jenkins 2002:85).

Within the field there are four types of capital: economic, social, cultural (legitimate knowledge), symbolic (prestige) and within the field there are struggles for 'interests' which are objects of struggle. Linking back to my earlier discussion concerning embodiment, Bourdieu viewed the 'body' as an instrument of cultural capital (Garrett, 2007) for instance, mannerisms and demeanour as a result of our experiences and socialisation. Concerning social work, individuals can share similar interests, experiences and capital, these then operate in relationship to the field of social work in sharing a 'code of ethics' (BASW, 2012). There are also collective bodies which define the profession and subject members to rules and guidelines (Bourdieu, 1992:244). As discussed in the context of social work earlier (chapter one, 1.3), the field of social work is influenced by the regulation of social work and the impact of other

fields with more power. Therefore, social practices result from the relationship between habitus, capital and field (Jenkins, 2002:87).

Thus habitus produces discourses and practices in relation to structures and triggers, it anticipates regularities and irregularities, so an individual can feel an affinity with a situation, what Bourdieu termed as a 'feel for the game', or like 'a fish out of water' (Grenfell 2008:58, Bourdieu, 1990). As habitus is embodied it is produced externally through practice, although this is also an unconscious activity as; "Habitus disposes actors to do certain things, it provides a basis for the generation of practices" (Jenkins 2002:78). As habitus is socially situated it could be perceived as common sense (Bourdieu 1990:55), hence people with comparable experiences such as; class, gender, employment, can share a similar habitus, but habitus can also consist of differences. This shares similarities with a constructionist view of identity, whereby it is the interaction between habitus, social interaction and the social spaces that is crucial to the development of identity.

For my own work, students and practitioners might share a similar habitus, as they could have had similar experiences and so feel an affinity with situations. However, there will also be differences in the experience of students and their social capital, which they have built up over time, such as class and so on. In addition, whilst students with similar habitus might gravitate to the field of social work, their habitus is not fixed, it will further evolve within the field as they learn the rules and strategies of the field, even the unwritten ones - 'doxa' (Grenfell, 2008:57-59) and establish their own position within the field. This is essential for social work students who are seeking to understand the social work field,

and at times are competing and struggling for position as a learner, but also as a professional, with varying amounts of capital. For example, in my own experience of social work training I had differing amounts of capital as a result of my working class background and in comparison to the more affluent experience of my peers (see chapter one, 1.2).

#### **2.4.4 Working with Criticisms of Bourdieu**

Whilst Bourdieu's work offers a promising theory of identity through the use of habitus, there has been criticism of his work, in particular the ambiguous nature of his explanation of habitus, field and capital. Bourdieu explained that one of the reasons for this ambiguity was to enable other disciplines to apply these theories, but as his theory of habitus is often perceived as vague, this leads to misinterpretation (Lessard, 2010). His work has also been criticised for being inaccessible, in terms of the French translation and use of words (Garrett, 2007:361) and Lessard (2010:1953) argues that Bourdieu does not fully take into account social change and transformation. Some have taken this further to state that Bourdieu's theories do not take account of ethnicity or race (Garrett, 2007, Jenkins, 2002). For my own research I have not been comfortable with the idea that actors have no agency or power, and this determinism is something that Jenkins (2002) is highly critical of in his book concerning Bourdieu's work. Furthermore, Garrett (2007) also argues that Bourdieu's work advocates that actors are 'passive' rather than proactive. Bourdieu has responded to these criticisms of the potential deterministic nature of habitus in 'An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology':

"Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is

constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structure. It is durable but not external!"

(1992:133).

Following on from Bourdieu's justification, other writers have suggested that habitus is more flexible and reflexive than would at first appear. Sweetman (2003) strongly suggests that habitus is able to respond to changes within the field. Essentially he argues that contemporary society is far more complicated and dynamic than when Bourdieu first established this theory. Sweetman (2003:538) proposes that reflexivity is embedded within habitus to enable the individual to adjust to these changes. For instance, an individual may have varying amounts of reflexivity based upon their age, gender, employment and so on. This resonates with my own experience of social work training and what I have observed of students on the programme that I teach and within my analysis of my data (see chapter five). Whilst students have differing levels of experience, due to age, employment, gender; they still manage to navigate the field of social work. For example, a social work student could use their previous work experience and first-hand experience as a service user to effectively practice and communicate with other professionals (see chapter five, 5.2).

Houston (2002) usefully explains how 'reflexivity' enables the individual to reflect upon their own personal habitus and the professional field. Essentially exploring our own assumptions and values and how they underpin our practice through habitus and the field. This is because the field, that is, the field of the social work profession in my research, also shapes an individual social worker's perception of the world. In further application to social work, the work of

Rhynas (2005) is useful. Although he relates Bourdieu's theories to the nursing profession he found:

"People will also use their personal history and experiences to shape their responses and feelings within the workplace".

(Rhynas, 2005:182).

Consequently, I have used habitus in exploring professional identity, as it enables me to view identity as further developing during the interaction between the student and their placement supervisor, practice educator, peers, other professionals and programme staff. I would partly agree with Rhynas (2005:183) that Bourdieu's work enables the individual and their practice to be understood in terms of how they are acting within fields of social care and wider public demands. However, from my own research findings I would also argue that an individual's background and experiences are essential, as a student's identity might well, and most likely will be very different to that of their peers, supervisors and educators (chapter five, 5.2). This view has been further supported in the work of Parker (2000:47) concerning 'Structuration', where he further expands upon Bourdieu's theory and the importance of practices, in order to make sense of an individual's past experience and how they apply this to their current context. In social work this would be within specific social work practice and how this is influenced by governmental bodies like the HCPC, and the perceptions of the wider public and the media (as explored in chapter one, 1.4).

Therefore, habitus has been a highly attractive concept for me to utilise within my research with social work students and I would agree with Jenkins that Bourdieu is “good to think with” (2002:98) and with Garrett (2007) who explains how his theories ‘unsettle’ and encourage us to employ a ‘more penetrating sociological eye’ (2007:372).

## **2.5 Interaction Order**

Returning to Jenkins’ three order model, the second order of interaction, is strongly related to the work of Goffman (1969), and his conceptualisation of the ‘presentation of the self’ and ‘self-image’. Jenkins also refers again to the work of Bourdieu, in that habitus operates either consciously or unconsciously, in interaction with others (2008:42). This has correlated well with my use of social constructionism, whereby the social work student’s identity is further developed in interaction with others. Jenkins (2008) does make use of ‘labelling theory’ and how these labels are internalised by the individual, although this was not an avenue I followed myself, as I found this to be too deterministic, as already stated. Moreover, I found that individuals have more control and reflexivity concerning how they develop their identity. Jenkins (2008:102) proposes the importance of groups and belonging to groups as essential to ‘identification’, a kind of ‘collective identification’ that I have applied to social work students in chapter six of my analysis. Here individuals share a common interest, behaviours and so on. This collective identity often reinforces individual identity and habitus, although there might also be conflict and incongruence, as stated earlier in this chapter.

### **2.5.1 History in Person - Lave and Holland (2001, 2009)**

What I have found most useful in conceptualising the importance of interaction upon identity development, is the work of Lave and Holland (2001, 2009). Lave and Holland as ethnographers were particularly interested in social life and how identity develops and changes over a period of time. They made use of Social Practice Theory, which takes account of emotion, motivation and agency (thus not as deterministic as some view Bourdieu's concept of habitus) and they explored tension, conflict and social change (which some argue is lacking in Bourdieu's work, Jenkins 2002). Lave and Holland (2009) explain identification as, 'history in person', whereby:

“persons are historically produced in practice in relation to the identities, cultural genres and artefacts that are central to the cultural activities in which persons engage”.

(2009:5).

This means that they examined 'identities' and 'identification' rather than identity, and were concerned with interaction and cultural practices. Like Bourdieu they do not see minds as operating separately from bodies, nor from practice. Although they are clearer that we “shape the on-going social world”, as we move through social spaces and institutions we are “persons-in-practice” (2009:2). So individuals adapt to the moment and situations that they encounter through their practice. Similar to habitus, the concept 'histories in person' is durable, made sense of and recreated in what Lave and Holland term; 'contentious local practice' (2001:30). This 'contentious local practice', offers a framework for understanding how individuals are historically related to their past experiences but are also different, as there is the potential for conflict and tension within current everyday practice. This conflict is represented by 'enduring struggles' within 'contentious local practice', consequently, "enduring

struggles and intimate identities are mediated through contentious local practice" (Lave and Holland, 2009:3). Thus 'contentious local practice' is both made in persons and by persons (2001:30). The following quote sheds light on understanding this framework and how I utilised this theory in my own research:

"viewed in this way one's identities, once they become entrenched in history-in-person, provide a ground for agency both in guiding one's behaviour in cultural activities and in avoiding behaviours that are not compatible with the self-assigned identity".

(Lave and Holland 2009:8).

Lave and Holland's (2001, 2009) theory also makes connections to institutions and wider structures which relate strongly to Jenkins' (2004, 2008) third order of institution. In some ways Bourdieu's struggle for capital can also be applied here, where actors struggle for economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. For example, students will be competing and struggling for a position within their placement agency and again later within employment (see chapter seven).

### **2.5.2 Legitimate Peripheral Participation**

Returning to my second assignment (see appendix four, 4.2) where I made use of 'Communities of Practice' (Wenger, 1998), this theory has been useful again in my current understanding of identity. In particular, I have found legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991), as a theoretical lens has assisted me in understanding the learning and development of identity experienced by students on placement. Although this theory has been superseded by 'Communities of Practice' for Wenger, and 'Histories in Person' for Lave, I propose that this older theory is

entirely comparable to the social work student and placement supervisor relationship. It corresponds neatly with my understanding of learning and how students learn through participation in social practice rather than through a 'transmission' of knowledge or even 'skill acquisition'. Most interestingly, this has offered me the scope to explore participation and development of identity as 'new comers' working with 'old timers' (see chapter seven).

Thus in my context, this would be students (new comers) and their placement supervisors (old timers). This has assisted my theoretical stance in order to move away again from the potentially fixed nature of habitus and is not limited to embodiment and the mind. Instead it has opened up opportunities for me to explore how students develop their identity in practice and in co-participation with others. Therefore, students will learn new skills and master these through participation, moving from peripheral to central participation. This participation involves negotiation and renegotiation of meaning. Rather than being fixed upon the individual it has enabled me to concentrate more widely upon the 'person-in-the-world' (Lave and Wenger, 1991:52) which is consistent with the social constructionist approach I have implemented in my research.

I have found this results in the co-construction of identity, as learning and identity evolves through ongoing participation. Within this model, learners have access to a range of activity within a community as a result of being a new comer, and as a newcomer they have more time and less responsibility, but have the opportunity to develop, which is entirely

applicable to a social work student on their final practice placement (see chapter seven).

“Moving toward full participation in practice involves not just a greater commitment of time, intensified effort, broader responsibilities within the community, and more difficult and risky tasks, but, more significantly, an increasing sense of identity as a master practitioner”.

(Lave and Wenger, 1991:111).

I found that another aspect of this theoretical lens is the possibility of exploring the challenges between new comers and old timers, explained by Lave and Wenger (1991) as ‘continuity’ and ‘displacement’. This also corresponds with Lave and Holland’s (2001, 2009) ‘contentious local practice’ and ‘enduring struggles’. Here as in my own situation with students and placement supervisors, there is often an imbalance of power which can hinder the learning and identification process. For example, placement supervisors may prevent the student’s ‘access’ to participation in order to develop their practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991:123). In addition, students need to be sufficiently ‘motivated’ to learn, or be motivated by their placement supervisors (Lave and Wenger, 1991:122). There is a sense that all participants are new comers, as old timers learn from new comers, change occurs and we are all constantly learning from each other. This is similar to the social work student and placement supervisor relationship, which at its best should be a ‘dual’ learning process (Fazzi and Rosignoli, 2016). This is an area that I have been keen to research, that is the interaction between student and placement supervisor and in turn the impact upon the student’s developing identity (see chapter six, 6.4).

Originally I was reticent to utilise Communities of Practice and Legitimate Peripheral Participation, as in my second assignment I had feedback that I had a tendency to reify these concepts rather than utilising them as a tool or 'conceptual bridge' (Lave and Wenger, 1991:123) to assist my understanding and research. In fact, Lave and Wenger (1991:35) state that peripheral participation may not exist at all. Instead:

"It is an analytical viewpoint on learning, a way of understanding learning".

(Lave and Wenger, 1991:40).

However, drawing upon the discussion within this chapter I have found that an individual's identity will consist of their previous history and experience and is further negotiated through training. As Day *et al.*, (2006) found:

"There are, then, unavoidable interrelationships between professional and personal identities".

(2006:603).

## **2.6 Institutional and Societal Order**

Regarding the 'institutional order', Jenkins (2004, 2008), makes use of Barth (1969), where he states that:

"Institutions are established patterns of practice, recognised as such by actors, which have force as 'the way things are done'. Institutionalised identities are distinctive due to their particular combination of the individual and the collective".

(Jenkins, 2008:45).

Jenkins expands this 'order' further by explaining how institutions usually take the form of organisations which are 'task orientated' and allocate roles and positions to members. These 'positions' or 'classifications' arise from political relationships and struggles within the organisation, including the allocation of these positions (such as selection and interview) and the struggle for resources (2008:45).

“Thus individual and collective identities are systematically produced, reproduced and implicated in each other.....Identities exist and are acquired, claimed and allocated within power relations”.

(2008:45).

Jenkins supports this view with the use of Bourdieu and his perception of struggles for symbolic and cultural capital within a field, where hierarchy and positions are further reproduced. This also accounts for why people accept their positions within society, without too much questioning. Therefore, our positions in the social hierarchy are determined by the capital that we possess (Houston, 2002:158).

This links well to my use of 'history in person' in the previous section, and the notion of 'contentious local practice'. For instance, central to Lave and Holland's (2001) theory is inequality, particularly how privilege is structured, such as class, race and gender. In their view these are distributed disproportionately. They are interested in the 'history' of such unequal structures and how these play out in 'enduring struggles' and 'contentious local practice'. Therefore, 'enduring struggles' and history in person are realised in 'local contentious practice'.

The book edited by Lave and Holland (2001) consists of a number of authors exploring 'contentious local practice' and how this develops identity. I have found the chapter by Willis, concerning the practice of the 'piss take' within Midlands manual workshops, as a way of initiating and training new comers and apprentices, struck a chord with my own research and findings. Potentially as my interest resides in how social work students develop their professional identity through practice, Willis' example is consistent in many ways with my own observations. For instance, social work students in my sample explained how their placement supervisor was crucial to the process of them successfully 'becoming' a qualified social worker, in assisting them to navigate and understand bureaucratic systems (see chapter six, 6.4).

I have found that Jenkins' model and Houston's (2014) fourth order is again useful, in exploring interaction between the placement supervisor and the student, and how this in turn is impacted upon by the organisation, in order to create 'contentious local practice' (see chapter seven, 7.4). I have seen how social workers and social work students take up differing positions within organisations, and how this in turn impacts upon their identity and practice (see chapter seven, 7.3). In particular students need support in navigating new practices within the organisation, such as the use of technology, hot-desking and implementing statutory interventions. However, students occasionally experience difficulties and conflict with their supervisor. Here the focus is often upon 'failing students' and not upon the misuse of power or struggle enacted by the supervisor (Giddings, Vodde and Cleveland, 2004, Bogo *et al.*, 2010. discussed further in chapter three, 3.6 and chapter seven, 7.3). I have found that this constituted my 'local contentious practice' and 'enduring struggles'

where the student further develops their identity during placement. For example, it might take the shape of, competing for resources, or the supervisor maintaining power by withholding student work load. This experience has prompted me to add conflict resolution to my teaching in order to prepare students for their final placement, something that was previously missing from my teaching. In addition, I have invited practitioners to speak to students about the tensions within modern social work practice, such as the use of technology and statutory interventions. I have explored these developments in my teaching further within the final chapter of this thesis (chapter eight) and the implications for future practice within social work education more widely.

## **2.7 Application to Social Work**

In direct application to social work, Cree's (2003, 2013) work promotes

Bourdieu's notion of habitus and Lave and Holland's view of history in person:

"The accounts demonstrate that there is no single way of becoming a social worker and no unitary social work task. In spite of the multiplicity of social work settings, however, shared ideas and practices shine through the contributors' stories of their lives and work".

(2013:203).

Cree explored social workers' narrative accounts concerning why they became a social worker, including her own, where she found that being and becoming a social worker often involves struggles between the 'self' and 'others', including between the individual, organisations and even society (2013:203). Thus her exploration fits well with Jenkins' (2004, 2008) 'three orders', 'enduring struggles' and 'contentious local practice' featured in the work of Lave and

Holland (2009). This viewpoint has been of great use to me, as Cree found the following important (all of which could be viewed as a history in person and habitus): Childhood and family background, experiences of education and work, the influence of significant individuals, the perceived value base of social work, the urge to 'do something', and finally an individual's motivation to make a contribution to society (2003:155). Cree also found some differences based upon age and gender (2013:204). As noted by Lave and Holland:

“Because history is made in person, registered in intimate identities as well as in institutions, there is every reason to expect that age cuts across people's experiences and creates intergenerational differences”.

(Lave and Holland, 2009:17).

Meaning that some experiences are only open to certain age groups and might pass other age groups completely by. Concerning values, most of the narratives explored by Cree evidence how social work 'fitted' with their own value base (2013:205). Finally, Cree questions the notion that becoming a social worker ends with qualifying, instead she supports the view that this journey is ongoing throughout the careers of social work individuals (2013:205/6). A notion I would fully support and can identify within my own ongoing experience of social work and the research within this thesis. I have utilised these themes in more depth within chapter five, when exploring student narratives in developing their identity, but this has also further justified the importance of professional socialisation within the social work profession, as analysed in the next chapter (3.3).

## 2.8 Conclusion

Thus I have presented within this chapter a group of theories that I have connected to assist me in understanding student learning and their development of identity whilst in placement. As with Bourdieu's theories, I have found that this framework is 'good to think with'. Lave and Holland (2009, 2001) offer a diagram of how their theory operates, which I have adjusted to incorporate the integration of Jenkins' (2002) three orders, Bourdieu's (1990) habitus and Lave and Wenger's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation, which is illustrated on the next page. Here the theories I have utilised can be viewed and how they can be grouped together within the sections of the diagram. The broken lines indicate how some of the theories and concepts overlap each other.

These theories share similarity, in terms of exploring how identities are constructed, and have inspired me to be concerned with identification (as discussed earlier in this chapter) rather than identity within my research. Collectively they promote a view of identity as being formed over time and through experiences, where individuals can share identities with others and confirming that identities are durable in nature. Identities and self from this perspective are perceived as a 'way of being', which is evident in social practice and the analysis of my research in chapters five, six and seven.

Essentially, this creative use of a number of models has been useful for my research as I concur with Jenkins' view that it allows for exploration of:

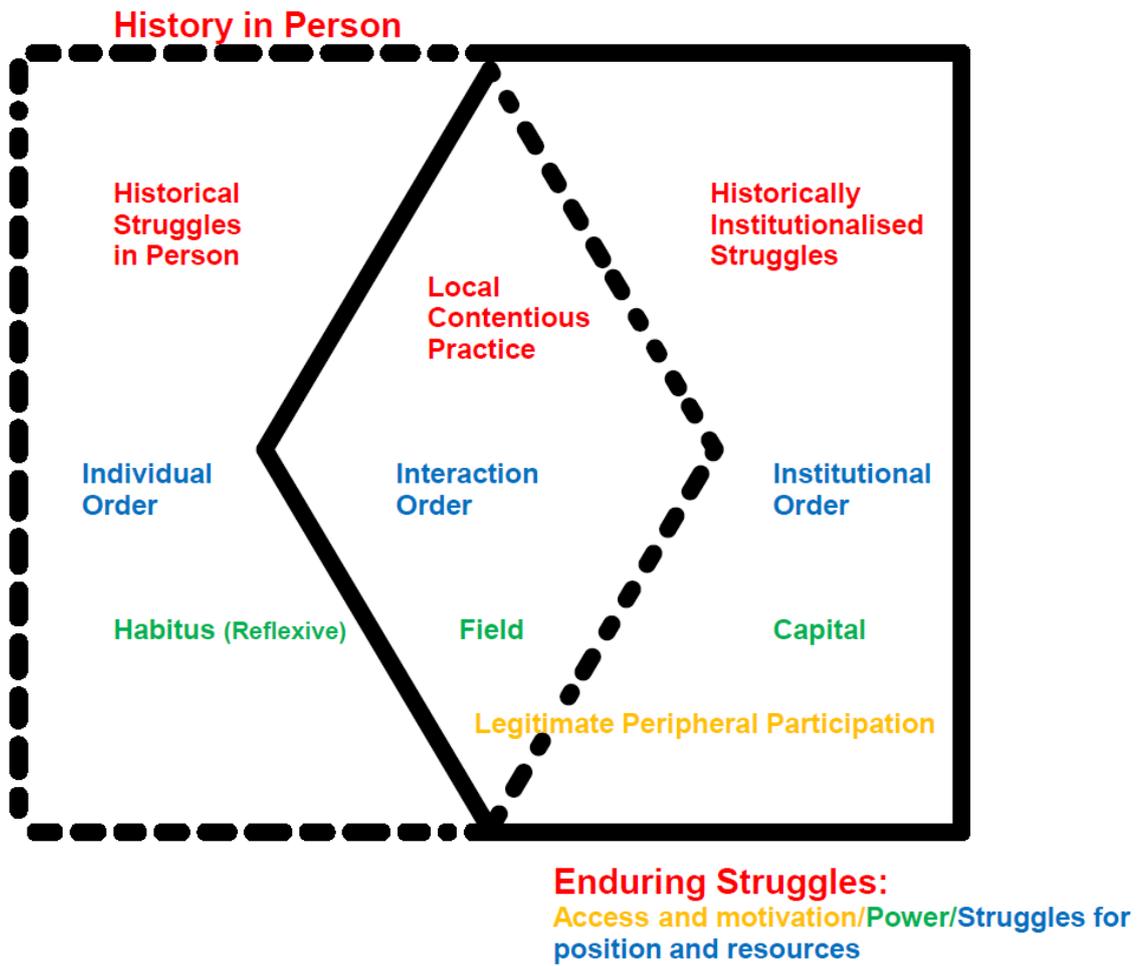
- How to bring together analytically the active lives and consciousness of individuals, the abstract impersonality of the institutional order, and the ebb and flow of historical time? And

- How to bring public issues and personal troubles into the same frame

(Jenkins, 2008:46).

In the chapter that follows, I will present a review of the literature in relation to my research, particularly from a social work perspective.

# Illustration One



## **Chapter Three**

### **Literature Review**

#### **3.1 Introduction and How I Reviewed the Literature**

During this literature review I discovered that there was a lack of research in the area of social work professional identity and socialisation of social work students. I initially commenced this literature review by focusing upon the last ten years, however when I first searched the literature using key words and phrases such as; identity, professional identity, professional socialisation and socialisation (which were formed from my understanding and theorisation of the development of social work professional identity and socialisation, see chapter two), I found a limited number of references utilising these keywords and phrases. This could be due to the challenges of defining professional identity and professional socialisation as I explained in chapter one (1.3) and in the glossary (pages, xi-xii). However, I also found that the majority of these references referred to research concerning qualified social workers. As a consequence, whilst I would have preferred to focus upon literature within the past ten years, because of the dearth of research explained above, I widened this to literature within the past twenty years.

Initially I searched for relevant literature within the United Kingdom and then located relevant literature of interest to my topic in other countries such as, America, Australia, Israel, Canada and New Zealand, and again a significant number of these sources concerned qualified social workers rather than student social workers. In other countries the terminology for placements is often different to the United Kingdom. For example; the use of 'Field Practicum' or, 'Field Instruction' for placements, 'Field Supervisors' or 'Student Supervisors' for

Placement Supervisors and 'Field Educators' or 'Field Instructors' for Practice Educators (Bogo, 2006). As stated earlier and explained within my glossary, for the purposes of this research and clarity for the reader, I have continued to use 'Placement Supervisor' and 'Practice Educator' throughout.

During my literature review I have searched relevant texts and databases such as SocINDEX, Social Care Institute for Excellence, JISC and the following journals; Journal of Social Work Education, The Clinical Supervisor, Journal of Teaching in Social Work, Health and Social Work, Social Work, International Social Work, Journal of Social Work Education, Social Work Education; International Journal, and British Journal of Social Work. In undertaking this literature review I discovered a number of key articles from other professions which were particularly insightful and useful to my own research (Adams, 2006, Scanlon, 2007, Trede *et al.*, 2012, Hayes, 2003, Lamote and Engles, 2010, Sims, 2011 and Johnson *et al.*, 2012), which I explore in more detail later in this chapter (see 3.5), as they focused upon professional identity development and professional socialisation.

In the past twenty years there have been six literature reviews which are relevant to my research. To briefly summarise, firstly, Bogo's (2006) North American literature review concerned 'field education' between the years of 1999-2004. Like my own research, Bogo (2006) mostly excluded articles that were not specific to social work. Bogo (2006) reviewed 40 articles and found that most of the research favoured individual semi-structured interviews (again similar to my own research), with only two undertaking focus groups. She also found that the majority of the literature focused upon student satisfaction with

their placement, rather than the development of professional identity and socialisation (Bogo, 2006:187). Another literature review and practice audit was carried out in Scotland by Clapton and Cree (2006) concerning the 'integration of learning for practice'. Although not specific to my area of research, this provided a useful exploration of the literature concerning practice learning in the United Kingdom. More specifically, Barretti (2007) conducted a literature review regarding the importance and practice of placement supervisors, which I will return to later within this review (see 3.4.4). Miller (2010, 2013) has provided two reviews of the literature concerning professional socialisation in social work, which I will examine further in this chapter (see 3.3). She established that much of the available research was dated, and that there was a lack of research in the field of social work despite evidence that professional socialisation is crucial to the education of social work students. Finally, Trede, Macklin & Bridges (2012) undertook a systematic literature review of the development of professional identity in higher education, which I explore further in application to social work later in this chapter (3.5).

These literature reviews have assisted me with ensuring I explored pertinent literature within my own review. The main themes that I found during the course of this literature review concerned;

- how professional identity is defined and developed
- professional socialisation of social work students
- how social work students develop their identity in relation to others;
  - Placement Supervisor
  - Practice Educators
  - Academics

- other professions
- readiness to practice as newly qualified social workers
- impact of organisational factors on identity and socialisation.

In the remainder of this chapter I explore this literature in some detail and how this research can be applied to this thesis.

### **3.2 Professional Identity**

Following the process described in the previous section of this chapter, I commenced this literature review with a search for 'professional identity', specifically relating to social work students. As explained in chapter one (1.3), there is no clear definition of professional identity within social work (Staniforth *et al.*, 2011 and Webb, 2015).

This ambiguity extends to an understanding of what it means to be a 'professional' and 'professionalism'. Our understanding of what it means to be a professional has changed overtime, a professional was once someone who was trusted, had status and autonomy, however:

“That professional no longer exists. They have gone, swept aside by the relentless, cold, instrumental logic of the global market, and with it the old order has upturned”.

(Dent and Whitehead, 2002:1).

Consequently, a professional no longer has a privileged and exclusive status, instead managerial and professionalism have become blurred (Dent and Whitehead, 2002:12). For instance, everyone is expected to act 'professionally', thus 'professionalism' has become a label. As managerialism

has adopted this definition of professionalism, it can be argued that individuals work harder and under scrutiny and regulation. This reflects Fournier's (1999) view of 'performativity', where we work harder if we believe ourselves to be acting professionally. Consequently, professionalism could be perceived more as a specific membership to a group, whereby one's professional identity may change to fit within the organisation and the role expectations. Pratt *et al.*, (2006) found this within their study concerning medical students in residency, where their professionalism was defined by 'what they did' (2006:236). The sense of professionalism experienced by the medical students was supported further by feedback from others regarding how they were meeting role expectations, and in turn assisted the students to understand 'who they are' (2006:259). Pratt *et al.*, (2006) findings are similar to my own research, where social work students receive support and feedback to assist them in navigating the role and expectations of social work within their final practice placement (7.3.1). Essentially I argue this can be viewed as professional socialisation, which is discussed in the next section.

An important study of professionalism by Ashforth and Mael (1989), made use of Social Identity Theory in application to organisational behaviour and social identification. They found that an individual classifies themselves into social categories and identifies with an organisation, by perceiving themselves as part of a group or organisation. This I have seen reflected within my own research, where students attempted to 'fit' with the culture and identity of the organisation, so that they were viewed as employable and were successful in completing their final placement (7.3.1). Ashforth and Mael (1989: 24-5) found three conditions were pertinent to enable an individual to identify with an organisation

and a profession, as explained below by offering examples of how these conditions apply to this thesis:

- i) “Distinctiveness of a group” – where an individual perceives that they share similarities with a group. Students within my own research talked about this, where they shared similarities with the social work profession in terms of values, attitudes and motivations (5.2.2).
- ii) “Prestige of the group” -status, reputation. This would be evident in contrast to other groups and professions, especially in multi-disciplinary agencies, where students in my sample spoke about their experience in health settings (6.7).
- iii) “Salience of the out-group” – an individual’s awareness of outgroups reinforces awareness of their own in- group – this can be viewed in my study, when participants compared themselves with health professionals and identified role expectations (6.7)
- iv) Finally, Ashforth and Mael (1989) explored how new comers must learn and understand to act within the organisation and group, such as policies, norms and power structures. The above three conditions enables new comers to achieve this.

The final condition is evident in my study, where students as new comers made use of their interaction with their placement supervisor and placement personnel to make sense of the social work role and expectations of the profession (7.2.3/4).

The majority of the literature specifically concerning social work professional identity, references a journal article concerning professionalism by Weiss and Welbourne (2008). Interestingly, they employed a trait approach to their research and undertook a power analysis of professionalism in their comparative study of ten countries. They set out to define and explore social work professionalism in these ten countries, therefore this study has been important in assisting my understanding of social work professionalism more

widely. Similar to the majority of professional identity research, Weiss and Welbourne concentrated their research upon qualified social workers rather than social work students. Notwithstanding this, their conceptualisation of professionalism in terms of 'internal', 'external' power and the impact of political forces upon social work professionalism is crucial to my own research.

Another important study was conducted by Wiles (2011, 2013), in completing her PhD, which explored the social work identity of students specifically in relation to policy and social work registration, utilising discourse analysis and a post-modern theoretical approach. Wiles has made an important contribution to my understanding of the impact of regulation on social work identity, however her specific research area is not entirely applicable to my own interest in the development of social work identity and focus upon professional socialisation.

In undertaking this literature review I learned that social work academics have a preference for focusing upon how students develop their skills and competencies (as explored by Frost, 2013) rather than their professional identity in placement and practice. This preference has been highlighted by a number of researchers, such as Clapton (2013) and Wilson (2010). Instead many studies explore how social work education 'gives' students the appropriate skills, values and knowledge to become a social worker. Specific to social work education, previous research has explored; course content, the development of values (Landau, 1999, Osteen, 2011), skills, knowledge (Thompson and West, 2013) and critical reflection, (Marlowe *et al.*, 2014). For example, Canavan (2009) interviewed social work students to explore their development of professional identity in terms of their knowledge base and values. Canavan

(2009) found that the students felt challenged in their practice because of their views about social justice. Canavan concluded that:

“Professional identity formation is therefore a crucial learning process that needs to be at the heart of social work education”.

(2009:63).

A similar view was taken by Asquith, Clark, and Waterhouse, (2005) who conducted a literature review of social work in Scotland and they concluded that there was a ‘crisis’ in social work professional identity that was impacting upon “recruitment, retention and the understanding of the profession’s basic aims”, which they believed should be based on core values and principles (2005:4). I fully agree that values and social justice are crucial within social work professional identity, as explored within chapter one, but my view is that professional identity is much wider than a definition concerning social work values (1.3)

More specific to this thesis, enlightening research was undertaken in two longitudinal studies; Marsh and Treliosis (1996) and Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000). Although, these two studies were concerned with how students developed their skills and their ‘readiness’ for qualified social work practice, both studies have contributed to my understanding of professional identity and how this is developed during social work training. In the more recent research of Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000:3) they focused upon how;

“Professional practice in social work, thus involves not just the effective application of knowledge, these values are expressed by, and used to guide, practice, especially in a climate of competing and conflicting values, is of particular interest in our study of professional expertise. Professional practice is thus not purely technical. The challenge is also to explicate how moral and value-based thinking is incorporated into effective and responsible professional practice”.

They achieved this by interviewing social work students and qualified social work practitioners at various stages of their careers, using their responses to practice vignettes and their descriptions of critical incidents within their own practice (2000:15). They surmised that early on in the student social worker's training they often 'sacrificed' their 'personal' identity (that is they felt they had compromised their values and perhaps been too judgmental and blaming the service user), for their 'professional' identity:

“There were a number of aspects to this. The main one was their [student's] concern with their use of self. How does the 'personal' fit with the 'professional'? How does one integrate personal values and style with professional ethics and expectations?”

(2000:158).

Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000) found that as the students progressed into practice they became more comfortable with their 'personal identity' and their 'professional identity' being 'mutually exclusive' (2000:158). Reflecting upon the research of Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000) I have often wondered if, when a social work graduate takes up initial employment, they might become disillusioned when they discover that the practice and values of the organisation conflict with their existing identity as implied by the research above. For example, Jack and Donnellan (2010) found in their research of the experiences of newly qualified social workers, that most agencies fail “to recognise the *person* within the developing *professional*” (2010:317). This social work specific research also gives credibility to Sfard and Prusak's (2005) argument that individuals have many identities which are constantly changing and that of Day *et al.*, (2006) concerning the impact of an individual's identity on their professional identity (also see discussion in chapter two; 2.4). This correlates with my own theoretical perspective as explored in chapter two, where I

proposed that students need to integrate and further develop their identity with their new knowledge and experience of social work education, through the process of professional socialisation (Zarshenas et al., 2014).

### **3.3 Professional Socialisation**

Having explored professional identity, I now wish to turn my attention to literature concerning how social work students are socialised into the profession.

*Professional socialisation* is often reported as the internalisation of a set of values and the culture of a profession (Zarshenas et al., 2014). It is also considered to be the process whereby students develop a sense of self as members of a profession, internalise the values of their profession, and exhibit these values through their behaviour. Therefore, within social work education:

"Professional education imparts values and identity as well as knowledge to students. It contributes in both intended and unintended ways to the socialisation of students to the professional culture".

(Valutis, Rubin and Bell, 2012:1047).

As explored in chapter two, Valutis, Rubin and Bell (2012) support the view that identity develops throughout a social worker's career. However as explained by Miller (2010, 2013) following her review of the literature, she found that professional socialisation is ill-defined and there is limited research in this field. For example, at the time of writing this thesis, Wilson (2013) was in the process of completing a longitudinal study of social work students in Ireland, but with a focus upon skills development rather than professional identity. Initially Wilson (2010) researched social work student experiences of the course in their first year, particularly the impact of age, gender and previous experience. In this

first part of his study, he acknowledged the importance of reflection in social work practice and training and found that there was a lack of connection between theory and practice and often a conflict between academic competence and vocational competence (Wilson and Kelly, 2010: 2433). Overall, Wilson found that there was very little understanding of:

“How students are socialised into the profession and acquire, apply and develop professional knowledge and expertise”.

(Wilson and Kelly, 2010:2432).

Therefore, what is apparent within this discussion is the importance of social work education in the socialisation of students. Returning to Miller (2010, 2013), she conducted a systematic search of all the social work research relating to professional socialisation in America. In her later work, Miller (2013) offers a framework for understanding the professional socialisation of social workers, where she takes account of what students’ bring to the course, how they learn through socialisation during the course and continuing professional development. Miller’s model is similar to my own theoretical perspective as outlined in chapter two (see Illustration One) and I fully agree with Miller’s conclusions. The following quote summarises one of my main reasons for undertaking this research:

“The more the social work profession can understand about this process of professional socialisation, the better informed and more efficacious our efforts towards educating and retaining our students and workforce will be”.

(2010:363).

The available literature concerning professional socialisation strongly indicates that social workers develop their professional identity throughout their individual social work career, hence it will not cease at the point of graduation (Mosek and

Ben Oz, 2011:106). For instance, Holmstrom (2012:282) found that often students have to lose their 'self' to gain insider status. A similar view is taken by other professions, like nursing (Sims, 2011) and teaching (Day *et al.*, 2006). On the whole I would concur with this, although I prefer to take the view that students negotiate and further develop their identity in relation to other professionals and their wider environment as explained in my theoretical perspective in chapter two (2.9) and my use of Lave and Holland (2009) and Jenkins (2008).

Furthermore, I would assert that professional socialisation begins much earlier, and potentially even influences how an individual selects a particular career. For example, as Cree (2013:205) found practitioners often chose social work as they believed social work professional values were compatible and similar to their own personal values and that they could fulfil their motivation to 'make a difference' (as explored in chapter two: 2.13). This was further reinforced for me by the memoir of Olive Stevenson (2013) who clearly explains how her early life experiences influenced her choice of social work career.

Therefore, it is important to pay attention to a social worker's prior life experiences, which a handful of social work literature explores. Christie and Weeks (1998) completed a study concerning the influence of life experiences on a student's decision to train as a social worker, where they utilised questionnaires and asked questions such as: Did any life event or experience influence you to make the decision to come onto this social work programme? (1998:63). They concluded that there is value in further exploring the life experiences of social work students and the potential impact upon their success

in completing social work training. They were particularly interested in 'life stories' and the narrative style of Linde (1993). Similarly, to my position, they viewed identity as socially constructed and that: "Identity transformation is a process which continues throughout our lifetime" (1998:75). More recently, Tsang (2011) researched the importance of life experiences and in particular the part that this plays in the identity development of students:

"In a way, social work students are involved in a sculpting process – integrating knowledge and skills as well as creating their own social work identities. In such a process, students are affected by their past life experiences but they are not just a product of that experience for they are also proactive, interpreting the meaning of the social work profession".

(Tsang, 2011:375).

Researchers have also explored how some students might encounter challenges during the course of their studies. These studies have mostly concentrated on the progression of students on the course and the support they require (Brown, *et al.*, 2016), such as those who experience disabilities (Hussein *et al.*, 2008), those of ethnic origin (Hussein *et al.*, 2008) and Moffat and Miehl (1999) explored cultural differences in social work identity in Canada and specifically the manifestation of power in the class room. The impact of gender has become a much debated topic (Brown, *et al.*, 2016, Schaub 2015, Parker and Crabtree, 2014), as there are fewer men enrolled on social work courses, yet they tend to outnumber women in failing social work courses (Hussein *et al.*, 2008). In addition, this is a factor reported upon within other professional courses such as nursing and teaching (Schaub, 2015).

The age of students has also been examined by some researchers. Firstly, there appears to be a perception held by qualified social workers, other professionals and in some ways portrayed in the media, that younger social

work students do not have the maturity or experience to progress within social work training. Bogo (2016) found that this was a view widely held by the placement supervisors (field instructors) that she interviewed in North America. Bogo (2016) described this as an 'age bias', where placement supervisors viewed younger students to be more anxious and stressed, although this was not necessarily how students behaved, nor was the view held by the students themselves. Alternatively, Hemy *et al.*, (2016) in their literature review of student social workers' experiences of placement found that mature students experienced more challenges as they often had to juggle competing responsibilities, such as caring responsibilities, which often had a negative impact upon their studies and progress within the course.

There have been a series of studies which focused upon qualified social workers, one of which was undertaken by Beddoe (2011), where she explored the impact of social work identity within a health setting. Although this study focused upon qualified social workers in New Zealand, the valuable learning for my own research is that social workers can develop their identity in relation to other roles and professions (Beddoe, 2011:28). Payne (2004, 2006) also found this in his case study of social workers in palliative care, where social workers negotiated and developed their identity and role in relation to the other professionals in the team. There have been a number of international comparative studies to explore social work professional identity (Hackett *et al.*, 2003, Zufferey, 2011, Moorhead *et al.*, 2014 and Frost, 2008, 2013, Fargion, 2008), but again these are based upon qualified social workers and the development of identity through their qualified practice, although still important to my own research and understanding of professional socialisation.

Furthermore, there have been a range of studies concerning newly qualified social workers (Bates *et al.*, 2010, Frost *et al.*, 2013, Grant *et al.*, 2016) and the development of their identity, where in particular Tham and Lynch (2014) found that newly qualified social workers wanted more placement time within their pre-qualifying programmes. Therefore, what seems to be of significant importance within these studies, is the value of experiential learning and how practice influences and shapes a social worker's identity. I would speculate that social work students further develop their identity on placement, particularly when interacting and working with other professions and colleagues (Payne, 2004, 2006 and Beddoe, 2011), which I will now explore within the literature.

### **3.4 Importance of Placement and Placement Personnel.**

As explored within the previous chapter, the relationships and interaction that the student experiences with placement personnel is crucial within the socialisation process. For instance, Webb found that role models and their influence on a student's professional development could not be disentangled from the socialisation process (1988:230). Within the available literature at the time of writing this thesis, the research indicates that the placement itself has a significant impact upon the student's development of professional identity, but also so too do their practice educator, academics, peers, placement supervisors and other professionals.

#### **3.4.1 Placement**

Within this literature review I found that research conducted with qualified social workers further highlights the importance of placement experience in the development of professional identity and the professional socialisation of

student social workers (Tham and Lynch, 2014). This corresponds with my own theoretical stance of how important the environment and interaction with others is crucial to the student's identity development, as I explored in chapter two (2.11). Within the literature, there are numerous mentions of the importance of placement, such as the research of; Fortune (2001, 2007), Fernandez (1998) and Bogo *et al.*, (2010), Zeira and Schiff (2014) and as stated by Dunk-West (2013):

“Placement is enormously important in the development of the professional self. In fact the movement of social work students into practice learning settings is the ultimate way in which the professional self is constituted”.

(Dunk-West, 2013: 113).

Each of these social work researchers has commented upon the importance of the social work placement in the development of a student's skills and capabilities to undertake social work. For instance, Zeira and Schiff (2014), conducted a study with social work students in Israel and found that students perceived their field experience to be essential in developing their professional identity.

More recently, Domakin (2014), explored the importance of the placement from the perspective of social work employers. Domakin and an earlier similar piece of research with employers conducted by Clapton (2013), found that employers were more concerned with the integration of the academic curriculum with practice/placement learning, whereas it appears from the literature that students are more concerned with the quality of their practice experience (Fortune, 2001, 2007, Fernandez, 1998 and Bogo *et al.*, 2010). Most of the research has attempted to ascertain student 'satisfaction' with their placements and concluded that satisfaction was closely linked to the student's experience of

placement personnel as well as the placement environment. For instance, in the final part of his study, Wilson (2013) focused upon the preparedness of students for qualifying learning. Here students who felt less satisfied with their placements, were generally those who experienced a lack of support from their practice educators, or did not have qualified social workers on site (Wilson, 2013: 602). This latter finding supports my earlier discussion in chapter one (1.8) where there is a wider view, promoted by reports like Narey's (2014), that social work students need to be based with other social workers in order to develop their skills and therefore their professional identity.

However, some recent research has shown that students do form an identity through interaction with other professionals, similar to the findings of Payne's (2004, 2006) and Beddoe's (2011) research with qualified social workers (see 3.3). For instance, Scholar *et al.*, (2014) looked at the success of a placement in a voluntary sector setting where students were not based within a social work team, although their practice educator was a social worker. These placements were a positive experience for students and they developed the skills they required to successfully complete their qualification in social work. Research by Hek (2012) suggests that student's in such settings need more support to ensure that they do not feel isolated and in order to develop their social work identity. Hek based this upon research completed in the United Kingdom of social work students based in placements with the police and probation. I explore non-traditional placements further in more detail in relation to my own findings in chapter six (6.6).

### **3.4.2 Practice Educator**

There have been a number of studies that focused upon the impact of the practice educator within placement, particularly concerning placement satisfaction, as explored by; Wilson *et al.*, (2009), Knight (2000), Brodie (2003), and Lefevre (2005). In the latter, Lefevre (2005:576) did discover that some students perceived themselves to have had 'expectation clashes' with practice educators, particularly where practice educators did not 'live up' to their expectations in terms of knowledge, skills and support. Generally, these studies have not explored the impact of the practice educator upon the student's development of professional identity or professional socialisation.

However, Humphrey (2011, 2012) completed a longitudinal, qualitative study over four years, where she undertook focus groups with students and semi-structured interviews with practice educators. She also carried out questionnaires with students and examined their practice portfolios. The main focus of her research was professional socialisation and the student's journey into social work. From this research she created a handbook for students to guide them through the programme of study, therefore she took a mostly practical approach, but one that was highly relevant to my own research (Humphrey, 2011). Mackay and Zufferey (2012) also focused upon practice educators and explored how social work educators construct social work identity in Australia. Their research related more to what social work 'is' and what social workers 'do' rather than 'how' they develop social work identity, nonetheless, a useful study for my own research. Overall, few researchers have sought the views of practice educators themselves, which Wilson (2012) identified as a weakness of his longitudinal study.

### 3.4.3 Academics and Peers

The role and views of academics has been explored by Wilson and Campbell (2012), and Clapton *et al.*, (2006, 2008), and Watson and West (2003), where the latter looked at the role of the tutor, specifically in relation to their impact upon the development of the use of practice supervision. Terum and Heggen (2016) undertook a longitudinal comparative study of social work students and nursing students in Norway, to explore their professional identification and found some interesting results in relation to academics. Terum and Heggen found that social work students who received “support and feedback from teachers”, and who had more confidence in their supervisors as role models “expressed a higher degree of identification with the social work profession” (2016:839). They measured professional identification using a survey of 623 social work students and 343 nurses. Concluding that:

“this indicates, in accordance with previous research, that feedback from teachers and supervisors and the experience of good role models are important in professional socialisation”.

(Terum and Heggen, 2016:851).

Concerning nurses, they found peer interaction had the strongest effect on professional identification, although peer interaction was also important to social work students. Social work students reported that teachers and placement supervisors were the most influential to their professional identification. Furthermore, the research of Schreiber (1989) and Mosek and Ben-Oz (2011), stressed the importance of peer relationships, which I explore in more detail within chapter five (5.2.3) chapter six (6.3) in relation to my own research findings.

### **3.4.4 Placement Supervisor**

As stated in chapter two (2.11/12), the role and influence of the placement supervisor is an area that I am particularly interested in researching. Barretti (2004, 2007, 2009) has dedicated considerable time to this within her research. Barretti found that the placement supervisor plays a significant role in the socialisation of students and other studies have explored how the placement supervisor's supervision of the student contributes positively and negatively to their development. For example, Bogo (2006:170) found that students identified that an effective supervisor is a person who creates a supportive environment and the supervisor shows personal qualities of "honest, likable, expert, reliable, sociable, prepared, sincere, warm, skilful, and trustworthy".

As discussed earlier in this chapter Barretti (2007) completed a literature review and explored how students ranked the characteristics of placement supervisors. Conversely, Barretti (2007) found that students can also develop their identity by experiencing supervisors who they would not like to be in practice, as opposed to positive role models whose practice they wished to emulate. As has been the case with previous research, Barretti (2007) spoke to students, rather than other placement personnel, and the research was based upon student satisfaction with the placement, thus supporting the importance of the placement supervisor in modelling practice for the student. However, none of these studies interviewed both students and placement supervisors, instead they sampled either one or the other (Bogo, 2006:186). This is despite agreement within the literature that placement supervisors influence a student by providing explanations, offering feedback, clarifying tasks and roles and assessing the student's performance.

In addition, the majority of research concerning placement supervisors focuses upon the role of supervision (Davidson, 2011, Gelman and Lloyd, 2008, Giddings, Vodde and Cleveland, 2004, Itzhaky and Eliahu, 1999, Koeske and Kanno, 2010) and the impact it has upon student satisfaction within their placement, rather than in relation to professional socialisation (Bogo, 2006:187). This is further supported by the work of Fazzi and Rosignoli (2016), who researched the 'dual learning' process between the social work student and their supervisor in Italy and found that previous research had concentrated on supervisory styles and models rather than the relationship impact upon the supervisor, or even the student. Therefore, there is minimal research specific to the role of supervision in the development of professional identity, but this is mostly in relation to qualified social workers.

For instance, Levy, Shlomo, Itzhaky (2012, 2014) explored the development of professional identity among recently qualified social workers and the importance of supervision and personal values. They interviewed supervisees rather than supervisors, and concluded that there is a need for more investment in supervisors and more research. The need for more research into the impact of the placement supervisor is further supported by the alternative study undertaken by Hantman and Ben-Oz (2014). They explored a disruptive placement situation upon the professional socialisation of social work students, where they were working with refugees in Israel, but had no access to placement supervisors. They found that students worked proactively with peers and service users, and this led to them being confident in their work. However, when they returned to the programme they initially struggled to engage with placement supervisors and tutors. Therefore, Hantman and Ben-Oz's (2014)

research does raise questions about the importance and role of placement supervisors in assisting students to develop their professional identity.

Whilst there is a reasonable amount of research concerning the role and student experience of placement supervisors, little is known about the impact of this relationship upon the students' development of professional identity. Thus it would be beneficial to seek the views of placement supervisors concerning how students develop their professional identity. Overall, this literature review highlights that there is merit in speaking to not only students and placement supervisors, but also to academics, practice educators and other professionals to understand how students develop their identity, which I will return to in my final chapter.

### **3.5 Other Professions and Identity Development**

As stated earlier in this chapter there is a range of research from the perspective of other course programmes and professions. Key to this Trede, Macklin & Bridges (2012) undertook a systematic review of the literature concerning the development of professional identity in higher education and found:

"Professional identity development requires students' active engagement and agency in conjunction with appropriate support and mentorship from academics. There is overall agreement amongst all articles that collaborative, dialogic learning from practice enables and facilitates professional identity development. "

(Trede, Macklin & Bridges, 2012:378).

Similarly, a study was undertaken by Adams *et al.*, (2006) which investigated the factors influencing professional identity of first year health and social care

students. Adams *et al.*, (2006) found that professional identity develops over a period of time, such as fostering of attitudes, values, and knowledge of the profession. In particular Adams found that 'role models' were important to a student's development of professional identity. On the other hand, they found the strongest professional identity was in physiotherapy and the weakest in social work (2006:61). From this research I have wondered if social work students develop a stronger professional identity in their final year of the course because of the participation in a statutory placement, where social work role models are more accessible, as found in my own data in Chapter six (6.6).

Another significant study concerned youth work, and students' transition into their first year of study at an Australian university (Scanlon *et al.*, 2007). This is of particular interest to my research as Scanlon (2007) made use of the work of, Bourdieu (1993) and Berger & Luckmann (1979). In their discussions with students, they found that a lack of cohesion in the student community coupled with the reduction of contact time that lecturers have with students, negatively impacted upon a student's identity. For example, many of the students were engaged in increasing hours of employment, resulting in less available time with the student community and thus a lack of peer support (Scanlon, 2007:225). In relation to Bourdieu (1990), they found that those students who successfully navigated the transition to university, already had 'social capital' and discerned how to fully utilise this capital in their new context (Scanlon *et al.*, 2007:226). Subsequently they deduced that students need to feel a sense of 'connectedness' and establish a 'remooing' of their identity to the new experience of university (Scanlon *et al.*, 2007:237). They concluded that if a student has not effectively developed this 'connectedness' they risk deciding to

leave the course. The review of the literature in the previous section would suggest that this connectedness could be assisted by peers, practice educators, supervisors and academics.

Within nursing as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Sims (2011) and Terum and Heggen (2016) explored professional identity in relation to nursing. In addition, Johnson *et al.*, (2012), explored how professional identity is often mentioned in nursing literature but rarely researched. Similar to my own theoretical view, Johnson *et al.*, (2012) explained how a nurse's professional identity develops throughout their career, including education, concluding that further research, particularly longitudinal research, is required.

Finally, there is much research concerning teachers in training, for example Hayes (2003:155) found that students experience an 'identity passage' where their old identity transforms and aligns with the new one. This research is transferable to my own, as I have confidence in the view that interaction is crucial to identity formation (see chapter two: 2.9). In addition, Lamote and Engels (2010) researched the development of student teachers' professional identity, finding that those who had been on work placement during the course had a more realistic and developed teaching identity compared to students who had not yet commenced placement. Similar to Johnson *et al.*, (2012) in nursing, Lamote and Engels (2010) concluded that more longitudinal research is required. This finding is consistent with my own identification that more longitudinal research concerning the development of professional identity would be beneficial for the profession, which I will explore further in my final chapter.

### **3.6 Impact of Organisations**

A factor prevalent in a number of the studies already mentioned was the impact that organisational factors had upon the student, but for most studies this was a research finding, rather than the focus of the study (Fernandez, 1998). For example, Trede, Macklin & Bridges (2012) found that minimal research has focused solely upon the impact of the organisation on a student's professional identity and development. However, there is a good deal of research that supports the view that social work is a stressful occupation and that training to be a social worker itself is highly stressful (Pottage and Huxley, 1996, Tobin and Carson, 1997, Wilks and Spivey, 2010, Kinman and Grant, 2010 and Rajan-Rankin, 2014). A finding that in many ways was supported by my own research as explored in chapter seven (7.3.2 and 7.5).

The stressful nature of social work has resulted in a focus upon how students and qualified social workers can develop their resilience (Beddoe, 2013, Biggart *et al.*, 2016, Kinman and Grant, 2014) and emotional intelligence (Morrison, 2006). This has given rise to social work practitioners and academics developing strategies for the management of stress, such as the use of physical exercise or mindful practice like meditation (Lynn and Mensinga, 2015). For employers, their interest in resilience has been to improve the retention of social workers (Collins, 2008) and prevent burnout in practice (Lee and Miller, 2013). As specifically related to this thesis, Grant, Kinman and Baker (2015) researched social work educators' perspectives on an emotional curriculum (emotional resilience and management of stress) for students where they interviewed thirty-five course leaders. The participants in this study reported how important an emotional curriculum is to social work training. They

concluded that previous training and research has concentrated more on the 'cognitive' rather than the emotional side of resilience. In addition, Rajan-Rankin (2014:2427), states that less is known about the 'process' by which a student social worker learns to manage and regulate their emotions. Rajan-Rankin's (2014) research points to the importance of the organisation's responsibility in enabling a social worker to develop their resilience rather than the individual. Thus, arguably the organisational culture could promote a healthier response to change (Hotho, 2008), rather than offering rigid and inflexible institutional practices and systems that have often been reported in the media (Bee, 2015, Isaac, 2016 and BASW, 2013) and were described by students within my sample (see chapter seven, 7.2).

More recent research has been undertaken concerning the impact of bureaucratic practices and organisational challenges with qualified social workers. For instance, Tham (2007) researched the challenges in retaining newly qualified social workers and their reasons for leaving. In his findings, Tham found that the quality of supervision and support was key in retaining staff. Whereas, Hussein, *et al.*, (2014) researched job satisfaction with newly qualified social workers with a specific focus upon organisational factors and found that an 'empowering' workplace was important in promoting staff morale, retention of workers and effectiveness of workers. Hussein, *et al.*'s (2014) research defined 'empowering' to mean that staff would be provided with good quality and appropriately supportive supervision, a finding that was also supported by Tham's (2007) research.

Applying this research to social work students highlights the importance of creating a supportive placement environment and culture that is facilitated by supervisors and the wider organisation (Grant, Kinman and Baker, 2015). On the other hand, in Bogo *et al.*'s (2010) research concerning the student's relationship with their supervisor, they found that, if this was a negative experience then the wider organisation could compensate. Therefore, others in the team could act as an emotional buffer. However, if both the organisation and supervisor are problematic then the student's resilience is often impeded (as explored in chapter seven, 7.4).

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Essentially, my research aims to explore how students develop their professional identity and are socialised into the profession. In particular I am interested in how students construct their identity and how they achieve this in relation to others whilst completing their social work training, but most specifically in interaction with their placement supervisor. This literature review has indicated that limited research has been conducted concerning the impact of the agency environment upon the development of a student social worker's professional identity, which I hope to explore with students and their placement supervisors. Overall this literature review has highlighted that there are gaps in research at the time of writing this thesis concerning the professional development of social work students, which I will at least in part bridge with the research I have undertaken.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Methodology**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

My aim and research questions were designed to explore a student's development of professional identity, particularly in relation to their final placement and placement supervisors, a focus I have explained in the previous chapters. I spent some considerable time in my fourth assignment (appendix four:74-78) exploring the methodology that best corresponded with my research paradigm (Guba, 1990:18). Since writing this assignment my methodology has evolved further in the process of undertaking my literature review and theoretical framework in the prior chapters. However, primarily my aim and research questions have remained constant throughout undertaking my EdD.

Within this chapter I will further outline my research aim and questions and the rationale for these, I will then explain the design for my research. Alongside this exploration, I will highlight the ethical considerations and limitations of the methodology that I encountered and explain how I utilised grounded theory to analyse the data collected.

## **4.2 Research Aim and Questions**

### **4.2.1 Aim**

My aim was to explore how students develop their professional identity during their social work training and establish how placement supervisors assist, support and enable students and make reasonable progress towards meeting the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF, BASW, 2016a).

In the process of undertaking this research I also aimed to explore the impact of a student's prior experiences, placement and agency setting on their development of professional identity. As explained in chapters two and three, the socialisation of students was of particular interest to me, not only through the impact of the placement supervisor, but also other placement personnel, peers, service users and other professionals.

As a consequence of this aim I developed the following primary and secondary research questions.

### **4.2.2 Primary Questions**

- How might a student's professional identity be affected by their interaction with their placement supervisor?
  
- How might a student's perception of their professional identity be affected by their experience of the placement setting and working practices within that setting?

### 4.2.3 Secondary Questions

- How does a student's experience prior to the course assist or hinder their professional identity? For instance; their educational experience, home life, age, ethnicity and gender?
- Does a student's professional identity change over the duration of their final practice placement?

### 4.3 Rationale for Research Aim and Questions

As explored in the literature review within chapter three, I anticipated that students would develop their professional identity through; placement, critical reflection upon their practice and in relationship with peers, social work practitioners, placement supervisors, practice educators, lecturers, and other professionals. Given my knowledge of working with students as an educator and my personal experience of completing the qualification (see chapter one, 1.2); I posited that students would bring a reasonably formed identity to the course, as a result of their; age, gender, class, work experience, education and so on. I surmised that some students would sail through the course, as they share a similar identity and have the 'social capital' (see theoretical discussion in chapter two, 2.4.3) to develop this identity further (Bourdieu, 1993 & Scanlon *et al.*, 2007). For instance, a student who has life experience and/or social care experience that they can draw upon.

Alternatively, as Hussein *et al.*, (2008) discovered, this life experience could produce challenges for students in successfully completing the course, such as those who experience disabilities, male students and those of minority ethnic

origin, often fail to complete the course or experience multiple attempts at modules.

As explained in the prior chapters I was particularly interested in the impact that the placement supervisor has upon the development of the student's identity (see chapter one, 1.2 and chapter 3.4.4). I found that this often took the shape of a student modelling themselves on the practice of their placement supervisor (Barretti, 2007), or forming their identity in opposition to a supervisor if there were difficulties in their relationship, or differences in their style of practice (see chapter three, 3.4.4 and chapter six, 6.4). I also found that agency practices impacted negatively and positively upon the student and their ability to develop their professional identity. For instance, my literature review (see chapter three, 3.6) uncovered that social work students are often hindered by bureaucratic agency policies and practices (Fernandez, 1988), but thrive in a supportive and nurturing working environment (Hussein *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, research by Bogo *et al.*, (2010) indicated that a combination of these two factors, agency context and placement supervisor, have a significant impact upon a student's development and success within the social work course (see chapter three, 3.6 and chapter seven, 7.4).

#### **4.4 Research Design**

To achieve my research aim I took a mostly qualitative approach to my research, as I made the decision that only qualitative methods could achieve the type of in-depth responses required concerning experiential learning. For instance, I explored students' development of professional identity rather than explaining and measuring this in a positivist and scientific manner (Crotty, 1998).

Furthermore, quantitative methods could not offer me the rich and detailed narrative that I gathered from participants. On the other hand, I initially collected demographic information on my sample, such as age, gender and other significant characteristics. I collected this demographic data as I anticipated that relating this data to my qualitative data might expose important findings.

As explained in my fourth assignment (appendix four), I would have preferred to undertake a longitudinal study of student experiences from the commencement to the completion of their course. This was particularly appealing as I wished to obtain the most comprehensive information concerning student experience and track the development of their professional identity throughout their training.

However due to the time restrictions of the EdD, and having completed a timeline in my fourth assignment (appendix four, 4.4), I came to the realisation that this was entirely unrealistic and impractical within the parameters of the EdD. To address this, I opted to focus solely upon the student's experience of their final placement, and this had considerable value as my literature review has highlighted (chapter three, 3.4), and my own experience (chapter one, 1.2), suggests that social work students develop a good deal of their professional identity in their final placement (Scanlon *et al.*, 2007). Nonetheless this does

offer an opportunity to undertake a longitudinal study post thesis, which I will explore further in my final chapter.

#### **4.5 Sample Design**

My main ‘respondents’ were social work students in the final year of their postgraduate studies; however, I also wished to seek the views of placement supervisors, as explained earlier in the first three chapters. As I intended to obtain detailed information from the students and their placement supervisors, it was more appropriate to regard them as ‘participants’ rather than ‘respondents’ or ‘subjects’ (Robson, 2011), as I worked in collaboration with participants to obtain their responses. Furthermore, I knew each participant in their role as a student or placement supervisor, so simply ‘responding’ seemed inappropriate and unethical, if not oppressive. For instance, in the research of Hugman and Pittaway, (2011), with refugees they highlighted the importance of the participation of those being interviewed throughout the process of the research, to obtain meaningful data and to promote empowerment:

“So the challenge is to find ways of ensuring that research relationships are congruent with the empowering and developmental goals of social work as a profession. The dynamic of reciprocity in relational ethics is a way of achieving this”.

(Hugman and Pittaway, *et al.*, 2011:1284).

Therefore, to encourage students and placement supervisors to volunteer, I designed my research so that participant responses were utilised to influence the future content of teaching and arrangements for the final placement. I hoped that by doing this, students and placement supervisors would understand the value in offering their views and experiences, and they would feel like fully

involved participants rather than 'subjected' to the research (Robson, 2011).

This was important given the current political pressure on placements and social work organisations, as described in chapter one (1.9) and also explored in chapter seven within my analysis (7.4). Essentially I wanted participants to feel that their responses would have value and have a meaningful impact upon future course content and how placements are organised. Indeed, students and placement supervisors did use the opportunity to offer their views on the course, which I explore in my final chapter.

Given that I already had an established relationship with the students and supervisors in my own educational setting, I made a concerted effort to secure the opportunity to undertake half of my student sample at an alternative establishment with a similar social work course. This would have offered me a comparison where I would not have been directly involved in the course. However, despite the alternative institution sending out my research information to students on numerous occasions, none of their students volunteered. I also offered to meet with students to explain my research, but unfortunately there was not an opportune time to do this, as students had already commenced placement.

Therefore, with the amount of data I generated from the in-depth interviews, and following analysis, I could not avoid having some form of influence, negatively or positively on both the analysis of the data and the responses of the participants. In addition, in my institution I have a role within the course as a tutor, module lead, lecturer, organising and developing placements; which is likely to have had an impact upon the responses I received. For instance,

students may have been fearful of my assessment of their progress on the course and might even have sought to impress me of their development as Brookfield (2005) found in his research concerning student learning. Therefore, I successfully avoided assessing the work of the students who participated in the research.

I was also aware of how my research might impact upon a participant's practice as well as the trustworthiness of their responses. For example; participating students could have been at an advantage over their peers by the raising of their awareness concerning the development of their professional identity, and placement supervisors could have been more mindful and supportive of their students knowing that they were involved in the study. This is potentially one of the reasons why none of my sample of students failed their placement, although supervisors did discuss working with previous failing students. To avoid similar challenges Hayes (2003) waited until students had graduated before analysing his data, which was not an option available to me, given the timescales of the EdD.

I was also conscious that the five supervisors interviewed may have volunteered as they already had an interest in how students develop their professional identity, and involvement in the study could have further developed their understanding of professional identity. Although on the surface this might not appear to be a limitation, these supervisors possibly offered more support to students as a result of having their awareness raised by the study. Additionally, this could have had an unintentional positive impact upon students who they were working with, especially with the three students who had volunteered to be

participants whose supervisors were also being interviewed. Therefore, I would have preferred to have interviewed more supervisors from a wider range of agencies, in order to minimise this potential impact.

To counteract these challenges, I used 'reflexivity' (Burr, 2003, Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001), ensuring that I was aware of my impact upon the research and data, so for this purpose I kept a reflective journal. This journal promoted my use of an autobiographical approach (Sparkes, 2002, Ellis and Bochner, 1996, 2002), as I explained in my introductory chapter, where I explored the impact of my own identity and my role as a researcher upon the data and the participants, but essentially my influence upon the data was unavoidable. This was also found by Humphrey (2012) within her research of social work students and practice educators within her own institution, which shares strong similarities with my own research design. Humphrey's (2012) undertook a qualitative study, where she interviewed practice educators and held focus groups with social work students. Like my own research, Humphrey (2012) attempted to navigate the power issues by asking participants to volunteer for her research. For my own research, I made use of my journal immediately following each interview to record my feelings and these notes further assisted and contributed to my analysis, as explored in the next three chapters.

My concerns regarding the negative impact of my existing relationship with participants was unfounded as I was able to collect extensive data. Conversely this was most likely a result of my relationship with the participant, as because they knew me they offered a detailed narrative of their experience.

Consequently, the lack of a comparison social work course had less impact than I had expected, and it is entirely possible that had I interviewed students who I did not know, they could have offered limited responses to my interview questions.

Returning to the sample design of the participants in my educational setting, I considered 'purposeful' sampling but I wanted to ensure that participants volunteered rather than felt pressurised to be interviewed. This was important as I wished to minimise the possibility that students and placement supervisors were volunteering as they believed this was necessary to improve their academic attainment or relationship with my institution (as explained earlier in this section). For the same reason I ruled out 'random' sampling and opted for 'self-selection' (Robson, 2011). Having arrived at the decision to undertake in-depth interviews with participants and a sampling method, I decided that the sample size should be reasonably small but should also be typical of the student and placement supervisor population.

The cohort within the programme consisted of approximately thirty students, who were working with a different placement supervisor and agency setting, therefore far too many to interview each one in any depth. I anticipated that more participants than were required might volunteer, so within the 'information for participants' (see appendix two), I explained that I would select participants on the basis of obtaining a typical sample. For instance, a mix of ages, gender, ethnicity, agency setting and so on. This was fully explained within my ethics proposal and agreed by my institution's ethics committee (see appendix one). Therefore, participants were fully aware that if more students and placement

supervisors volunteered than were required, I would select participants based upon the demographic information they had provided.

#### **4.6 Sample Process**

Following discussion in my transfer viva, I elected to interview placement supervisors who had volunteered and were not necessarily connected, or working with the students that volunteered. This was to avoid potential placement supervisor and student reluctance to offer responses that identified other participants within the sample. It was also to ensure that participants fully appreciated that their responses would not impact upon either the student's progression within their programme, nor would the placement supervisor's relationship with my institution be adversely affected.

Therefore, I have been attentive to these concerns within my ethics proposal and have ensured that students and placement supervisors were aware of how their anonymity was protected and what I would do with the collected data. In many ways confidentiality was a challenge, as responses were often quite personal in nature, thus easily traceable to the originator. For this reason, I anonymised participant responses to student 'one' and placement supervisor 'two' and so on. Furthermore, I added to the consent form that participants did not have to answer questions during the interview, and were not required to offer any rationale as to why they did not wish to respond, although none of the participants acted upon this option. I also ensured that participants were fully aware that they could withdraw their consent without explanation, until the time (July 2015) that their responses had been subsumed and integrated within my

analysis. This action was one of the minor amendments requested by the Ethical Committee in order to obtain ethical approval. However, none of the participants withdrew their consent.

In order to acquire volunteer placement supervisors, although I had already obtained the agreement of my institution's ethics committee, I had to approach each agency to gain ethical approval to interview their staff. This resulted in contacting ten agencies to complete their application process, before I could approach placement supervisors to volunteer. I had no response to my request to approach placement supervisors from two of the agencies, despite gentle reminders and further contact to garner their involvement. One agency denied me access to their staff as they were undergoing a 'turbulent time' with changes within the organisation. Finally, another agency took a lengthy time to consider my request, resulting in their response being too late to interview their personnel. Of the agencies that responded, two were charitable children's organisations and the remainder were local authorities in both rural and inner city environments, working with both children and adults. As a consequence of this process, five supervisors volunteered, although I would have liked to interview more, I will explore this further in my final chapter.

#### **4.7 Actual Sample**

My final sample consisted of nine students and five placement supervisors, hence it was not necessary for me to select fewer students or supervisors. If I had received volunteers from another institution, I would most likely have needed to select a smaller, typical sample from within my educational setting.

However, at my first request for student volunteers none of the male students contacted me, therefore I made another request directly to the male students and three volunteered. Obtaining male volunteers was important given their different experiences of social work education as reported within the literature (Parker and Crabtree, 2014 and Schaub, 2015, Brown *et al.*, 2016) see chapter three, 3.3) and corroborated by my analysis in chapter five (5.3.4).

As a consequence of this process my sample was typical of the national picture across England as reported by Skills for Care (2016:10), where 85.4% of the social work student population was found to be female. Two of the students who volunteered self-identified as from an ethnic minority, the remainder identified as white British, again reflecting the national average across England of 90% white British (Skills for Care, 2016:11). Three of the students identified as experiencing a disability, and this would seem typical of my own experience of the course, although surprisingly such data on disability was not collected by Skills for Care (2016).

Concerning age, the youngest student was twenty-seven, and the oldest was fifty-five. Six of the students were in their thirties and one student was aged forty-four at the time of the interviews, this again seems fairly typical for a postgraduate social work course (Skills for Care, 2016:9). The students were in a range of placement settings, one working with care leavers, four were placed in local authority children's settings, two were in local authority adult settings and the final two were placed in voluntary children's settings.

A limitation of the student sample is that the study was completed with postgraduate students, so the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the experiences of undergraduate students. I would have liked to have interviewed undergraduate students in my own institution or even at an alternative institution, which may have offered an understanding of their experiences of the development of professional identity for comparison.

Of the five supervisors, three were female and therefore two male. Two were employed within voluntary children's organisations, one of these two supervisors was not social work qualified. Two supervisors were employed within a local authority adult's setting and one was employed within a local authority children's setting. Of the four that had a social work qualification they had all qualified post 2002, with one graduating as late as 2012, this meant that they had all trained under the new arrangements of social work as a degree (see chapter one, 1.7). Three had undertaken practice educator training and were acting at the time of data collection, in the dual role of practice educator and practice supervisor with students on the programme. All of the placement supervisors interviewed were currently working with and supporting a student on the programme. Of the five, three of the students they were working with at the time of the research, had volunteered to be interviewed. Therefore, this was despite my concerns that placement supervisor and students might not wish to share current experiences of working together during the final placement, as can be seen further in the analysis of their relationships in chapter six. These fourteen in-depth interviews generated comprehensive information and I reached saturation (Charmaz, 2014) of the data in order to fully explore my research questions, as discussed in the next three chapters.

## 4.8 Methods

Having considered a range of approaches to undertaking my research (see appendix four, fourth assignment), initially I was attracted to narrative approaches, which is often utilised in researching social work practice with service users (Riessman, 2008). For instance, in writing assignment four, I ruminated upon the use of a journal for students to keep notes of significant events and experiences during their placement (Hayes, 2003). However, following considerable reflection I concluded that I did not wish to create superfluous work for students to undertake, within an already demanding course. Furthermore, making use of a narrative approach could have been too time consuming, and generate far more data than a study on this scale or within the parameters of an EdD, could realistically have the scope to manage (Riessman, 2005).

I also contemplated the efficacy of focus groups, but given the very individual nature and experience of professional identity, I concluded there was a danger that more dominant members of the group would overwhelm the data collection and I would run the risk of not obtaining the crucial views of more introverted members (Barbour, 2007). In addition, individual responses could be quite personal in nature, and not something that students would wish to divulge to their peers. As a consequence, I elected to use semi-structured interviews, as essentially I would agree with Silverman (2013:87) that these can be utilised as a form of direct access to the experience and feelings of a participant. Therefore, this method of interviewing was a good means of accessing a participant's narrative of their identity and development of professional identity.

Overall as Kvale (1996:5) has argued, through these ‘conversations’ I hoped to explore the participant’s view of the world.

#### **4.9 Interviews**

I initially collected data regarding the identity and experiences that the student brought to the course, and the placement supervisor’s previous experience of supervision and social work education, before interviewing each participant (see appendix three). Making use of Kvale’s (1996) guidance on the ‘conversational’ nature and use of interviews, I utilised in-depth interviews with participants.

These interviews took place during the student’s final year placement, at the mid-point, prior to submitting their interim portfolio and before receiving interim placement feedback. I undertook these interviews having generated around five central questions as prompts to exploring student experiences and placement supervisor views (see appendix three). A few days following each interview I sent each participant a summary of their interview content, for them to comment upon accuracy and if there was anything further they wished to add. This follow up assisted with ‘participant validation’ of the data that I had collected and added further to the analysis in the next three chapters (Reason and Rowan, 1981 and Silverman, 2013:288).

I then contacted the students and placement supervisors towards the end of the placement, via email, in order to ascertain any changes and to ‘validate’ their responses and refine the data if necessary based upon feedback received (Reason and Rowan, 1981 and Silverman, 2013). However, in the follow up to

the initial interview and later contact with the participants to clarify their narratives, most participants had nothing further to add.

Although interviews appeared to be the most appropriate method, I was aware that participants may not always explain what they mean, and new meanings could have been created by participants within the interviews. Essentially as Charmaz (2014:78) argues interviews are in themselves a performance. It was also a challenge at times to negate the power participants perceived I held (as explained earlier in this chapter), but also the impact of my age, gender, culture, status, credibility and so on, upon the responses of participants. Consequently, I was mindful of the impact of power upon the interviewees and the data, as Kvale (2006:497) argues the interview is a powerful method and process. It was equally important that I did not take for granted that I understood the terms and meanings used by participants. Instead I needed to clarify these with them, as my personal experience could be entirely different. This was a challenge because of my own experiences of social work and as a previous practice educator and placement supervisor, as explained within the introduction to this thesis (1.2). Here the interview summaries were useful as well as contacting participants at the end of placement for further clarification and validation (Reason and Rowan, 1981 and Silverman, 2013:288).

I audio recorded each interview to assist with data collection and to enable me to be fully present during the interview, actively listening and engaging with participants. Following application for ethical approval I was asked to ensure that the participants were aware that they did not need to agree to be audio recorded. If a participant had chosen not to be audio recorded I would have

needed to take some notes, which would have distracted me from their narrative and could have impacted on my ability to listen and clarify. Fortunately, all the participants consented to audio recording.

Given the personal nature of my research I needed to offer my own explanation of why I was interested in this topic to the participants. I hoped this would also encourage the participants to explore their narrative more openly with me. To assist this process, I explained this clearly within the 'information for participants' (see appendix two), whereby I stated that I wished to improve placement experiences and the support and training of supervisors.

Furthermore, given the topic of the research concerning professional identity, I needed to be sensitive to the narrative of participants and what they told me, thus being non-judgmental in my responses and not too direct in my approach. For instance, I encountered; students concerned about failing, challenging situations faced by both students and placement supervisors concerning the programmes, their organisations and relationships with placement personnel. These difficulties might also have produced bias in the student's responses, where they might have held negative views regarding their course and preparation for placement. In addition, there could have been factors beyond my control within the placement setting that influenced the data. For example, it could be that the students were affected by a lack of available social work role models (Wilson 2013, and Narey, 2014, see chapter three, 3.4.1), or challenges in relationships with their practice educator, placement supervisor or academic tutor and any 'expectation clashes' as found by Lefevre (2005:576, see chapter three, 3.4.2).

This is an area I explored within my ethics proposal (see appendix one) and I explained to the participants that if there was anything of concern I would discuss how this would be addressed with the participant, such as the safety of a service user or difficulties within a placement (see appendix two). Although there was no need to follow the actions described in 'information to participants' (appendix two), I did wonder if there were situations that I was unaware of such as, students concerned about failing, challenging situations faced by both students and placement supervisors concerning the programmes, their organisations and relationships with placement personnel. It is possible that participants did not share more of their negative experiences with me because of my role within the course and the 'power' they perceived me to hold as a result of my role.

#### **4.10 Interview Questions** (see appendix three)

For the semi-structured interviews I devised six questions to ask participants and to act as prompts if required. I commenced each interview by asking the participant how the placement was progressing, this resulted in the majority of students explaining how important it is to have the right placement, which fortunately all the students felt had occurred, or at least that is what they conveyed to me. The responses to this particular question are explored in more depth within chapter seven.

Consistent with my theoretical understanding of professional identity as outlined in chapter two, I asked each participant how a 'student's experience prior to the course influences their professional identity'? This gave me the opportunity to

explore participants' answers in more depth. For each interview I left this question until last, in the hope that it would be an area naturally raised in their narrative. As suggested by Charmaz (2014), I wished to allow the participant to pace the interview and did not wish them to feel uncomfortable, especially at the beginning of the interview. My reason for this was that I hypothesised that this would be quite a personal area for the participant, and indeed this was evidenced in the responses I received (as explained in chapter five). Many of the participants did naturally raise this area concerning their experiences prior to the course themselves, or were prompted to do so in the final stages of the interview (see chapter five).

In addition, I was quite cautious of asking this question too early in the interview, as I did not wish to enter into a discussion with the participant concerning how 'professional identity' is defined. Instead I hoped that the participants' responses would involve them raising this issue for themselves, in the process of explaining how they felt their professional identity was developing. I also did not wish to impose my own interpretation of professional identity upon the participant. Although unavoidable to some extent, I hoped that taking the interview at the participant's pace would result in minimising researcher impact upon the responses I obtained. I found that the participant responses to this question encompassed two broad themes, one concerning their prior experience and the other regarding the embodiment of identity, which I explore in the next chapter.

As highlighted in chapter three there is a distinct lack of research concerning the socialisation of social workers (Miller, 2010, 2013). Having explored how a

student's prior experience impacts upon their development of professional identity, I was keen to learn more about this process of socialisation, once students were undertaking the course. As already stated within the prior chapters and in the 'information for participants' (appendix two), I was particularly interested in the impact of the student's interaction with their placement supervisor. Therefore, my research questions referred specifically to a student's interaction with their placement supervisor, although I was open to participants raising the importance of other professionals in the development of professional identity. Many of the students and supervisors began the interview by explaining their perception of this, following my first question concerning how the student's placement was progressing. I explore the responses to these questions in considerably more detail within chapter six.

Finally, the importance of the organisational setting and its impact upon the student's development of professional identity was highlighted in all of the interviews. I would assert that this is partly due to my own research interest and questions, which undoubtedly impacted upon interview responses (Kvale, 2006), but most likely because the interviews were purposely planned at a significant time of the students' final practice placement (a timing which would be consistent with other similar social work programmes). That is, prior to the student's interim portfolio submission, so around mid-point in their placement. This was with the intention of giving the students the opportunity to settle into the placement and experience agency practice, both shadowing and first-hand prior to interview.

In summary the use of semi-structured interviews fitted well within my constructionist theoretical approach, and the interviews generated a substantial amount of data. I approached my analysis of the data as explained in the next section.

#### **4.11 Data Analysis**

As interview responses are far more than simply access to the experience and feelings of participants; they are what Silverman (2013:87) terms as 'constructed narratives', I needed to analyse responses from participants in considerable depth. Thus my choice of data analysis was crucial and it needed to correlate with my theoretical framework as already outlined in chapter two. To the reader, it might seem that an obvious option would be discourse analysis and a focus upon "looking closely at language in use" (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001:6). However, I was not concerned with how the participants utilised language. Instead, I analysed the content of their language, rather than the process (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001:15), thus my analysis needed to be interpretative in nature. As a result of my intention to use a more interpretative approach I employed Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), as a method of analysing my interview data.

Grounded theory was particularly useful in my situation where the researcher has few preconceived ideas. Having stated this, I have highlighted some of my ideas and hypotheses at the beginning of this chapter, and within the research questions that I have generated from my literature review. Grounded theory was attractive to me as it enables the researcher to develop themes and

explore individual responses (Charmaz, 2006). Originating from the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory has been further developed by a number of writers. I have been particularly inspired by the work of Charmaz (2006, 2014) who was a student with Glaser and Strauss, but has taken a constructivist approach to grounded theory rather than the more positivist one that Glaser and Strauss promoted.

Charmaz argues:

“Stated simply, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves”.

(Charmaz, 2014:1).

Therefore, grounded theory offered me a flexible set of guidelines for analysis, but what I particularly liked about Charmaz’s use of grounded theory, is the promotion of an open way of thinking, so that the data is constructed by both participants and the researcher. For this reason, Charmaz advocates keeping a reflective journal and maintaining a reflexive approach, which also corresponds with my use of autobiographical writing. So the data was not forced to fit my research questions, and I anticipated that the data would emerge through my analysis (Charmaz, 2014:32). Therefore, I methodologically began with my broad research questions and then refined these as participants explained their narrative. This was also useful in the follow up emails to participants, where I asked for more information and participants could further clarify their narrative if they wished. For instance, one of the participants might crystallise what others have said and then offer clearer patterns and themes for me to explore further within the data.

As suggested by Charmaz (2014) and supported by other writers concerning research methods (Robson, 2011, Saldana, 2009), grounded theory involved me initially coding the data obtained from the interviews (open coding) then I continued coding (axial coding) and created a 'coding paradigm', identifying a 'central phenomenon', context and consequences, until I reached saturation of the data. I then made use of 'selective coding' within my analysis to arrive at 'propositions' or a 'hypothesis' and thus generating a theory relevant to my research. Through this process of coding, relationships between the codes became apparent and I identified gaps for further exploration (see illustrations two, three and four, in chapter five). Charmaz (2014:141) argues that coding in this way is not always a linear process, so as I conceptualised and identified themes I constantly returned to the data and theoretical ideas emerged. Consequently, my research design evolved with the collection of data, but this also enabled me to take a highly organised and systematic approach to my data analysis (Robson, 2011).

Therefore, grounded theory through thematic codes, has enabled me to be creative and work with the data to understand and construct meaning without being restricted or imposing a rigid framework of analysis on my data. This enabled me to work more openly with the narratives of the participants, and returning a summary to the participants offered opportunities for clarifying and constructing further meaning. These attributes of grounded theory were essential in my research as I collected a reasonably large amount of data and I required an organised method to coordinate my data. I made use of Nvivo software to assist in this organisation, and working with the data in this way encouraged me to take a deeper analysis of my research, and assisted in

analysing and drawing conclusions from the responses I received from students and placement supervisors. Concerning transcribing, I transcribed the data from the audio recordings, as soon as I was able, as promoted by Kvale (2006) and I began to establish codes and themes as I transcribed (see illustrations two, three and four, in chapter five). I elected to personally work with the data, rather than employing someone to transcribe, as this assisted me in using grounded theory and enabled me to understand and analyse the data at a deeper level.

There are a number of criticisms of grounded theory, such as: how will one know when one has reached saturation of the data? Moreover, some state that grounded theory results in 'concepts' rather than 'theories', and there is much disagreement concerning how to employ grounded theory (Bryman, 2012:574). Indeed, Glaser and Strauss (1967) had differing perspectives on exercising grounded theory; Glaser being an empiricist whilst Strauss held the view that participants are active agents rather than passive recipients (Charmaz, 2014:11). Personally in working with the data, I found grounded theory to be the best approach to analysing my data, from both a theoretical standpoint and how I wished to interpret and understand the data, which is demonstrated in the next three chapters.

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

Initially I would have preferred to take a narrative approach to my research, but it was more practical and realistic to undertake semi-structured in-depth interviews (Kvale, 1996) with participants, because of the time constraints of the EdD programme. However, I would argue that these interviews did take the form of participants' narratives and allowed me some access to their experiences and views concerning professional identity development (Silverman, 2013). There have been a number of ethical considerations that I have needed to take into account, not only in my collection of the data but also in my analysis. Throughout this process I have made effective use of a reflective journal (Charmaz, 2014) and the autobiographical approach I mentioned at the onset of this thesis. This has assisted me in addressing these ethical challenges, in particular being mindful of my impact as a researcher upon the participants' responses and data analysis, which I explore in further detail within the next three chapters.

In summary a longitudinal study conducting interviews at a number of points during and following the student's completion of the course would have been desirable. In addition, I would have preferred to have succeeded in creating the opportunity to interview both undergraduate and postgraduate students in at least two different institutions for comparison (which I will explore further in the final chapter). However, the design of the study as explained in this chapter was realistically achievable within the time constraints of the EdD.

## **Chapter Five**

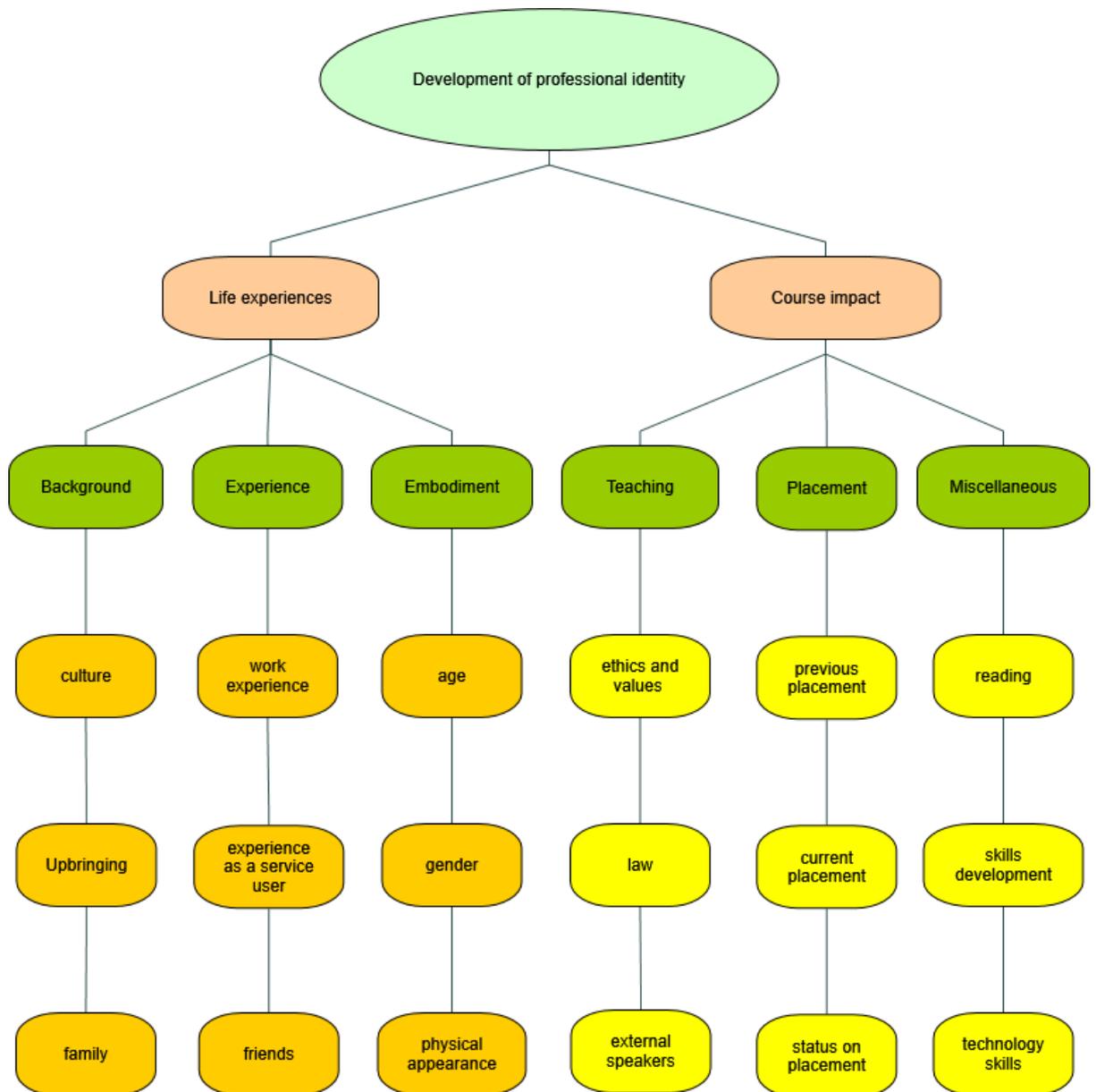
### **Analysis and Interpretation of the Data**

#### **Introduction to Findings**

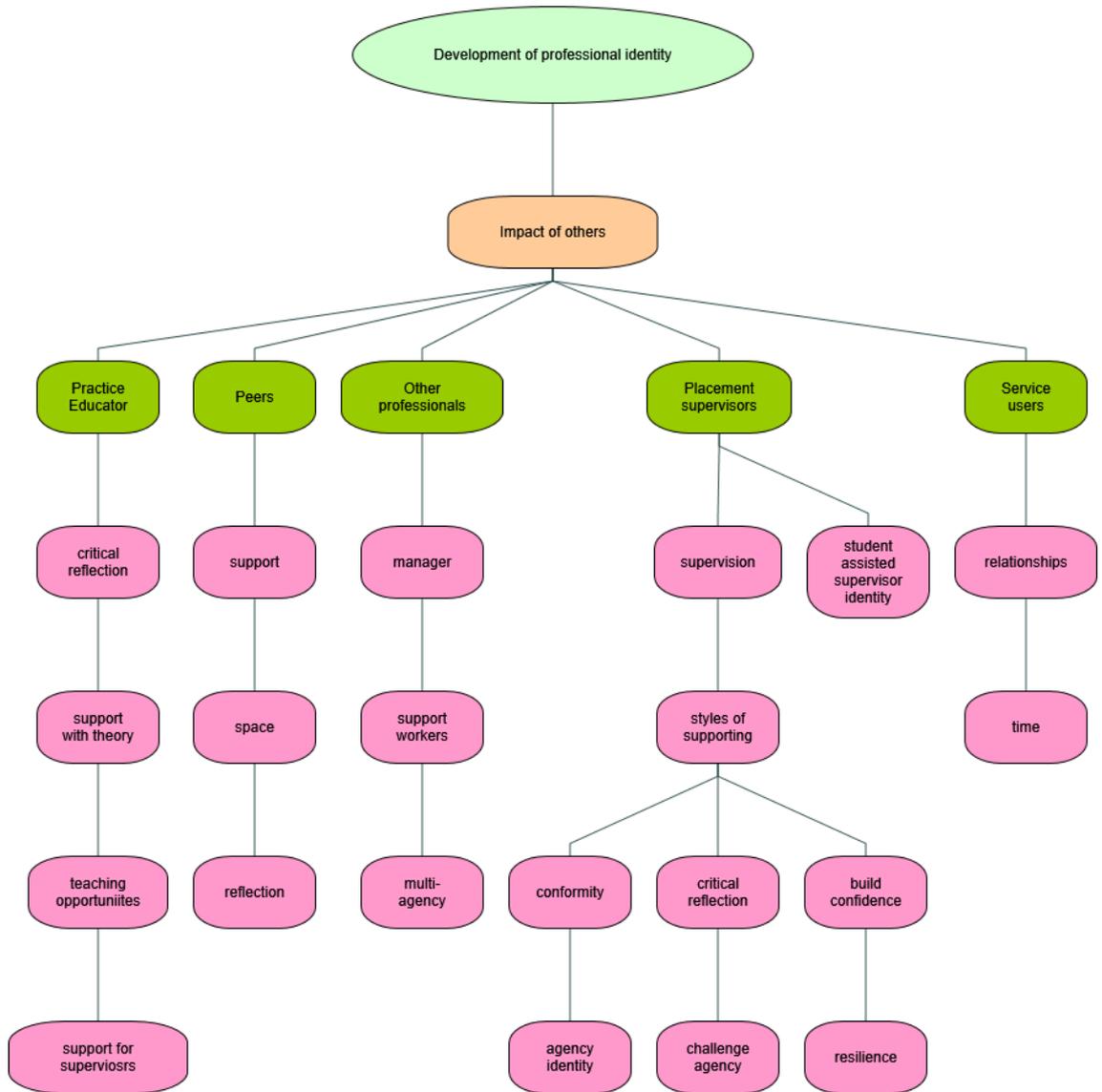
Following the collection of the data as described in chapter four, I analysed the data employing grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). I utilised Nvivo software to assist me in the process of coding and identifying themes for analysis. This coding is illustrated via the use of mind maps (Buzan, 1995) on the next page (illustrations two, three and four). By the end of this process I found that three broad themes emerged from the data. All participants talked about the relevance of previous experience and their identity before embarking upon the course, and the impact of this experience on their professional identity and socialisation into the social work profession. The second prominent area was the importance of interaction with others during the course, particularly those involved in the student's final placement. Finally, students and supervisors raised both the positive and negative impact of organisational practices, especially the emergence of hot-desking and the increasingly bureaucratic nature of social work.

In many ways these themes were congruent with my own experience of social work practice and social work training (see chapter one, 1.2), particularly organisational constraints, where I have observed the impact of contemporary social work practices upon students and qualified social work practitioners. However new codes did emerge from the data as discussed in the next three chapters, where I will take each of these themes in turn to analyse their importance to my research questions, and these will be illustrated with the use of direct quotes from participants' transcripts.

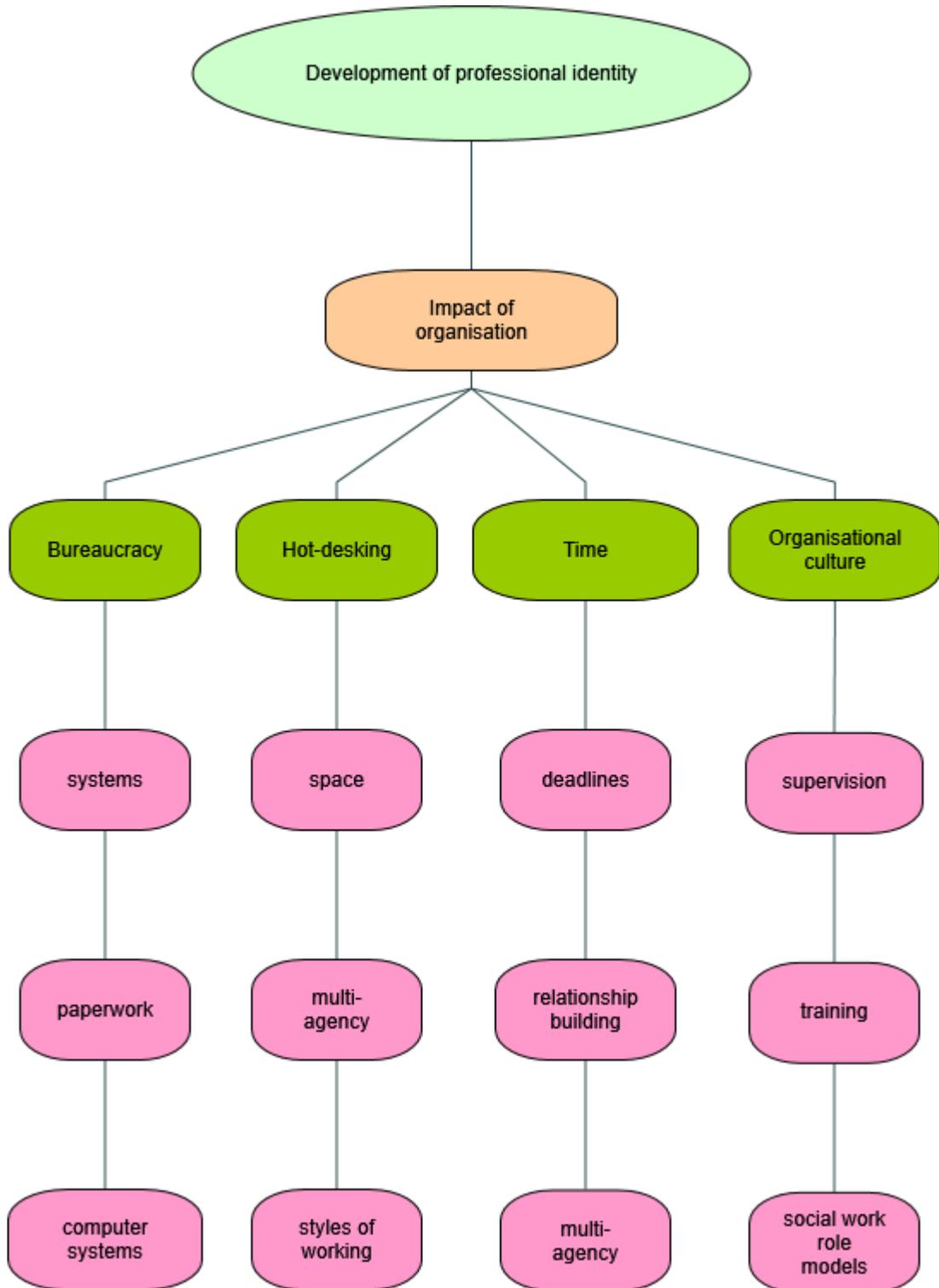
## Illustration Two



### Illustration Three



**Illustration Four**



## **5.1 The Student's Experience**

As stated in my methodology (4.10), one of my research questions was designed to enable the participant and myself, to examine the impact of the individual student's background and experiences (Jenkins, 2008) on their development of professional identity. This focus is congruent with my theoretical perspective concerning how professional socialisation begins before students commence the course, as I explored in chapter two concerning habitus (2.4.2), and chapter three regarding the literature pertaining to socialisation (3.3). Whereby the student's life experiences influence their choice of career as a social worker, as narrated by prominent social workers like Olive Stevenson (2013) and in the research conducted by Cree (2003, 2013), commented upon in chapter two, (2.7), and chapter three, (3.3).

Before exploring and analysing the responses from participants, it is important to highlight that placement supervisors were asked how they perceived a student's previous experience impacted upon their development of professional identity. However, you will read in this chapter how some of the supervisors did choose to reflect upon how their own experience influenced their social work training and their own development of professional identity. This is consistent with the research of Mosek and Ben Oz (2011, see chapter three, 3.3), as they argued that professional socialisation and identity development continues throughout an individual's career, and I have undertaken a similar discussion within chapter two (2.7).

The participant responses concerning this first theme encompassed two distinct areas, one concerning the student's experience prior to the course and the

other regarding the impact of the physical nature of identity, such as age, gender and so on.

## **5.2 Prior Experience**

Participants explained how their previous experiences have influenced, assisted and hindered their development of professional identity. Participant narratives encompassed a range of experiences, from early childhood experiences to work experience prior to their social work training.

### **5.2.1 Early Socialisation and Experiences**

During the interviews the majority of the student participants explained elements of their prior experience to the course. The most common experience concerned their upbringing and family experiences. For many students this was a positive experience, but an experience which highlighted for participants that service users did not necessarily have the luxury of these positive experiences. Students explained how they had a 'privileged' experience, one often characterised by a middle class background, which was one of the reasons why they wished to become a social worker in the first place. For instance, students expressed that their 'privileged' background had motivated them to want to advocate and support others that they saw as less fortunate, a view supported by the work of Cree (2003, 2013, see chapter 3.3) in her discussions with practitioners.

The following quote by 'student one' explains well what students in the study meant by 'privileged':

**"You are going to work with people and you can understand, actually I've had a fairly comfortable upbringing, I've been parented well and that has been a huge issue for me, these people haven't had the luck of good parenting. The impact on their self-esteem and things like that. So I have definitely used that, and its definitely part of who I am. I might not be on a social work route if I didn't have that."**

As 'student one' explained in this quote, most of the students commented upon how family life has assisted their development of professional identity. Within the interviews the younger students tended to talk about the impact of their parents, whilst more mature students discussed their own experience of being parented and parenting their own children. For example, for two of the students where family members were qualified social workers, they felt this had significantly inspired their choice of career. Whereas 'student three' enthusiastically explained how the way they had been brought up by their grandmother heavily influenced their choice of a social work career, that is 'student three' wished to support and help others during their work. This correlates strongly with Jenkins' (2008) research and Bourdieu's theory of habitus, whereby early life experiences and socialisation are crucial in the on-going development of one's identity, as explained in chapter two (2.4.2). For instance, for those students who had family members who were qualified social workers, or fostered children, students stated that these experiences were pivotal to their choice of social work as a career.

Furthermore, some of the students made clear connections with their cultural background, as part of their experience of family, parenting and general cultural upbringing, as explained by 'student two':

**“So I suppose that that sense of difference, and the need to listen to the voice that is different and understand the person that is different. As I’m becoming a social worker that has influenced me.”**

Cultural upbringing was also prominent within 'student three's' interview, similar to the impact of their grandmother, they linked their cultural experience to their ambition to become a social worker. This in part is supported by the work of Moffat and Miehl (1999, see chapter three, 3.3) concerning how cultural differences impact upon students in the class room. 'Student three' crystallised this within the following quote concerning how they were developing into a social worker as what she termed a 'finished project':

**“So yes, utilising all those life experiences you are building on all that and then you are using them to your advantage together with, shaped by the values of social work as well. You become like, an item, you can see you are working towards a finished project.”**

This quote supports the premise that identity is flexible and is further developed through socialisation and experience, similar to Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus. As stated in the above quote, 'student three' also acknowledged that their professional identity is further developed by social work values within the field of social work. Student participants explained how they chose social work as a career, as this corresponded closely with their previous experience and values, and enabled them to establish their position within the field of social work. As I have discussed in chapter two (2.4.3), students already had the cultural and social capital in order to have a 'feel for the game', rather than

being a 'fish out of water' (Grenfell 2008:58). Furthermore, I was not supporting a deterministic view of identity, instead I was proposing that students undergo a process of identification as they become socialised into the social work profession, further developing and negotiating their identity within the field of social work (Bourdieu, 1990, as discussed in chapter two).

### **5.2.2 Prior History**

Evidence from the interviews would suggest that the identification explained above will not only be shaped by a student's previous experiences, but these will also be influenced by how the student acts within the field of social work. I would concur with the work of Rhynas (2005:182) in respect of student nurses (described in chapter two, 2.4.4), whereby students used their history to shape their response to the workplace setting. For example, Lave and Holland (2001) argue that individuals bring an established history of prior experience and use their interaction with current experiences to negotiate and navigate their identity. As neatly summarised by 'student seven':

**"I think there is a core self that you can't completely change and I don't think you would want to. But then I have spoken to some people and they have tried to shift their whole insight to fit in the pattern, and I don't know if that is going to create congruence in a practitioner, because then you change yourself all the time, it then becomes a weakness and you crumble under pressure if you are not authentically you."**

'Student seven' was expressing how imperative it was to maintain an awareness of previous history, where she had observed other students attempting to change themselves and losing touch with this personal history. This student went on to explain later how sustaining an awareness of the impact

of their historical experiences enabled them to strengthen their resilience, this stemmed from their first-hand experience as a service user, as analysed in more detail in the next section (5.2.3).

As for students with what they perceived as having had more 'privileged' upbringings, they presented their previous experiences as being essential to their development in 'becoming a social worker'. Many offered narratives concerning their urge to do something positive and contribute to society regardless of their varying early experiences, which was also significantly portrayed by social workers in Cree's (2003, 2013) research. As Christie and Weeks (1998) argued in their research on the impact of life experiences, it is important to understand the life experiences of students and in turn the impact of these upon their successful completion of a course. For me this also raised how crucial it is to support students through this identity journey.

This focus upon previous history was further extended by all the students drawing upon their previous work experience and how this impacted upon their identity and development as a social worker. This was very well summarised by 'student six':

**"I don't think you can be a social worker without the course, even with my massive past history and professionalism, I have worked eight years in various similar things. But without the course you couldn't do it, ....you need the course, you need the placements, you need the structure, whatever your past".**

By and large, all the students expressed how it was their belief that they already had the skills and values consistent with 'being' a social worker, but required the opportunities and process offered by the course to gain the qualification. This supports my earlier discussion concerning the need for students to be

socialised into the profession, whereby students achieve the social work qualification and accreditation of their knowledge both previous and acquired during training, in order to cement their professional identity.

### **5.2.3 Experience as a Service User**

Three of the nine students perceived themselves as having first-hand experience as a service user or a carer, and this experience was prominent within their interviews, where they explained how this experience had considerably impacted upon their choice of career as a social worker. As described by 'student two':

**“Yes you want to come in and save people from abuse and be able to change people’s lives, although sounds stupid, you probably get that at every interview”.**

An additional three students spoke about their experience as a service user in relation to the experience of a disability and how this impacted upon their work. For example, two students mentioned dyslexia and how this had enabled them to be more mindful of the experiences and needs of others. Although very few of the students I spoke to explored disability in great detail, other researchers such as Hussein *et al.*, (2008), have found this more noticeable in their research, particularly in terms of the poor progression rates of social work students who experience a disability.

The three students who had substantial prior experience as a service user explained how different they felt to their peers on the course, who they perceived to have had more privileged experiences and a 'normal' family

upbringing as explained earlier in this chapter. In many ways this was viewed negatively by the students with these first-hand experiences as a service user, clearly outlined by 'student seven':

**“That is something that has been quite powerful, but when I first started the course I felt that really hindered me because I stopped and went, am I meant to be here? Because you had all this very straight line professionals or straight families, and you hear so much about attachment. .... Hearing about how unstable attachments affect you through life, you sit there and go, I feel a bit like a broken toy, this is awful, I think I will go and cry in the corner”.**

The latter point made by 'student seven' is particularly poignant, where 'student seven' and 'eight' (see below quote), demonstrated in their narrative that their service user experience motivated them to help others. These two students utilised their experience as a service user to further develop the skills required for social work, as explained further by 'student eight':

**“But it is part of who I am and I feel that I’m at the point now where it’s not that every kind of service user I meet, but my experience is valid and I think that has been in some respects my asset and to some extent is constant. For some people it is more impressive than your Masters”.**

Despite at times feeling like 'a broken toy' as described in the earlier quote by 'student seven'; these two students were highly motivated to become social workers and they managed this experience constructively, viewing it both as an advantage in understanding and empathising with the experience of service users, but also something to be wary of to ensure that they did not over identify with service users and their carers. This was an area also highlighted by Rajan-Rankin (2014:2430) as she warned that there could be value conflicts between the student's personal experiences and the work they undertook as a practitioner, as 'student seven' illuminated:

**“I’m very mindful and balanced that I can have a really empathetic approach, I can understand chaos and people’s lives..... but then I have to be really careful of over identification, transference. So I am always holding in my mind..... that has always been a positive for me. Of just stepping back and that is one of my strengths, being able to step back from everything and be able to look at it quite balanced.”**

Although these two students reflected upon their previous history in such a way that their experiences benefitted their work, they were troubled by how their service user experience would be perceived by others, not necessarily service users, but other social workers and professionals. Essentially they were concerned that other practitioners would label their experience negatively. For instance, student eight explained:

**“In other respects some people see it as a risk. It does impact, I feel that I’m back at the place where I can feel more upfront about that to certain individuals and by doing that, even if I’m not upfront about that to everyone, because a couple of people understand that and have accepted me before that, feels that I am alright”.**

This student was based within an organisation that was open to discussing their experience as a service user and viewed this experience as an advantage rather than a hindrance or a ‘risk’. Hence student eight’s comment concerning being ‘accepted’. These concerns about how the students would be ‘accepted’ was also exhibited within the peer group on the course. The three students with first-hand experience of being a service user voiced similar experiences when they commenced the course, feeling different to their peers because of their service user experience, and they actually gravitated towards one another. As described by ‘student eight’:

**“Whereas the first few weeks on the course it felt like you go round the room and we all introduce ourselves and sort of like, someone else I got to know quite quickly, like you do you zone in. I know that she was in care and that**

**helped. But both of us felt that actually did we come through the wrong door, did we come through the service user door rather than the Social Worker door?"**

The literature in relation to students' experiences as a service user are limited mostly to academic research, such as Gore and Black's (2009) study concerning students' experience of sexual abuse. However, students are beginning to employ social media to explain their experience and the experiences and motivations of qualified social workers are well documented in some literature (Stevenson, 2013, Cree, 2003, 2013, see chapter three, 3.3).

One journal article written by a student offers an interesting perspective concerning students who have service user experience and how this impacts upon their practice (Smith, 2014). Smith's (2014) narrative echoes with the interview responses of the three students within my own research. Where she argues that this experience can be turned into a strength, if the student has developed their resilience to manage these experiences within their practice (Smith, 2014:5). Smith was also keen to highlight that although she had experience as a service user, this did not mean she was an expert, but it does provide her with insight into a service user's world (2014:6). Other studies have supported this view, for example Doron *et al.*, (2012), found:

“many students who turn to the social work profession have experienced the difficulties faced by their clients”.

(2012:500).

This begins to highlight the tensions for such students, although they appear to manage their personal experiences well, it is how they are perceived by others

that creates the challenge to their development of identity. This is explored in more depth in the next two chapters, concerning the interaction between students, other professionals and the agency setting.

This experience portrayed by the students with first-hand service user experience within the course is noteworthy, and should be researched further, which I will discuss in my final chapter. If we are to encourage students from a wide variety of backgrounds into social work, then adequate support and encouragement needs to be in place. This could be more of a challenge with the increasing cost of social work training, potentially resulting in students from disadvantaged backgrounds being discouraged from training. Although other opportunities might arise for students to access social work training with the emergence of fast track social work schemes (McNicoll, 2016b), as I have explored in chapter one (1.9).

#### **5.2.4 Placement Supervisors' Perspectives**

All the supervisors interviewed highlighted the importance of the student's prior experience. In particular, 'supervisor one' felt that if a student had a supportive or 'privileged' background, they required assistance in understanding the service user's point of view. To address this 'supervisor one' adopted a questioning approach, enabling the student to view situations from the perspective of the service user, as they explained:

**"I quite often find that I think it is really important that social work students try to see life through the eyes of the service user they are working with. So I think quite often you can hear things like, 'oh well if that was me I would just do this'. You think, that is because you have a supportive Mum, or husband, so I think that is a key thing I try to get across".**

'Supervisor one' was attempting to enable the student to understand and empathise with the service user's experience. 'Supervisor one' and 'supervisor two' demonstrated in their interview that they held an assumption that students generally did not have service user experience. Consequently, given the discussion in the prior section (5.2.3) there is some educational work required to be undertaken with supervisors, but also thinking around how to support those students who do not have service user experience. In chapter six (6.2), I explain how students made use of their service user experience, and for those who did not have this experience, explained how they highly valued the service user contact within placement, and they extensively explored how this contact had impacted upon their professional identity.

On the other hand, 'supervisor three' was clear that students did arrive on the course with valid life experiences and they wished to encourage students to utilise this experience within their practice, although mostly from a skills based perspective:

**"Whether life experience or work experience, they come with an identity, with a professional identity already, and with a personal identity. I guess, it's not just through supervision but general conversations that you have with them, can help them to think about doing things in a way in which they may have never have done before. Or experience different service user groups that they wouldn't have done before and think about developing those skills.**

Therefore, this particular supervisor was aware of the importance of a student's understanding of the impact of their prior experiences, as they acknowledged students had a wealth of previous life and work experience. This same supervisor (supervisor three), felt that the work of their agency was emotionally

challenging and thus prior life experience was essential to successful completion of a placement in their agency:

**“Which is why we like to have students here who are quite well developed and rounded, because the nature of the work can be really challenging and we all have things going on in our lives which we have no control over and it has an impact on us. It depends on how well rounded you are and how you cope with difficulties.”**

‘Supervisor three’ and ‘supervisor five’, both expressed how they valued the previous life experiences of students. Both of these supervisors worked in non-local authority settings and coincidentally the students that they were working with had extensive service user experience. That is not to say that the other supervisors in my sample did not value service user experience, but they did not discuss it, as explored further in the next section.

### **5.2.5 Disclosure**

Despite the encouragement from the supervisors that I interviewed for students to disclose and utilise their prior experience, there was a recurrent theme in the student interviews of concerns about sharing too much of themselves in placement. This was particularly important to the students who had substantial previous experience as a service user. Students also expressed concerns about disclosing other personal information, especially concerning issues and challenges that they might be currently facing in their personal life. It was apparent that some placements and supervisors actively encouraged disclosure of previous and current experiences. Whereas in other agency settings, students felt uncertain, or even unsafe about how this information would be exploited in their placement, particularly in terms of being assessed to become

a social worker. I too have found this in my experience of teaching, where students are encouraged to make 'use of their self' in their practice portfolio, but students often worry about how much information to divulge, as demonstrated by 'student eight':

**"I think throughout the course actually, if you reveal too much of yourself in terms, your inner life, your inner kind of emotional life or what you are thinking, then maybe you kind of show yourself up to be someone who can't cope".**

Despite the encouragement to reflect in supervision, 'student eight' appeared to be reticent to do so, possibly a result of reflexivity in their use of habitus (as explained in chapter two, 2.4.2). In the interviews all of the students explained that they felt pressurised into disclosing their previous and current experiences by their practice educator, supervisor and even markers of their portfolios. Although some students chose not to share this information with placement personnel, during the interviews they talked to me about how they had reflected upon their professional identity and how this was influenced by their personal experiences. Therefore, students were in a compromised position of feeling they could fail if they do not share, but could also fail for disclosing too much. For example, within my own teaching of a practice module, students often ask me: How much information should be offered, how will it be judged? How will it be assessed? Another concern that students voiced within the interviews was that by disclosing this information they might be perceived as unprofessional. This is supported by the research of Rajan-Rankin (2014), where she found that the 'containment of emotion', emerged in many of her interviews with students (2014:2433). This emotional containment and censoring, is what student eight appeared to be portraying in the prior quote. It could be argued that this

pressure to disclose was perceived by the students, as their supervisors and the placement organisation exerting some form of control and attempting to govern or regulate their identity. Gilbert (2001) made a similar assertion, where he made use of Foucault's concept of 'Governmentality' to explore how supervision and reflective practice could be utilised as a means of surveillance through the use of 'confessional practice'. This use of supervision to exert power and manage students through surveillance, was more apparent in the supervisors' interviews within my data, in terms of what they described as their style of working with students. This is an area I discuss further in chapter seven concerning supervisor styles (7.3)

Therefore, despite encouragement from placement personnel to disclose, students often declined to do so. 'Supervisor three' pointed out the challenges when recalling one student who refused to disclose:

**"The whole thing was a nightmare and she came here and what she wasn't prepared to do was disclose some of the things that was going on for her personally, which was interrupting her ability to learn and work effectively. ...It was a real challenge and at the end of it she said I am really glad you pushed me because I realised I was burying my head in the sand and hiding, all this."**

'Supervisor three' in the above quote was making reference to the personal challenges being encountered by the student at the time of the placement and described how this ended positively. For all the supervisors this disclosure was linked to the need for students to be resilient and manage these tensions, which I will discuss further in chapter seven concerning the impact of the agency setting (7.3.2).

Within the two interviews with students in non-local authority settings, these two students explained that disclosure seemed less risky and that they perceived non-local authority agencies as being more accepting of their background and experience. As stated earlier, it just so happened that these two students also had extensive service user experience, as explained by 'student eight':

**“There is a lot more encouraging of who I am as an individual and they want me to bring that into my work. Does that make sense? It seems to be celebrated rather than eyebrows raised”.**

This is an interesting finding from the interviews and it appears specific to the fact that these two students were in non-local authority settings. This finding contradicts the view of Narey (2014) and government initiatives like 'frontline' and 'step up to social work', where emphasis is given to final stage students requiring a local authority setting to develop their skills in practice (see chapter one, 1.9). There is growing research to suggest that non-local authority placements are sites where students can develop their final stages of professional training. In addition, students who have a final placement in a non-local authority setting go on to be employed in local authority agencies, should that be their wish. For example, Scholar *et al.*, (2014:2) undertook a four-year study of social work students in 'non-traditional' social work placements, and they found that there:

**“is a growing body of evidence and opinion supporting the contention that placements like these can make a significant and relevant contribution to the profession and to professional development”.**

Therefore, it would be useful to illuminate this further by interviewing more supervisors and students in a variety of practice settings. This is worthy of further exploration, which I will discuss more in my final chapter.

## **5.3 Physical Nature of Identity - Embodiment**

### **5.3.1 Introduction**

A recurring topic that emerged from the data was that physical attributes featured strongly in all of the student's interviews. Although not necessarily prior experience, this was a part of the student's physical identity that they had attempted to manage within their social work practice and specifically in how they were perceived by others. This was an area that I had explored in my theoretical understanding of identity in chapter two (2.4.1), that is the way in which identity is embodied.

### **5.3.2 Physical Attributes**

This embodiment of identity was summarised by student six in their narrative of how they worked with service users:

**"I try to slightly stay hunched up and small to minimise my size. If I was with friends I would sit upright. So physical presence in people's lives is important".**

In this quote, student six was referring to their height and physical build and how others perceived the way in which they looked, thus a form of reflexivity concerning their habitus as explored in chapter two (2.4.4). For instance, they went on to explain that at times when they had visited service users (who in their setting were older people), the student needed to explain that they were a student social worker, as the service user did not expect them to look the way they did. They good humouredly stated that service users often commented that their physical appearance was more in keeping with a debt collector! Once the student had explained their role and showed the service user their identification card, this misunderstanding was resolved.

Within my research students also expressed that they keenly felt the impact of their physical attributes with other professionals. This had an impact upon how professionals perceived and judged the student's professionalism, as clearly explained by 'student eight':

**"I went to an interview with the Local Authority last year and the person was real high up, I'm covered in tattoos, in my first year I was thinking this is who I am ..... So she said, people do have tattoos, and there were others there with tattoos. So it might be something about the way I look, she said the thing is we are a Local Authority and with social work we really like to differentiate ourselves from service users – and I couldn't believe my ears when I was hearing it".**

This student went on to explain that because of the way they looked, they often found that other professionals displayed the views above. The tattoos in some way were more tangible and could be covered up by the student, but similar to 'student six', they could not change their physical height and build. Therefore, what 'student eight' and 'student six' described was a form of stigmatising and labelling by other professionals, where assumptions were made about the student because of the way they physically presented themselves.

### **5.3.3 Age**

Within the interviews this physicality was often linked by the student to their age, or perceived age by others. This is similar in some ways to my own experience of social work training, where I was one of the youngest on the course (see chapter one, 1.2). As student seven explained:

**"When I first started in work I was 22 and looked even more baby faced than I do now, I sound middle class..... I'm even more mindful of being, like sometimes like I struggle with being authoritative and rigid and this is what**

**you need to do. That isn't helped by the way I look, so you have to overcome it more with your identity".**

Within this quote there is a mix of a number of personal qualities that the student has alluded to; age, gender, accent and physical appearance. In my own personal experience and during my teaching, I have found that age is often discussed by students and practitioners concerning social work training. For instance, I have heard supervisors and practice educators question how old a student should be to become a social worker. This opinion is often based upon the assumption that younger students will not have access to the life events that mature students have experienced (Bogo, 2016). This appears to be a perception held by other professionals rather than the students themselves as supported by research undertaken by Wilson (2010), Hemy *et al.*, (2016) and Bogo (2016), as already discussed in more detail within chapter three (3.3). This study highlights the value of further research regarding the impact of age on the development of professional identity, which could be achieved by interviewing a wider range of students including undergraduate students (see final chapter).

#### **5.3.4 Gender**

Physicality was prevalent in the students' responses concerning the impact of their gender. For example, student three explored cultural gender differences that they had experienced and how this impacted upon her work. Whereas 'student nine' had given a great deal of consideration to her gender, based upon her family life experiences and previous work experience in a male dominated culture. This made 'student nine' mindful of the impact of gender in her

placements and how she then developed her practice, as stated:

**“From my background within the Navy, I was really conscious of my gender and how there was definitely imbalances within that Navy environment. I really found it impacted on my first placement, which was with asylum seekers or refugees. And how being a woman, and probably white as well affected some of the relationships I had with service users because of the cultural differences”**

Thus it seemed a surprise to ‘student nine’ how much this had impacted upon her practice and development as a social worker. Whereas ‘student six’ explained how they had not considered the impact of their gender, until this was raised by his practice educator:

**“Being male too, my tutor, supervisor and practice educator are all women and they asked if that had an impact on me. I hadn’t thought about that, [they said], but if we were middle aged men and you were a young woman we would have concerns”.**

As stated in chapter three (3.3), gender is an area that has been explored within research concerning professional identity. As social work has been a traditionally female orientated profession, there is a growing body of research in relation to the experiences of men in social work training and practice (Brown, *et al.*, 2016, Schaub, 2015, Parker and Crabtree, 2014), although this research mostly explored the challenges of progression of male students in social work training. My research does highlight the need for further research (which I will elaborate more upon in my final chapter), as all five men (three students and two supervisors) that I interviewed mentioned the impact of their gender; even if this was because it had been raised by others within their placement as explained in the prior quote from ‘student six’.

### 5.3.5 Dress

One way in which students explained they could change their appearance was through how they dressed. As explained in chapter two (2.5) minimal research has been conducted on physicality and social work, although there is some recent research concerning what social workers choose to wear (Scholar, 2013). In my own research 'supervisor four' spoke about the impact of dress in terms of working with health professionals who were distinguishable by their uniforms. This supervisor felt that the fact that social workers do not have a uniform meant that they were perceived as having less power, essentially they believed that social workers did not have a visible identity for service users and professionals to relate to:

**"Sometimes I think with service users they will, almost put more emphasis on what somebody in a uniform is saying to them rather than someone who is not wearing a uniform. Even if we are the key worker and we have asked a nurse or a physio to come along with us to support us in our assessment. It is quite often that the service user will refer to them".**

Supervisor four's' view is supported by Scholar's (2013) small scale study, where she found that students did think carefully about what to wear, especially in order to be taken seriously by other professions. However, in relation to the above quote by 'supervisor four', students within my interviews and in Scholar's study were mindful not to present barriers to communication and relationship building between themselves and service users by 'power dressing' (Scholar, 2013:373). This careful consideration of dress, could be viewed as the student using reflexivity to avoid impacting negatively upon the service user. Scholar (2013) concluded that more research was required on this issue. I will return to this topic later in my final chapter and explore reflexivity further in relation to 'dress'.

## 5.4 Conclusion

This analysis evidences the importance of a student's prior experience, particularly where they have had first-hand experience as a service user. Within the responses it was clear that a student's gender, age, disability and physical attributes play a crucial role in influencing the development of their professional identity and how they are perceived and judged by other professionals and service users. The students in my sample were all postgraduates, so this analysis cannot be generalised to social work students on an undergraduate course. Notwithstanding, it cannot be assumed that a younger student has not had adequate or significant life experiences, and even possibly extensive first-hand service user experiences as described by my sample. However, postgraduate students have undertaken degree studies and so are more likely to have confidence in their ability to survive in higher education, and in this sense have more 'capital' and understand the 'rules of the game', compared to undergraduate students.

Therefore, it is evident from participant responses how crucial prior experiences and current personal ones, are to a student social worker's professional identity. This chapter has demonstrated the significance of prior experience, in particular one's upbringing and service user experience. Those students who have substantive previous experience as a service user or carer require far more attention in terms of further research into the impact of their experience, and require more support from social work programmes to assist them in navigating the impact of these experiences and the perceptions of others. For example, these students within my research evidenced insight into how they utilised this experience positively and required the support of others on the course and in

placement to achieve this. All of the students in my sample were encouraged and supported to disclose their previous and current personal experiences, but this was met with trepidation by some students, especially concerning how the information would be exploited for assessment.

This study supports the view that although social work training seeks to assist students to develop the appropriate skills, values and knowledge to become a social worker; a student's prior experience is crucial to this process in students further developing their professional identity. This analysis has demonstrated that students are motivated from these prior experiences to pursue a career in social work, as found by Cree (2003, 2013) in her research of social workers' narratives. In addition, students that I interviewed shared comparable experiences and values (capital) which they were then able to apply in the field of social work (Bourdieu, 1990, as explored in chapter two: 2.4.3). Students in the sample employed the course and placement as a vehicle to achieving the social work qualification and in further developing their professional identity, as Lave and Holland (2001) would state, 'negotiating' their identity in relation to others and the agency through socialisation, which I will explore further in the next two chapters.

## **Chapter Six**

### **The Student's Interaction with Others**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

As previously stated in chapter two I have argued that students are influenced by other professionals and I have drawn heavily upon the work of Jenkins (2008) and Lave and Holland (2001,2009) to assist me in exploring this premise. As discussed in chapter five, although students embark upon a social work course with an established identity, formed from their previous experiences, students will also interact with others within practice and negotiate their identity further during these interactions (Lave and Holland, 2001:2).

In chapter three I explained how previous studies have tended to focus upon the influence of practice educators (Wilson, 2009, Knight, 2000, Brodie, 2003 and Lefevre, 2005), although not specifically concerning their impact upon the development of a student's professional identity. Within my own research the individuals most prominently discussed by participants were; service users and carers, peers, placement supervisors, practice educators and other placement personnel or professionals within practice. The latter included, family support workers, community care workers, volunteers and a variety of health professionals.

In the following sections I have explored each of the individuals identified above in turn and their influence upon the development of a student's professional identity.

## 6.2 Service users and Carers

There is a requirement upon social work programmes in England to involve service users and carers in all aspects of the course (DH,2002), which was later maintained by the Social Work Reform Board (2010). Therefore, students in the sample had some contact with service users and carers during their studies. The students in the sample were also actively engaged in working with service users and carers in their placement settings at the time of the interviews.

As a result of this contact with service users and carers, all of the students spent a good deal of their interviews explaining their practice with service users, most offering detailed examples of their practice. Although students protected the confidentiality of service users and carers, I have refrained from describing detailed information about these situations within this analysis, as I wished to maintain and protect service user and carer confidentiality. However, what was clear within these accounts was the impact that working with service users and carers had on students, as they develop not only their practice, but also their professional identity. The most important aspect of this work was the need to develop a professional 'relationship' (Ruch, *et al.*, 2010) with service users. As explained by 'student one':

**"But in fact I've leaned more heavily on narrative theory and things like that. Because it's about building up a relationship with the young people you are working with and working out from that, what they need and what they are saying they need, and the subtext of what they are saying".**

Needless to say, the importance of service users in the development of a student's practice is critical. All students interviewed talked about learning and developing as a result of working with service user situations. Students highlighted that the 'time' that they were allowed as learners to work with

service users might become more restricted once they are qualified, but they were currently valuing the opportunity to develop relationships as described by 'student five':

**"I think that is probably one thing I will struggle with if I go to work in a statutory setting, because I just got used to doing that real relationship like, based practice and see how valuable that is, and then the chance is that you are going to work where you don't have the time to do that".**

'Student five' was in a split placement, where half their time was spent in a local authority setting, and the other half in a team which worked one-to-one with young people, in a mostly therapeutic style. In this latter setting, the student could see that they had the time to build rapport and relationships with young people. Whereas they found that in the local authority setting they were undertaking more time limited work with young people and their families, as demonstrated below:

**"Really different style of working and different style of techniques. If you have to get stuff done and you only really have an hour with that young person you are not working in the same way, as if you have not got all the time in the world. You haven't factored in time for just relationship building".**

As can be deduced from 'student five's narrative, students believed that they would not have as much opportunity to develop relationships with service users in statutory settings once they had qualified. This was mostly because of the bureaucratic systems and strict deadlines for assessments that are imposed in local authority settings. As argued by Lave and Wenger (1991), learners as 'new comers' were allowed more time to develop their practice within the placement, so students had more time to build relationships with service users and carers (chapter two, 2.5.2). I will explore this further in chapter seven (7.2.3) with reference to the impact of bureaucratic processes.

Returning to the role of service users and carers and their impact upon the development of a student's professional identity; there is a programme requirement (comparable to placement requirements for most social work courses) for students to obtain service user and carer feedback on their practice for inclusion in their practice portfolio. Whilst this is good practice for students to develop, students often find that there are challenges in obtaining constructive feedback from service users, as often service users find it difficult to be critical of the student's work and are not always comfortable with this role of assessment, as found in the research of Robinson and Webber (2013:938). Furthermore, service users and carers who are receiving a service from students, might find it difficult to offer negative feedback or even constructive feedback, for fear of losing this service. Regardless, students within the sample found service user feedback and contact useful in developing their practice, especially concerning skills development, such as communication.

Students who had first-hand experience as service users or carers explored how this prior experience impacted upon their development and how they were able to empathise with service users. The three students with substantive experience as a service user, were all based within children and family settings and empathised strongly with children and parents who were striving to protect their children. One student worked with perpetrators of abuse, and they found that this was particularly challenging and described how they utilised supervision to manage the tensions they experienced. How these three students managed their own experience as a service user was analysed in depth within chapter five (5.2.3), where a balance of this experience alongside

resilience, as proposed by Smith (2013) and Doron (2014), assisted the students in the development of their professional identity.

### **6.3 Peer Relationships**

The impact of peer relationships as researched by Mosek and Ben-Oz (2011) and Schreiber (1989) was far more evident within the interviews than I would have anticipated. Thus I found the importance of peer relationships was raised unprompted by all of the students interviewed. Students explained how they sought the support of peers within the course who shared comparable life experiences and values. This is consistent with my analysis in chapter five (5.2.3) concerning how students with first-hand service user experience felt drawn to one another, but also with the findings of Mosek and Ben-Oz (2011) who found that the support of peers enabled students to manage stress and that:

“The peer group also assisted students in those personal and social issues that affected their successful transition from layperson to professional”.

(2011:106).

Students within my sample achieved this transition by organising an informal network of support outside of the university frameworks during placement. This informal network was created in addition to any contact they had through the means of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. This was explained extensively by ‘student five’:

**“Actually on both my placements I have been in touch with other students and organised ‘beer supervision’ rather than ‘peer supervision’! Just saw each other a bit and had a few glasses of wine, chat about what was good or bad and I think that is quite important as well. We don’t have beer supervision**

**here, as we see each other more, so more like coffee supervision but yea we bump into each other quite a lot. That is nice because there is usually one of us who is behind on this or whatever, when you talk you find it can dissipate the problem as you are either in that place or have been."**

'Student five's' quote highlights the importance of informal social spaces for students to offer one another support as well as space to reflect upon their placement experiences. This is similar to the way in which the students who had substantial first-hand experience as service users, specifically sought out other students with comparable experiences (5.2.3). Despite these three students initially struggling on the course with the wider peer group where they expressed how they felt like outsiders, by the end of the course they had formed positive and significant relationships with other students on the course, as described by 'student seven':

**"But definitely I've got about 10 people, that's about half the course I suppose, that constantly talk most of the week. It's like how are you doing, driving each other through. You can make it, its fine, we will cry all the way through but it's alright. So the peer group is brilliant"**

This quote explains how students created these informal spaces to offer support to each other. At my institution, students return to the university from placement once a month for group tutorial support and teaching in relation to the compilation of their practice portfolio. These days at the university offer a more formal opportunity for students to network and support their peers. Students within the study reported positively upon these days, as student six explained:

**"What they are useful for, the people in my tutor group are open. I can get help and advice. You realise that you are not alone, something that the course gives you, a few people who can check in with, not an isolated experience and listen to you"**

I would speculate that a student's relationship with peers on the course was

particularly important as the power imbalance was substantially reduced within these relationships. Given that all the other personnel within the placement and at the university had the power to assess and potentially 'fail' students (Finch, 2015). Linking back to the previous chapter, students felt 'safer' to explore difficult experiences in placement with their peers and even their prior experiences, and how these might impact upon their professional identity and development. This could be the reason why so few students raised problematic situations and relationships in placement with me during the interview. They were most likely concerned how I would respond as a member of university staff, despite the details of my ethical agreement with them and 'information for participants' (see appendix one and two). Although notwithstanding this limitation I do believe that students offered me more information than I had expected concerning their peer relationships because they knew that I understood the context of their narrative, which I would not have had in a comparable student group at a different institution, as originally planned in my sample design (see chapter four, 4.5).

#### **6.4 Placement Supervisors**

As my research aim and questions focused upon how the placement supervisor influences a student's development of professional identity, most participants explored this in some considerable depth within their interviews. The importance of the supervisor was a prominent feature in all of the student interviews, partly as participants knew of my interest and there was an interview question directed at this area, should the participant require prompting (see appendix three). Student responses ranged from negative to positive

experiences of their supervisor's impact, but mostly they were positive in nature with only a few exceptions. For instance, 'student one' found that their relationship with their supervisor took some time to develop:

**"I think personality comes down to it quite a lot, so I get on really well with her, but she is a really quiet individual. At first, for me she was so quiet I lacked confidence in her ability, and it has taken me a while to kind of peel back that shell and actually find someone that's knowledgeable and that relationship has improved a lot and the respect from me has come and the ability to question has come, but it has taken two months to get to that point".**

Therefore, I would concur with the research of Barretti (2007) and Bogo (2006), as explored in chapter three (3.4.4), where they found that the key ingredients in establishing a positive relationship with a supervisor was dependent upon the supervisor's personal qualities. On the other hand, concerning the prior quote from 'student one', another reason they had cited for this slow development of relationship with their supervisor was a difference in application of theory.

'Student one's' supervisor was a trained counsellor and utilised these skills within their work, whilst 'student one' opted for a different theoretical perspective, taking a mostly task orientated approach. Whereas for other students these personal qualities took the form of sharing comparable values, motivations and even political stances with their placement supervisors. The latter was voiced by 'student two' in their narrative:

**"Yes, I'm never sure as we are fairly similar and coming from a similar political place and also in terms of how we would practice, such as the signs of safety, narrative and all those kind of influences in the background. So I'm never sure I feel that influence is more because they are similar to me and so not had to change in that sense"**

When these ingredients worked well and students formed positive relationships with their supervisors, students voiced how it could then be difficult to identify why the relationship worked so well for them, as described by 'student one':

**"The more time you spend with someone the less you can identify how they are impacting on you as well. It is very subtle, little things, if you are with a baby all the time, you don't see it grow, whereas if you see it once a year you are always shocked. That it is the similar impact it has on my professional identity".**

This corresponds with the earlier discussion concerning the 'dual' learning process between a student and their supervisor (Fazzi and Rosignoli, 2016, see chapter two, 2.5.2). Whereby, if the relationship between the student and the supervisor works well, this is of benefit to both student and supervisor. On the other hand, there is the danger of this reciprocal relationship becoming collusive, where the student acts in a way that they believe meets their supervisor's expectations. The supervisor might also find it difficult to be critical about the student's practice because of this reciprocal relationship. However, none of the participants in this study discussed a collusive relationship between the student and their supervisor.

Only one student reported that they had a negative experience with their supervisor and they felt this far more keenly than those with positive experiences, as described by 'student four', who had a particularly challenging relationship with a supervisor:

**"There was a lot going on, and I kind of had this sense that I was a burden. So although I was very busy, doing all the learning and e-learning that they recommended, keeping myself busy, but I was very much isolated at that point".**

Whereas on the other hand students who had supportive and positive relationships with their supervisors found them essential at times when they were experiencing difficulties in placement as portrayed by 'student nine':

**"I think if it wasn't for the support of my supervisor I would have been, I don't know, maybe crumbled by now. But I can see that, everything I do they are very supportive, and in the sense of making me feel confident in myself to be assertive".**

Again this success was due in part to the quality of the relationship the student had with their supervisor as explained by 'student eight':

**"I think my relationship with my supervisor is quite a strong one actually, I don't know if that is because before I went on the placement there was some issues in my personal life, that I had to be quite transparent about at the time before I got there. With that, she then appropriately I felt shared some stuff about herself as well, when she was starting out as a practitioner and I feel that within that it has been quite an accepting kind of, you can be who you are, but still be a competent professional. I feel that, there is just an openness to discuss that sort of thing and then move on".**

This last quote demonstrates the importance of supervisors sharing their own previous experience and 'self' with students, to encourage the student to also make 'use of self' and their prior experiences. This could generate a feeling of trust as well as respect for the supervisor's experience, something that 'student one' alluded to in the first quote of this section (6.4). Where 'student one' described how their supervisor was quiet and they could not fathom what their style of practice was or their experience as a practitioner. Student one explained that once their supervisor "opened up", they warmed to them and began to build a relationship.

This corresponds with the pressure described by students to disclose their previous experience, as discussed in chapter five (5.2.5). If supervisors shared something of their own experience and 'self', this effectively enabled the student

to do the same. Thus this reciprocal process is crucial to establishing a positive relationship, where the alternative would be the supervisor misusing their position as an 'old timer' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) to exert power over students and manage students through surveillance, as explored further in chapter seven concerning supervisor styles (7.3).

I have observed many situations in my previous role as a practice educator and in my current role as a lecturer (see, chapter one, 1.2), where this trust and reciprocal relationship has not been established. In addition, I have observed situations where students believe that they have a personality clash with their supervisor, or much worse, where the supervisor has misused their powerful position to undermine the student. Examples of the latter would be; setting the student up to fail, belittling the student's skills and generally not offering positive or constructive feedback to the student. Furthermore, as explained in chapter three (3.4.2) Lefevre (2005:576) discovered in her research that some students perceived themselves to have 'expectation clashes' with placement personnel, where practice supervisors did not 'live up' to their expectations in terms of knowledge, skills and support. This would then lead to difficulties in the relationship between the student and the supervisor as experienced by 'student four'.

This support from supervisors often took the form of supervision as described in chapter three (3.4.4) and found in the majority of research concerning supervisors and practice educators (Davidson, 2011, Gelman and Lloyd, 2008, Giddings, Vodde and Cleveland, 2004, Itzhaky and Eliahu, 1999, Koeske and Kanno, 2010). Supervisors themselves highlighted a number of other ways in

which they supported students, such as through critical reflection and role modelling in addition to supervision. They often spoke about challenging students and enabling them to question their practice. Supervisors achieved this by utilising a range of tools to encourage the student to explore their identity and values and build upon a student's confidence and assertiveness, which I discuss further in chapter seven concerning supervisor styles (7.3). Both students and supervisors in my sample cited the positive use of supervision, as explained by 'supervisor one':

**"So what is it about you [student] that makes you different from so and so, what is it about your practice, your identity that sets you apart. Because we are all going to be different. So I think I have had a massive impact in generating those ideas, particularly through supervision".**

Furthermore, supervisors within my sample expressed that they could see how their support was positively assisting the development of a student's professional identity as explained by 'supervisor three':

**"It helps them to increase their skill base and their ability to understand human behaviour and some of the difficulties that some of the service users groups do kind of face. I think that helps them in their confidence, in doing the work and their understanding of human behaviour, which I think all kind of impacts on development of your professional identity".**

From a student's perspective, 'student three' described the impact of this support on their confidence to practice:

**"I can see, I never had confidence to, probably deal with a complex situation, on the phone or face to face. Dealing with that, and talking to my colleagues and talking to my supervisor, or to my line manager as well, it gives me that confidence to say yes I can do it".**

Thus on the whole, the student responses illustrated how key the reciprocal relationship with their placement supervisor is in developing, or even potentially hindering their professional identity development.

## **6.5 Practice Educators**

The role of the practice educator was raised by some students and supervisors during the interviews. As stated in chapter three (3.4.2), there has been previous research, although not based upon identity development, which has highlighted the importance of the practice educator (Wilson, 2009, Knight, 2000, Brodie, 2003 and Lefevre, 2005). Although mostly I needed to prompt students to talk about the impact of their practice educator, students did talk about a range of positive experiences with their practice educator. For example, 'student four' explained how they often turned to their practice educator for support because of their challenging relationship with their placement supervisor:

**"That has been a life saver, because we have met fortnightly, being able to talk to them about stuff and being completely frank. Talking about my perceptions about things, how I felt, particularly at the beginning time, when I wasn't very sure on my own and doing my own thing".**

The most typical statements made by students are summarised as follows by quotes from 'student eight' and 'student three' respectively:

**"He is great, really good, different to last year. I have really liked both my practice educators and I really am already analytical and I think that gives me that space to look at how I am working, where I'm working from, what knowledge informs. I have been really lucky that both my practice educators have been very, (pause) they have allowed me to develop my own working**

**models, my own understanding. They have appropriately challenged me; they challenge my assumptions in a really positive way”.**

**“Yes, very good, very influential role model, I can draw from my first practice educator, from my first year, and this one in the second year. Yes, I find, last year my practice educator was extremely good, her approach was absolutely fantastic, it made me think, she always challenged me, she always gave me things to research on, to look forward to our next supervision. Or if she had something, for example, we were talking about the identity, such as gender role”.**

Hence students found practice educators vital in their role of enabling the student to make links between theory and their practice. Those participants also acting as practice educators explained how they strove to challenge and question students to assist their critical reflection. However, very few students mentioned how their practice educator had impacted upon their development of professional identity. Only ‘student seven’ made this clear and again this related to critical reflection:

**“So whilst I don’t think your core identity changes because it is built up of such complex experiences I think you can’t not change over a placement. It is impossible, because you take on other’s wisdom. When I work with my Practice Educator we do a lot of critical supervision and exploration of self and I think you are going to change. I don’t know if a social work student can honestly say they do not change during a placement. If that makes sense?”**

This student was also the student in the previous chapter who felt that a student needed to be mindful of their previous experience and identity, thus not changing to fit within the course (5.2.2). Their interview narrative had a strong sense of remaining, what they termed as ‘true’ or congruent with their past experiences as a service user, and developing their resilience to manage this through supervision with both their supervisor and practice educator, something I will return to in my concluding chapter.

Surprisingly for students, placement supervisors who also undertook the role as their practice educator had an exceptionally positive experience of their relationship. Students were surprised, as initially they thought they would experience detrimental challenges with the same person undertaking both roles. In particular, they were concerned about the amount of power this person would have in their placement, especially concerning assessment of their practice. On the contrary they found that their supervisor/practice educator had an enhanced understanding of both practice realities and the learning needs of students, including the course requirements. This was particularly pertinent for 'student five' who was in a split placement and who found their supervisor/practice educator was extremely knowledgeable, thus exceeding their expectations of the practice educator (Lefevre, 2005):

**"She is direct and she does also seem to know everything about everything. When I ask something she can always answer, she worked as a practice educator before, which is really useful. So I have a supervisor who has worked in both teams, and understands the processes and differences between the two teams".**

Inclusive of the above student, four students in my sample had experience of supervisors undertaking the dual role as practice educator. In addition, three supervisors out of the five interviewed undertook both roles with students. This dual role undoubtedly influenced the findings of this study. I will return to this in my final chapter, where I propose that more supervisors and students should be interviewed in future research to explore this further. Supervisors/Practice Educators themselves perceived the benefits of assuming both roles and utilised this in their style of working with the student (see chapter seven).

All the practice educators in this dual role highlighted the need for placement supervisor training, so that they could understand more about the programme and course expectations of students. They stated this from a position of previous experience as a supervisor, before they undertook practice educator training. These practice educators described how this should improve the placement experience for students and the student relationship with their supervisor.

So it appears that the practice educator is one of the key personnel within the placement in assisting the development of the student's professional identity. The practice educator takes on a more prominent role if the student does not have a supportive relationship with their placement supervisor. In addition, students found practice educators who also undertook the dual role as their placement supervisor as immensely positive.

## **6.6 Placement Personnel**

It was not just one individual that positively influenced the development of a student's professional identity, it was the team of personnel around the student in their placement. This is consistent with my own experience (1.2), where the student is placed with a team or an organisational setting and not just an individual supervisor.

This was particularly essential if the student did not find their supervisor supportive. This concurs with Bogo's (2010) research, where students sought out the support of others if their supervisor was unavailable or unapproachable.

Key within this support provided by the wider team, was the opportunity to observe varying styles of working and role models, which has been corroborated by research as early as 1988 by Webb (see chapter three, 3.4). 'Student five' below described how role modelling allowed them to try out different ways of working and discovering their own style of working:

**"I think, it's made me realise how it is nice to see other people work and you, I think you admire certain parts of it. You almost, you see someone doing something, oh I really want to be just like that social worker, for example".**

Thus, not merely role modelling, but also allowing the student to test out different ways of working and finding their own style of working. The same student's narrative resonated strongly with 'student seven's' view of remaining congruent with previous experiences, as discussed in the previous section. As illustrated by 'student five':

**"I think for me as a social worker I think that's the one thing I've learnt in this placement is actually if you are true to yourself then that's how you can be the best social worker you can be. That's an impact that everyone I've seen working has had on me, I think".**

This supportive team included other types of professionals, such as; youth workers, support workers, family support workers and volunteers. For example, 'student three' was in a mostly health environment and found this team incredibly supportive:

**"When you finish talking on the phone the other people, not to say they are listening to every conversation, but sometimes they can hear that was a difficult conversation. Then you can discuss and share in a confidential way, but it is that support that you need, I find that very useful".**

'Student seven' also explained how supportive their team was in the office:

**"But they are all very much, all stop me and say how are you doing and how are you managing, even before I started they said, how do you think you will deal with this? How are you going to manage? It is really nice, not a nicety, it is a professional competency, like can you manage this?"**

These two quotes from 'student three' and 'seven', correspond with the earlier discussion in this chapter concerning the students creating and seeking out informal spaces for reflection and support. Two students even found their managers supportive of their practice and these managers demonstrated an interest in their work. For 'student seven', this also included a regional manager:

**"All the team will stop and talk to you about their practice and their tools, so really lovely. So I can say, I have no clue what you are talking about, and I have never had that before, where I have not heard of this model. Even the managers are really good. The regional head came in the other day, she came over to chat to me and ask how am I finding this as our student".**

Only one of the students was in a setting where they did not have direct contact with social workers and whose supervisor did not have a social work qualification. Consistent with the research of Scholar *et al.*, (2014), this student was mostly positive about their placement experience and in fact felt incredibly well supported by their supervisor and agency. This student had contact with social workers from other agencies and their practice educator was social work qualified, but it was the support of their supervisor and agency that they found significantly supported their development. This finding is in contrast to Narey's (2014) technocratic view, that social work students need to be based with other qualified social workers in order to develop their skills as discussed in chapter one (1.8) and chapter three (3.4.1). This also supports my findings in chapter five, where students found non-local authority settings to be more supportive

environments, in particular concerning disclosing previous experience as service users.

Therefore, overall, students had exceedingly positive experiences of their placement personnel, who assisted their overall development. While students did not always talk about these professionals assisting the development of their professional identity, this did figure strongly in interviewee narratives concerning working with health professionals, which I will now discuss.

## **6.7 Health Professionals**

The two students within a health setting found that other professionals within the team had a distinct impact upon their development. These two students explained how health professionals encouraged them or even challenged their sense of identity. As student three explained:

**“Yes, my placement is within a multi-disciplinary team, it is dominated by the medical staff, so to find the voice from a social model into dominated medical model it is a challenge sometimes. It has tested my values, personal values as well as the values of social work, in terms of if you are going on a joint visit with people like OT or physiotherapists, They asked me what do social workers do?”.**

Other social work research and studies undertaken within other professions has identified the importance of health professionals within identity formation and socialisation (as explored in chapter three, 3.5). This was particularly found by Beddoe (2011:28) in her research concerning qualified social workers in health settings in New Zealand. Indeed, I have found this myself in presenting (see conference list, page iv) to medical professionals at a conference concerning assessment and professionalism. Here in order to explain the findings of my

research, I needed to clearly explain the role of social work and what social work identity might look like. I was the only social worker in attendance at this conference, so this meant I needed to explain this with confidence and assertively. This experience is consistent with the experience of ‘supervisor four’:

**“Well within the team we are multi-disciplinary, so and it is very health based, and we are kind of the add on. .... So we do have to be quite boundaried ourselves as a team and clear what our role is, when often the other professionals are not clear what our Social Work role is. Within the team we do a lot in terms of educating the other professions”.**

From this quote it appears that the process of explaining one’s own role enables an individual to be more conscious and clear about their professional identity. This is corroborated by Adams *et al.*, (2006:56) where they found professionals within their study compared and differentiated themselves from other professional groups in interaction with those professionals in the workplace. Thus students in this study described how they defined and redefined their professional identity and role in relation to colleagues and other professionals.

‘Supervisor four’ went on to explain how the student assisted them in furthering their own professional identity, as they needed to be clear with the team concerning the work and role of a student social worker, which is consistent with the concept of the ‘generalised other’ (Mead, 1934) as discussed in chapter two (2.4).

Fazzi and Rosignoli (2016) argue that good quality social work placements should provide this kind of two-way learning process, as the ‘new comer’ and ‘old timer’ work together (Lave and Wenger, 1991), which will be discussed

more fully in the next chapter. Where students are socialised into the profession of social work by their supervisors and need to be sufficiently motivated by their supervisor to learn effectively. However, in order to achieve this the student needs a positive relationship with their supervisor to begin with, or with placement personnel.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter the sharing of comparable personal qualities and prior experience continues to be a theme within this analysis of interview responses. Students found that they were significantly influenced and supported by those who shared comparable values, experiences, motivations and at times political stances and theoretical perspectives. Supervisors were portrayed by students as key to this development if they shared these qualities and were open to sharing their own experiences with students. As a consequence of the need for these similarities, peers figured significantly within the interview responses. Therefore, it is not enough for the supervisor or key placement personnel to be merely supportive and offer good quality supervision, they also need to display comparable values and qualities to the student to develop a reciprocal relationship.

Only two students that I interviewed mentioned the impact of tutors, which has been researched in other studies (Wilson and Campbell, 2012, Clapton, 2006, 2008), although all students commented upon key teaching experiences, such as concerning critical reflection and communication skills. Consequently, there was little to reflect upon in terms of the impact of tutors and lecturers upon

students in my study, something that would be worth exploring in the future (see final chapter).

Surprisingly very few of the students mentioned their identity in terms of being a 'student'. One student (student six) did talk about the use of their status as a postgraduate student on placement, in order to help him gain more respect from placement personnel and service users. They perceived this postgraduate student status as offering them opportunities for more complex work and encouraging others to respect their views and opinions. This is an area I would like to explore in the future by interviewing undergraduate students (see 8.6.2). Implicitly, students did discuss their student identity in terms of having more time to build relationships with service users and they were mindful that once qualified they might not have this time (see 7.2.3). Students also identified with their peers where they shared similar comparable life experiences and values. This reinforced their student identity and they established informal support groups with these peers. Overall, students were keenly aware of their student identity in terms of being continually assessed within placement, so they found these peer groups important and safe places to explore their practice and developing professional identity. In particular this exploration centred around developing their understanding of the role of social workers and the expectations of supervisors and placement settings, as discussed further in the next chapter.

In terms of socialisation, the interaction with other professionals was more important than I had imagined or even experienced myself, until I presented recently at a health conference. On reflection have come to understand that

this is because, although I have worked in multi-agency settings, I have never worked in a practice setting where staff are predominantly health professionals. From this analysis it is clear that professional identity develops further when students have the opportunity to explain their role, values and theoretical perspectives to other professionals like those in health. In doing so, students develop confidence in their role and identity as a social worker and are able to defend this if necessary. This was eloquently supported by 'supervisor four' who was based in a health setting, and where they found the student themselves assisted their identity.

Finally, the creation of informal spaces for support and reflection with peers and other professionals was commented upon by students within the sample, which I will explore further in the final chapter.

Next I will return to a number of topics already raised in this chapter and chapter five, concerning the impact of the organisation and placement setting upon the development of a student's professional identity.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **The Student's Experience of the Placement Setting and Working Practices.**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In chapter two where I explored theory, I emphasised the importance of organisational settings and practice upon a student's development of professional identity, utilising Jenkins (2004, 2008) and Lave and Holland (2001), in terms of 'enduring struggles' and 'contentious local practice'. This is consistent with the notion that the students as 'new comers' to the placement setting are socialised into the practice of the organisation by supervisors and team members in their role as 'old timers'. Here students are learning through participation in the social practices of the agency, moving from 'peripheral' to 'central participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

During the interviews all the students commented upon how they felt their placement was a good learning opportunity for developing their professional identity, or at least this is what they conveyed to me. As already described in the prior chapter, there was only one student in my sample of interviews who had a negative experience of their supervisor. Despite this 'student four' communicated that they had learned a great deal and developed during their final placement.

Perhaps for this reason I found less 'contentious practice' and 'enduring struggles' of power between students and supervisors than I had anticipated. In addition, I had unintentionally not interviewed students who failed the practice module, notwithstanding this, there were two students who failed practice in the cohort, but they had not elected to be interviewed.

Although, the issue of power was not discussed as overtly as I would have expected, it was often implicit within participants' responses. For example, participants explained the power of others within the organisation and the placement environment. Power can be observed as an implicit theme throughout the interviews, which I will explore further within this chapter in relation to the organisation and later in my concluding chapter.

Most participants required some prompting to consider how the institutional practices of their placement and organisational setting had impacted upon the development of their professional identity. I would assert that this is because at first this premise seemed new to participants, until they were offered the opportunity to discuss, reflect on and explore these issues within their agency setting, which the direct quotes from participants in this chapter demonstrate. A number of topics emerged in the student participants' narratives concerning the impact of the organisation, the most prominent being the impact of modern working practices, namely hot-desking and bureaucratic systems.

Whereas my interviews with supervisors raised some noteworthy data concerning the styles that they employed in working with students, and how they believed these approaches to supporting students enabled students to develop their professional practice and identity within the agency.

I will firstly discuss the modern working practices and then turn to supervisor and organisational styles.

## **7.2 Modern Working Practices**

As already stated, students and supervisors highlighted a number of modern working practices that supported or hindered their development of professional identity within the final placement. This mostly took the form of hot-desking and bureaucratic systems that they worked within.

### **7.2.1 Hot-desking**

One particular form of current working practice that figured prominently in seven of the student interviews, was hot-desking. This is becoming an increasing form of practice used within social work as commented upon by social work bodies within the media, such as British Association of Social Workers (2013) and Community Care (Bee, 2015). For instance, recently within the Guardian (2016) it was reported that 57% of those who responded stated that hot-desking had a negative impact upon their work and “that hot-desking was not beneficial for working with colleagues” (Isaac, 2016).

Alternatively, two students within my sample stated that hot-desking was useful in enabling them to sit amongst different social workers and professionals in order to observe varying styles of working. Respondents within the Guardian (Isaac, 2016) survey also acknowledged this benefit, where social workers felt that hot-desking was useful in sharing knowledge within an organisation, and crucial to having the opportunity to work with professionals that they would not normally have worked with.

However, most students in my sample felt that this practice was a negative one, mainly because as a ‘new comer’ they had no clearly defined workspace.

Whereas many 'old timers' had an established desk space for themselves, despite hot-desking being reinforced within their organisation, as pointed out by 'student five':

**"People are territorial, I try to find out whose desk it is, but otherwise I will just move, and it feels awkward working at a desk where you've got peoples family photos there, it feels like you are sitting somewhere you shouldn't be rather than just sitting at a desk".**

Students, like those practitioners in the Guardian survey (Isaac, 2016) and BASW (2013) survey, believed that their own 'space' was important in promoting effective working conditions. For instance, students spent a good deal of time seeking out available desk space and a computer to complete assessments. Similarly, students in my research found hot-desking areas noisy and in the BASW (2013) survey, social workers reported that they needed to make sensitive telephone calls to service users in their cars or in the toilets, in order to create a quiet and confidential space. This was reinforced by a BASW (2016:2) survey where social workers stated that they required "dedicated private workspace as opposed to hot-desking", particularly as social workers require "quiet spaces to write up complex reports" (BASW, 2016b:8). This next extended quote by 'student nine' demonstrates this further:

**"I don't like it, only because I like to have my space that I can go into in the morning. I like to sit within the team, because I can hear what my agency supervisor is doing and I think in terms of the person, you feel out of it if you are not sat with your team. You sit with other teams and sometimes you notice you get a funny look because you are sat in someone's seat. So I think that can be, not hugely uncomfortable, as I'm not the kind of person, where it would affect me too much. But you do definitely see it across the whole floor. I definitely prefer just to have my own desk and have my drawers, rather than shuffling about every day, trying to get my stuff together".**

'Student one' and 'student five', worked in teams where flexible working, including home working, was promoted. This was partly due to the introduction

of hot-desking, but also because they worked in large rural geographical areas where home working was at times more practical and time efficient. However, both of these students reported that this resulted in there being a reduced team presence in the office. This had the negative repercussions of less support available for students and feelings of isolation from the wider team and sometimes even their supervisors, who were working flexibly from home. This finding is reflected in the BASW survey where qualified staff felt isolated and unsupported (BASW, 2016b:9).

So it would seem that the benefits of hot-desking in order to improve multi-professional working and to observe varying styles of practice are outweighed by the negative impact upon the support, that is, the lack of support from the student's supervisor and team. This finding is consistent with recent research by Biggart *et al.*, (2016:24):

“One of the difficulties of the recent introduction of hot desking and open plan offices can be that social workers do not have a physical ‘secure base’ which creates uncertainty about where work can take place (in the office, at home, in the car?) and can reduce the chances of meeting colleagues over the course of a day. Increasing uncertainty into a role, which is already dealing with high levels of uncertainty with their cases, will increase levels of stress”.

The impact of stress is highlighted by the research conducted by Biggart *et al.*, , a finding I will return to at the end of this chapter (7.3.2).

### 7.2.2 Bureaucratic Systems: Negative Perspective

Students talked about bureaucratic systems within agencies using mostly negative terminology, such as ‘machines’ and ‘beasts’. This was particularly evident in the interviews of students in local authority placement settings, as highlighted by ‘student two’s’ narrative:

**“So I think there are changes within the organisation in terms of the child focus and making them more the centre of the process. But the reaction from the team around me is that they are struggling timewise because it is much more in depth. So there is a sense of the clashing of the machine in terms of the machine still requires you to do as much if not more in fact, without giving you the time and space to actually do that”.**

Student two’s quote also refers to ‘time’ and ‘space’ which corresponds to the earlier analysis in chapter six concerning the time required to develop relationships with service users (6.2), and space to reflect and obtain support from peers and placement personnel. Some students stated that they felt ill-prepared for these practices and explained tensions between what they had learnt at university and the realities of practice. However, as Lave and Wenger (1991) found, students as learners on the whole had more time and less responsibility during placement, so that they could further develop themselves and explore organisational practices. So this in some ways diminished the negative impact of these practices upon the student, if they were coupled with a supportive supervisor and team, as explored in the previous chapter.

Although most students had more time as a new comer and learner, they still used negative language such as, ‘process driven’, and explained how this meant that despite being a new comer and having more time to undertake their work, they were still required to conform to policy and procedural timescales.

This is similar to the view that one's identity can be constructed through action or performance as part of 'performativity' (Powell and Gilbert, 2007:194).

As illustrated by 'student two':

**"Within the organisation, at the moment I am more process driven because I need to say I am a good prospect and you want to employ me I suppose and I want to pass all my work and done everything I need to do in that regard. But, for me I need to explore how I can be more away from the process, the way I have been brought up I need to be able to drop certain parts of the process and that is something I've been learning as I go along as well".**

The student who did not experience a supportive supervisor (student four), felt that they had very little support with understanding these systems and that there was an assumption that they would already be conversant with these systems. This student found that the agency was more familiar with working with trainee social workers, who were sponsored by the agency and were therefore well versed in agency systems as explained in their narrative below:

**"Again from not having Local Authority background, it was really hard to work out how the jigsaw fitted together, but I am still learning, but this massive beast that no one could really explain. When you come into a place like this there are huge assumptions made and absolutely fair enough, that we understand how it works and I think not being home grown student, not just getting it, the recording system, the whole lot of it and there is children's finance here and there is panel and this. No one ever thinks to try and explain, it has been a whole culture to learn about. So that for me has been more of a challenge than the actual work itself, the actual beast".**

This is an interesting quote as the student describes the culture of the organisation and supports the view that old timers need to support new comers to understand and work effectively within these systems. This links well with my use of Lave and Wenger (1991) in chapter two (2.5.2), where students need assistance to become more familiar with organisational practices.

As alluded to in an earlier quote ('student two'), students found that rather than technology supporting and assisting them to negotiate these systems effectively, it was in fact making the process more time consuming. As described by 'student five':

**"Otherwise just a lot of computer inputting, it is just the repetition, wish you could just write something once somewhere. I think to be fair they are working on it, you used to write a visit and put in a number of times, but they are changing it now to just one form. Things like having to write down every single telephone call even if they didn't answer, that all gets a bit laborious especially as a student. We don't have laptops so we can only do all that in the office. So you have to write it all down by hand, otherwise you forget if you are out and about for the whole day. You have phone calls and stuff".**

Although this student did state the agency was trying to improve the situation, other students who were sponsored by the organisation did have access to laptops. However, overall negotiating systems meant that work took more time, which students described as unrealistic and conflicted with what they perceived to be best practice. For instance, many of the students stated that for every visit and contact with a service user they needed to spend around twice the amount of time recording, when they would have preferred more time with the service user.

Meetings were also identified as taking up considerable time, which 'student nine' felt was not realistically portrayed within the teaching at the university:

**"The biggest thing I have found is compared to the teaching on the course, it all seems more simplistic in the classroom. When you actually go into practice, how easy it is to do certain things. For example, getting a legal meeting, it takes a couple of weeks and then if you really felt that a child needed to be removed, actually the reality of that happening and meeting a threshold is quite low. So I think in terms of what I have learnt in the class room and then putting into practice, it is completely different. More different than I ever imagined it to be. So opened my eyes."**

Thus bureaucratic systems were an area of immense learning as well as difficulty for students, which could at times hinder their development of professional identity, if they did not receive adequate support to negotiate and understand these systems. Furthermore, the students highlighted the different experiences and support that social work trainees sponsored by the placement setting received, both in terms of understanding the systems and equipment such as laptops. Thus further evidencing a divide between the placement experiences of students who enter 'fast track' social work schemes compared to higher education routes as discussed in chapter one (1.5/1.9).

### **7.2.3 Bureaucratic Systems: Positive Perspective**

Conversely, 'student one' described how they found the bureaucratic systems and paperwork useful in their practice, firstly in reflecting upon their practice and secondly in aiding their decision making. They expressed how this meant that they could explain the paperwork and decision making process to the service users they were working with, thus enabling this particular student to feel more confident in their practice as described below:

**"But the paper part within statutory, is the important part of it, because it doesn't happen unless it is written down. So I think that is a really big challenge, that kind of confidence in decision making for myself and really showing my workings and how I made a decision. It has really challenged me, it's made me more confident as well because it does make you stop, reflect and use that decision making model, and I think that's what, for me is influencing my practice".**

Furthermore, this student explained how the paperwork and systems offered them more structure and consistency to their practice. This was important as this student was learning new systems and ways of working that they had not undertaken before. In the quote below 'student one' made comparisons

between previous work experience within a non-local authority setting, where they perceived there was a lack of structure and consistency:

**“I think in previous work I’ve seen people do things that I don’t like and I think that really impacts on my want to do it properly, and that is why I quite enjoy working in the local authority because it is very procedural. While that creates a lot of paperwork the other point of that is that it is done properly, and things have to be done properly and there are those kinds of check and balances that I really quite enjoy. Because there’s that clear message, that’s the important thing, that kind of consistency from the team and that has had a huge impact on me, to ensure that that consistency carries on, because I’ve seen what it is like when it is not consistent”.**

The last statement within the quote above concerning consistency cannot be generalised to other non-local authority settings, as within the interviews I found that in non-local authority settings there was a significant emphasis upon paperwork and bureaucratic systems. As illuminated by ‘student seven’ in their placement agency’s use of ‘manuals’, when they were placed within a charitable organisation:

**“But then it is also quite positive that I know I’ve got rules to follow and I’m not radical, I am happy to stick to boundaries, but I have found manuals hard work and the evaluations. Some I have to do about eight times, and I try to make it as open as possible, but you know the young person are just ticking boxes and I find that frustrating. I see the bigger picture that it is to improve practice but I don’t know if that has impinged my growth but it has challenged me a little bit”.**

This is in contrast to what Scholar *et al.*, (2014:10) found, where voluntary sector placements are ‘more open’ and encourage more scope to ‘go that bit further in working with people’. I would argue whilst voluntary sector placements might encourage more time to be spent developing relationships with service users, they do still employ a number of bureaucratic systems. I analysed this in chapter six (6.2), where students voiced that they were concerned that bureaucratic systems would present obstacles in the way of

relationship building with service users as more time is spent on these systems. Overall students observed the negative impact of this way of working more upon the practice of other more experienced team members, who had less time than the students did for meeting with service users as explained by 'student one':

**"I think it does fit, I think everyone understands you've got to do this and this is the real work you are doing, the relationships side building with young people. So I think people are very aware of that but people are also a bit disempowered by the time limits involved. For me, because I have more time at the moment that has a huge impact but I can see will change".**

'Student one' speculated how this would change once they graduated and they did not have the time of a 'learner':

**"So I can see how my identity with that young person will change once I've got a huge caseload and an hour with them, the information I need from them will take an hour. So you lose that ability to build that relationship in the way you want".**

Instead, students were still striving in their practice to establish and maintain positive and effective working relationships with service users (Ruch, *et al.*, 2010). This took a good deal of commitment and confidence, especially in the arena of completing assessments, as 'student six' elaborated:

**"But I struggle to practice in the way I am being asked to, so I characterised it by, it is almost like the written assessment, the narrative I create about somebody, becomes the service user and I lose track of the service user in writing the report. It becomes so focused on a document that I lose track of the service user, and I often I think people are too busy once they are sent out. I have been trying to check the impact of that document on the person, saying it is your story. However, I think with a full caseload I imagine that doesn't get done by my colleagues very much. It is a hassle making changes once you have completed a document as well".**

It is noteworthy how this student draws upon the idea that the assessment is the service user's narrative and they wished to maintain what they perceived to be

good practice. Therefore, although the working practices and bureaucratic systems can present obstacles, they can also be utilised by students as a framework in completing best practice. This also raises the question of how students as 'new comers' can be supported by their supervisor and team to maintain this good practice within organisational practices and tensions.

### **7.3 Placement Supervisor Styles**

#### **7.3.1 Conformity**

Supervisors explained some interesting styles of managing the organisational tensions in supporting students as 'new comers'. All of the five supervisors interviewed explained that they strived to enable students to successfully negotiate these bureaucratic systems, but the style that they employed did at times evolve into 'enduring struggles' as noted by Lave and Holland (2001). For instance, 'supervisor two' stated that a way of navigating these practices was for the student to 'conform' to what they perceived as the agency identity:

**"I think the organisation gives very clear boundaries of what they expect a student to meet and how their professional identity at a corporate level is mostly constructed by the expectation of that agency. So you will dress a certain way, you will not have lip rings and so on. So the agency, it does construct them, their professional identity".**

Here 'supervisor two' refers to students conforming to agency dress codes, as a way of promoting identity. This links with my earlier discussion in chapter two (2.4.1) concerning the embodiment of professional identity and in chapter five (5.3), where students explained the impact of their physicality on identity and how they were perceived by others. The conformity described by 'supervisor two' is supported by Scholar's (2013:366) research, where she argued that

agency dress codes were a means of the agency imposing 'organisational control' and agency values, thus demonstrating the impact of organisational power upon the student. 'Supervisor two' went on further to explain:

**"I really work with the students then, also for my own practice, I have to know, I have to check out that their values match those of the agency. It's almost like you do a mini 'fit for practice' again, I have to check that out..... but I also see the student as an extension of me".**

Thus this supervisor in stating the 'student as an extension of me', supports the earlier views of students in chapter five, (5.2.5), where students felt pressurised into conforming to supervisor expectations, and where supervisors were exercising their power on students. Whereas for supervisors and students to work positively together they needed to share comparable values and styles of working (as discussed in the previous chapter). However, this quote takes this perception a step further, stating that students also need to share the agency identity, values and culture. Thus potentially regulating the behaviour of students and promoting conformity (see discussion 5.2.5, Gilbert 2001), a kind of surveillance of the student's behaviour and practice (Foucault, 1980). As explained in chapter three, research concerning newly qualified social workers supports this further by describing how graduates often felt that their values were compromised as they attempted to 'fit' within the organisation (Jack and Donnellan, 2010). So effectively 'conform' as the quote above from 'supervisor two' suggests.

I found 'supervisor two's' narrative concerning their style of working with the students very thought provoking. 'Supervisor two' often worked with students as a practice educator, so they were familiar with the programme and social work education. Despite this they seemed risk averse to offering the student

the opportunity to develop their own style of practice, diverging from what this supervisor perceived as a professional identity that was consistent with the organisation:

**“Whether that is right or wrong, I take a lot of responsibility for the students and I feel if their professional identity is not strong enough then I feel that reflects on my professional identity. In this organisation I have worked a long time to build, hopefully a good professional identity here, and I don’t want students to jeopardise that for me. So I have almost a selfish interest in that student’s identity being sound”.**

I prompted ‘supervisor two’ to elaborate more upon what they viewed as a ‘sound identity’ (see above quote), but they returned to their earlier narrative concerning the student conforming to the agency identity of values and dress codes. ‘Supervisor two’ worked within a local authority setting and it transpired through the interview that they placed a good deal of emphasis on the student understanding and being comfortable with statutory interventions, in particular using legislation. They did identify one student who struggled with conforming to the agency identity that they had described, and they explained how this student was not a ‘bad’ practitioner, but once they graduated they found their niche within a non-statutory organisation, which fitted with their identity. Therefore, ‘supervisor two’ was not promoting the view that students who did not fit within a local authority setting should not become social workers, but suggested that their professional identity might be better matched to a non-statutory organisation. This challenges the perception held currently by local authority employers, that students should have a final placement in a local authority setting (Narey, 2014). Indeed, it has been my experience that some final year students would prefer to be placed in non-local authority settings as they believe they would not ‘fit’ or manage the culture of a local authority setting. This is further promoted by local authority agencies who offer placements to my

institution. They interview students before offering them a placement, and I have wondered if they are selecting students based upon whether they believe they will 'fit' or conform to the agency culture.

However, I would propose that although students conform to this perception of agency identity, this is somewhat an act, as students stated that they needed to present themselves as employable by the agency, thus compromising their professional identity. Therefore, I would concur with the longitudinal research of Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000) that students adapt their personal identity to navigate the agency's. Students are often positioned within the middle ground of having to prove they are ready and 'fit' for practice and wish to be viewed as employable, despite how they might feel about the agency systems. Drawing on the earlier discussion in chapter five (5.2), this posed particular challenges for students as their motivation was to work with people and improve life chances, rather than simply conforming to agency systems and legislative frameworks. In my view and experience as a practice educator, students need to manage the tensions between their own values and motivation to become a social worker, with that of the agency context. To achieve this, students require the support of other practitioners around them. This was a perspective taken by the other four supervisors.

### 7.3.2 Developing Resilience and Critical Reflection

The other four supervisors took an entirely different style of working with students, one where they sought to promote the student's confidence and assertiveness in their own particular style of working. For instance, 'supervisor one' encouraged students to do the complete opposite of what 'supervisor two' proposed in the prior section. Instead 'supervisor one' sought to enable a student to develop their confidence and to challenge the agency system:

**"I also don't understand this but some supervisors have a blind loyalty to the Local Authority. Which I don't understand, as I am happy with students, maybe because I am union representative as well, to completely slam the idea of key performance indicators. When I get an email to say fantastic you have achieved 90 %, this is completely meaningless – and I have that discussion with them [the student]. But some supervisors are horrified when I do that. I am not saying anything radical".**

Thus 'supervisor one' encouraged students to develop their own professional identity, which would require support from them as their supervisor but also the confidence and assertiveness of the student to achieve this. These four supervisors highlighted within their narrative, that crucial in the student developing their own professional identity and style of work was the need for students to not only to be confident and assertive, but also to be resilient. This has been supported by recent research in the area of resilience, emotional intelligence and work life balance (Beddoe, 2013, Biggart *et al.*, 2016, Kinman and Grant, 2014), as discussed earlier in chapter three (3.6). All five of the supervisors shared the view that resilience and looking after oneself was crucial to developing professional identity, but also in working within agency systems and practice, as stated by 'supervisor three' and 'supervisor five' respectively:

**“So here we need to be honest, and if you are not feeling right, you cancel it, you don’t try and wing it, because that could be more detrimental towards the service user”.**

**“It means that I get the best and get them focused and what I need them to do, because I have given them the space to work out the other stuff that they’ve got going on”.**

Indeed, there is a growing amount of literature concerning how social workers should become more ‘mindful’ (Lynn and Mensinga, 2015), as explored in chapter three (3.6). Key to this resilience and management of agency practices is the use of supervision and the support of the supervisor, as highlighted by ‘student eight’:

**“I’m making healthy choices and being open about it and letting people know where I’m at and I think that has been a really good thing. I feel that it has been used in the way, I think you could have the best supervisor in the world but if you haven’t got the courage to use them, then it doesn’t matter as you soldier on, on your own. But I do think my attitude has changed. I was the student in the first year that said I wouldn’t get any benefit out of supervision, because I feel my attitude has been the boss is here, keep your head down. Now I feel I have a good working relationship and made me understand my own working”.**

As stated in the prior chapter, placement supervisors employed a series of methods of supporting students in practice settings, not only providing good quality supervision, but also providing spaces for critical reflection. The success of these methods was often reliant upon the student and the supervisor sharing comparable values and attitudes. This could be observed further in the responses given by supervisors concerning the impact of the agency and their style of supporting the student within agency practices.

All of the supervisors were keen to offer students this space within supervision for critical reflection and they expressed a wish to meet with the student group before placement to enable them to critically reflect and prepare for the realities

of working within agencies. I fully concur with this view, as through my own observations of students in placement I have become increasingly concerned that students should enter their placement and the workplace with effective strategies for managing and negotiating modern working practices, otherwise they could experience placement breakdown.

#### **7.4 Organisational Culture**

The organisation and placement setting itself within the interview data proved crucial to assisting students in developing professional identity and the resilience that I described in the prior section. There has been some research that suggests that social work training is in fact more stressful than qualified social work practice (Pottage and Huxley, 1996, Tobin and Carson, 1997, Wilks and Spivey, 2010, Kinman and Grant, 2010, and Rajan-Rankin, 2014).

Therefore, there has been a growing number of studies to explore how students can build upon their resilience (Kinman and Grant, 2014, Beddoe, 2013), and emotional intelligence (Morrison, 2006), and be supported in this process by the organisational setting (as discussed in chapter three, 3.6).

Organisations would appear to be keen to support students and graduates in light of the social worker vacancy rates explored in chapter one (1.9).

Furthermore, organisations wish to promote the effective management of stress in an attempt to prevent burnout (Lee and Miller, 2013) and to improve upon the retention of social workers (Collins, 2008). As explained earlier in chapter three (3.6), Rajan-Rankin (2014), acknowledged the importance of organisational responsibility in enabling social work practitioners to develop and sustain their

resilience. Thus creating a supportive environment and culture for students is possible if facilitated by supervisors and the wider organisation. Alternatively, if the student's supervisor is not supportive, the wider team and agency can compensate and provide the support a student requires, as argued by Bogo *et al.*, (2010, see chapter two, 2.2. and chapter three, 3.6)

'Supervisor four' was the only supervisor to explore the culture of the wider organisation and the importance of identity on a wider scale, and how this was supported within their agency:

**"Within the wider organisation, we do have a reasonably strong Social Work identity. We have a Social Work Education lead and he does quite a good role of representing us and we have had a Social Work conference that he has organised. He is proactive and he stands up for Social Work amongst the other professions. Sounds like them and us, but it is not".**

As stated before (6.7), 'supervisor four' was based within a more health dominated setting, so it seemed that their organisation attempted to support social work professionals in remaining clear about their role and purpose. Similarly, 'student three' who was also based within a predominantly health setting stated:

**"But I think there is still more to be done in terms of raising the profile of social workers, what does social workers and the profession of social work and the identity of social work, what does it mean in other teams, especially the medical people".**

So whilst 'supervisor four's' quote promotes the idea that agency's support can assist social workers in health settings to develop a clearer professional identity, this was not the experience of 'student three'. This could be based upon how the organisational context was viewed differently by the student and the

supervisor, as this support could be open to interpretation. However, it is more likely that this difference of opinion was the result of how these two organisations promoted dissimilar learning cultures for social workers.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

Within this final analysis chapter, I have outlined how the placement organisation and context was described by students and supervisors as playing a significant role in the development of a social work student's professional identity. To achieve this, participants argued that organisations could encourage best practice, although many of the students interviewed found systems cumbersome and time consuming. Even as a learner, they described the pressure they experienced to complete assessments and recording within tight timescales.

The narratives I collected from students and supervisors illuminated that these tensions are manageable if students are supported and encouraged by their supervisors. The styles of supervisors varied from expecting students to conform, to supervisors who actively encouraged students to confidently challenge the organisation. However, all of the supervisors within the sample agreed that students need to develop resilience and emotional intelligence to manage these challenges and tensions, which in turn has a potential impact upon the retention of newly qualified social workers.

What the participant responses have further highlighted for me is the changing nature of social work. Whether that be the growing trend towards fast-tracking

social work education, to implementing bureaucratic systems. Students reported in the interviews that these practicalities and systems have had a significant impact upon their developing 'selves' as practitioners. Therefore, this would suggest that programmes should seek to be clearer about what social work training should deliver, so that the content reflects and prepares graduates for the realities of contemporary social work practice. Even more importantly, with the closure of the College of Social Work and a new regulatory body for social work on the horizon, these modern social work practices will be subject to continual change, and social work students would benefit from building upon their resilience, as described by supervisors in their interviews.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This study set out to explore how students develop their professional identity during their social work training, and to establish how placement supervisors assist, support and enable students in this process of professional socialisation. As a result of the research aims and questions, the study explored the impact of a student's prior experiences, final placement and agency setting on their development of professional identity (see primary and secondary questions, chapter four, 4.2). During the interviews with participants and the analysis of their narratives, the research aims and questions of the study were further honed. How these findings and analysis contribute to knowledge regarding the development of professional identity is discussed within this final chapter.

This chapter summarises how the theoretical framework employed within this study, makes an important contribution to the understanding of the development of professional identity. Limitations and strengths of how I employed the methodology to undertake this study were considered and the policy and practice implications emerging from the study are explored. This chapter concludes with a review of the main contributions of this study to knowledge of how professional identity is developed, and identifies areas for further research.

Consistent with my autobiographical approach, I will begin this chapter with a personal reflection upon the thesis, including how I have developed as a researcher.

## **8.2 Autobiographical Reflections on the Study**

In the process of undertaking this research and in writing about this study, I have interwoven my own experiences consistent with the use of an autobiographical approach. Latterly this assisted my analysis of the data, but initially enabled me to develop my theoretical understanding of identity from a personal point of view. That is, ensuring I valued the life experiences of students before they commenced the course, in addition to seeking to understand their experience of the programme, placement and others around them. I have maintained this stance by use of a reflective journal, recording my experiences as I progressed through the research, but also documenting my potential impact upon the data. This reflexive approach is something I observed in student responses, in how they utilised informal spaces with peers and placement personnel to reflect upon their placement experiences and practice.

### **8.2.1 Influence of the EdD Programme**

As highlighted throughout this study, I have utilised my previous assignments for the EdD programme (appendix four) and built upon these to compose this study. In assignment one (appendix four, 4.1) I made use of social policy discussions in outlining the context of this project, as presented in chapter one. Assignments two and three (appendix four, 4.2 and 4.3) were beneficial in my use of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and in developing my theoretical understanding of professional identity and professional socialisation. Finally, I made extensive use of the fourth assignment (appendix four, 4.4) to design my research and methodology in chapter four of this thesis.

### **8.2.2 Development as a Researcher**

As listed at the beginning of this study (page iv), I have had the opportunity to attend and present my research at three conferences and write a book chapter. These openings enabled me to begin to disseminate some of the findings of this study and further develop my analysis of the research. From a personal perspective these opportunities have had a major impact upon my confidence as a researcher, in presenting the findings of this study and exploring the project with others.

The first conference occurred shortly following the completion of the interviews for this study, thus this presented an excellent opportunity to discuss the emerging themes from the participants' narratives. The conference focus was upon social work identity from a sociological perspective, so this further ignited my passion for the topic of professional identity. I was enthused by the positive responses I received to my research by conference members, and from these discussions sprung new ideas for me to explore within this study. In particular I was inspired by some of the theoretical discussions, that assisted me to further clarify and refine my theoretical framework. On my return from this conference I was galvanised by the experience and this positively carried me through the process of analysing the interview data.

Inspired by my first experience, I sought out other conferences to discuss my evolving analysis of the findings of this research. The second conference I attended was organised by medical professionals (mostly general practitioners and doctors, pre and post qualifying) in my own institution, concerning assessment of professionalism. This posed a valuable opportunity to explore

the findings of the study with those not familiar with the social work profession. My experience of this conference is mirrored within the narratives explained by participants that I interviewed, regarding their interaction with other professionals assisting in further developing and clarifying their professional identity. In my personal situation, this concerned developing my confidence in clarifying and explaining my research to other professionals. Furthermore, listening to, and engaging with other professionals, highlighted the similarities in how professional identity evolves within all professions.

The final conference took place at the time when I was writing and redrafting chapters of this thesis, and so it was a pivotal opportunity to present a conclusion of my findings to an audience. In addition, the conference focus concerned virtue and ethics in the professions, which added a new dimension for me to explore within the study. At this conference there was an interest from participants concerning the use of informal spaces for reflection and thus this began to take a more prominent feature within this thesis.

More recently I have contributed a chapter to a book concerning social work identity, where my remit was to focus upon professional socialisation. Within this chapter I further refined and explored the importance of the student's interaction with others, particularly within their placement setting. This was a valuable opportunity in developing my professional identity as a researcher, particularly in writing about my research for a different audience.

On reflection, these openings to discuss and present this study have been fundamental in my own development as a researcher, but they have also been

pivotal in crystallising how this study contributes new knowledge to how students develop their professional identity, which I will now explore.

### **8.3 Theoretical Contribution of the Study**

My theoretical understanding of professional identity as outlined in chapter two, integrated a series of theories (as further explored below) which I argued share a number of similarities. In particular, they all view identity as an ongoing process, constructed throughout one's lifetime, thus making use of identification (Jenkins, 2004). This fitted with my social constructionist (Burr, 2003, see chapter two, 2.2) stance throughout the study, where I proposed that identity is further constructed through interaction with others and the surrounding environment. This was fundamental in my decision to interview students whilst on placement, so that I could explore identity development with them. In addition, I identified that the student's placement supervisor was a significant person in encouraging and supporting this development of professional identity, which I derived from my own previous experience of the role (chapter one, 1.2) and was further illuminated in the interviews of participants in the study.

The diagram in illustration one (chapter two), demonstrates how I incorporated these theories and utilised them within the study. Where I employed Jenkins' framework of (2003) three orders of social identity, Bourdieu's (1979, 1990, 1993) theories of habitus, field and capital, Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of 'legitimate peripheral participation', and Lave and Holland's (2001, 2009) theory of 'history in person'. I used Jenkins' (2004, 2008) three orders of; individual, interaction and institutional, to draw together these theories and Houston's

(2014) 'societal', fourth order. Jenkins' and Houston's use of Bourdieu was enlightening, especially concerning how habitus is a set of dispositions formed through socialisation and on-going experiences (Bourdieu, 1979), such as experience prior to the course and during the practice placement. I also found Mead's (1934) concept of the 'generalised other' essential in understanding why students in the study explained how they were cautious about what to disclose to others (chapter five, 5.2.5), particularly those who would be assessing them.

As the study progressed and I analysed my findings, the notion of habitus became more important in understanding how students developed their professional identity. As can be viewed in illustration five, the individual experiences of the students were central to assisting the students in developing their professional identity. Initially, students were motivated to undertake a career in social work because of their personal experiences, and as they shared similar values and attitudes (dispositions, Bourdieu, 1979) consistent with social work as a profession. These dispositions were also crucial in forming reciprocal relationships with peers, placement supervisors and other placement personnel, where they found they shared comparable life experiences, personal qualities, attitudes, and beliefs. These reciprocal relationships were key to students being successfully socialised into the profession, where they were supported to navigate and negotiate their professional identity within the final placement. Essentially their habitus remained the same, but it assisted them to negotiate and find their position within the field of the social work profession (Bourdieu, 1993). As 'student seven' eloquently explained:

**“So whilst I don't think your core identity changes because it is built up of such complex experiences I think you can't not change over a placement. .... I don't know if a social work student can honestly say they do not change during a placement. If that makes sense?”**

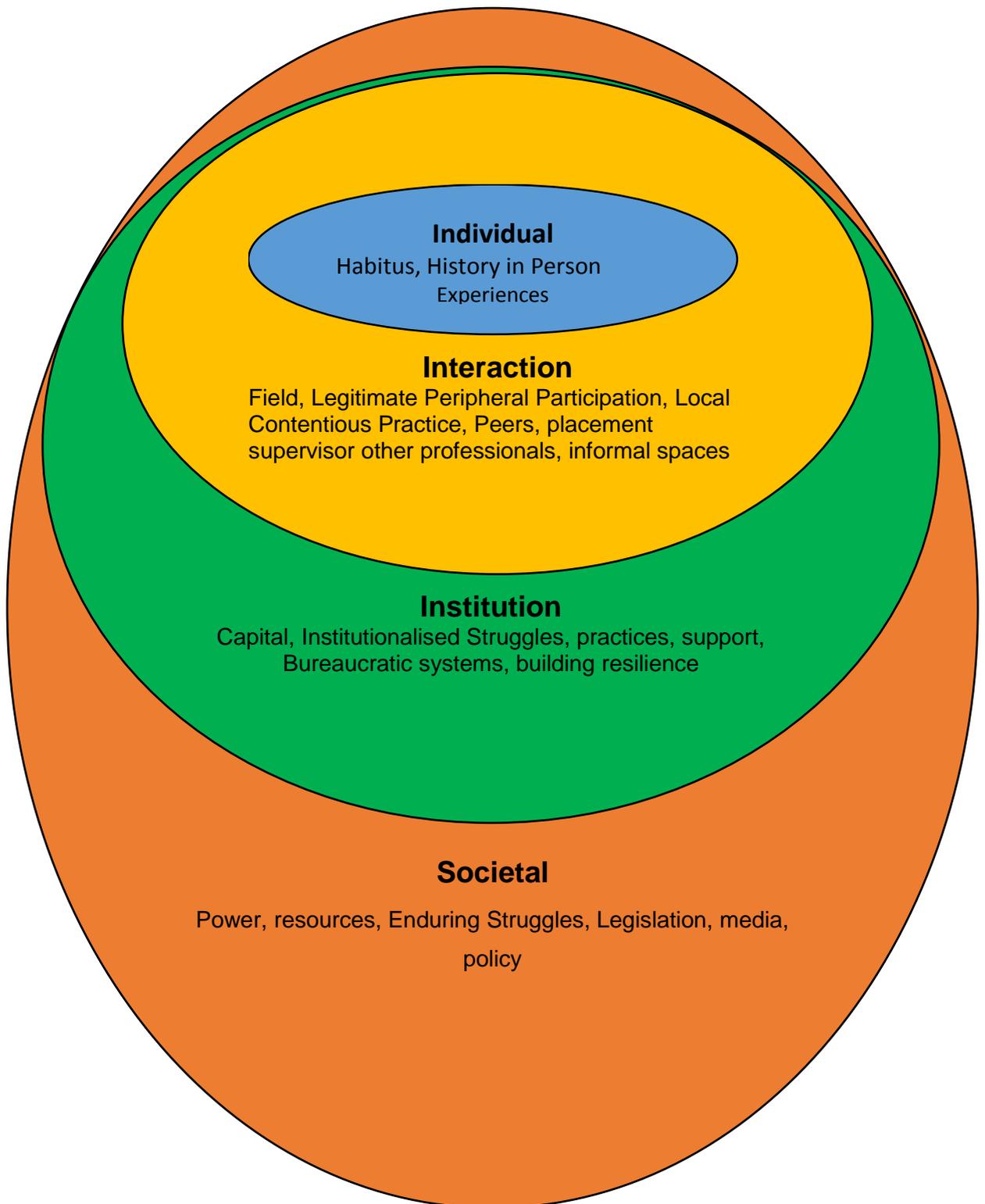
Embodiment was also a key element of habitus that I drew upon in my findings (chapter five, 5.3), concerning how students experienced the impact of their physicality on others, and how they negotiated and positioned themselves when working with service users. 'Capital' was important in terms of how students negotiated the field of social work, managing the expectations of others, such as their supervisor. Here students appeared to have developed a 'feel for the game' (Grenfell, 2008, Bourdieu, 1990), sharing similar comparable experiences with others, or negotiating how to manage these differences within the placement setting. Crucial within this process was how students utilised informal spaces with their peers and placement personnel, to reflect upon their experiences.

Lave and Holland's 'history in person' was expedient in focusing upon the interaction between the student and others in the social space, including the impact of cultural and organisational practices. Therefore, students influenced their placement settings as well as being affected themselves through 'contentious local practice' and 'enduring struggles', as highlighted in chapter seven (7.1). I returned to the earlier work of Lave and Wenger (1991) concerning 'legitimate peripheral participation', in order to explore further the interaction between the student and others. Utilising this concept, I found that students as 'new comers' were assisted by placement supervisors as 'old timers' (see chapter two, 2.5.2 and chapter seven, 7.2.2), if there was a reciprocal relationship, similar to a 'dual' learning process (Fazzi and Rosignoli, 2016, see chapter six, 6.4).

These theories were an essential scaffold for supporting and forming my ideas concerning the study, and I would assert that this offers a new framework for understanding how students develop their professional identity. The contribution of this study to the theoretical knowledge of how professional identity is developed, can be viewed in the diagram overleaf.

This diagram illustrates how the study has evolved since the earlier discussion and diagram in chapter two. The use of circles rather than straight lines depicts how the student and their prior and current personal experiences are central to the process of their developing professional identity. The surrounding circles signify the interaction between the student, peers, placement personnel, placement environment and wider society, and depict how students navigate these relationships and practices in the process of developing their professional identity. This framework is further illustrated in the next section concerning implications for practice.

## Illustration Five



## **8.4 Policy and Practice Implications of the Study**

From the analysis within this study a number of practice and policy implications can be drawn. This was achieved utilising the theoretical framework outlined in chapter two and in the preceding section and diagram (8.3). I will now explore the policy and practice implications for each of the three main themes from chapters five, six and seven, and using Jenkins' (2004, 2008) three orders; individual, interaction, institutional and Houston's (2014) fourth order, 'societal'.

### **8.4.1 Individual**

Firstly, the study highlights the importance of a student's prior experiences, such as their upbringing, in the development of their professional identity. In particular, those students who had substantive previous experience as a service user or a carer (see chapter five, 5.2.3), as supported by the research of Doron (2012) and Smith (2014). For example, students within the study explained how they utilised this first-hand service user experience positively, but often required the support of others on the course and in placement to achieve this effectively. The majority of the students in the sample were encouraged and supported to disclose their previous and current personal experiences by their placement supervisors, but this was met with apprehension by some students, especially concerning how the information would be utilised for assessment, and how it would be perceived by others. This concern regarding the perception of others was also evident in how a student's gender, age, disability and physical appearance plays a crucial role in influencing the development of their professional identity. Furthermore, the physicality of their identity impacted upon how they were viewed by other professionals and service users.

Essentially this illuminated the importance of the embodiment of identity (as researched by; Tangenberg, 2002, Northcut, 2014, Cameron and McDermott, 2007), and how this influenced the student's development of professional identity.

For all of the students in the study, more support and preparation in navigating the impact of these experiences, whether negative or positive would have been beneficial. For instance, students could be supported through training concerning how much to disclose about their personal experiences and how to reflect upon these past experiences. Indeed, some of the students spoke about the support that could be offered to them by the programme, especially how those with service user and carer experiences are perceived by others. In particular students advocated for the need for 'spaces' within the course that gave them time to safely reflect upon these experiences, and how they might be used positively within the course. One student suggested that students should be encouraged to do so, by those facilitating teaching sharing more about their own personal experiences and journey, in developing their professional identity. For me this has stressed the importance of course staff and tutors sharing personal profiles, and offering a more open dialogue concerning their previous and current personal experiences and motivations to undertake a career in social work. This also highlights the benefits of further training and awareness raising with supervisors, practice educators and other professionals, concerning how these previous experiences are of benefit, rather than a risk, in social work practice (as discussed further in 8.4.6).

This study has demonstrated that students are motivated from these prior experiences to pursue a career in social work, similar to the research of Cree (2003, 2013) in her examination of social workers' narratives. As a result of these previous experiences, students in the sample appeared to share similar experiences and values (Capital) which they were able to utilise in the field of social work (Bourdieu, 1990, see chapter two: 2.4.3), where students had a 'feel for the game' (Grenfell 2008:58). Students expressed how they already had the skills and values consistent with 'being' a social worker, but required the opportunities offered by the course to gain the qualification and further cement their professional identity. Students in the sample explained how they utilised the course and placement as a vehicle to achieving the social work qualification and in further developing their professional identity.

Therefore, as promoted by Lave and Holland (2009), students negotiated their identity further in relation to others and the agency through socialisation into the profession. Thus social work training is a means of building upon and accrediting already existing skills, experience and knowledge, but the course is required to gain the qualification and to further reinforce the student's professional identity (see discussion in chapter five, 5.2.2).

#### **8.4.2 Interaction with Peers**

Students within the sample described how crucial their relationships with peers were in exploring how these previous and current personal experiences might be utilised in practice (as described in the previous section). In many ways this assisted them to build their resilience, as proposed by Smith (2013) and Doron (2014), but most importantly they created informal spaces with their peers to reflect upon these experiences. This relationship with peers was fundamental (as supported in the research of Mosek and Ben-Oz, 2011 and Schreiber, 1989, see chapter six, 6.3), since the power imbalance was substantially reduced in these relationships. Students described this was because all the other personnel within the placement and in the course had the power to assess and potentially 'fail' them (Finch, 2015). Essentially students felt 'safer' to explore experiences in placement with their peers, or even their prior experiences and personal circumstances, and how these impacted upon their professional identity and development. This finding supports the need for courses to encourage, promote and facilitate these informal spaces where at all possible. From discussion with students in the sample, this needs to be in addition to social media spaces, as students benefitted more from meeting face-to-face, thus the need to encourage informal support groups with peers.

#### **8.4.3 Interaction with Placement Supervisors**

Placement supervisors within the study expressed how they valued the life experiences of students, and some of these supervisors shared their own life experiences to encourage students to do the same. This was evident in the narratives of placement supervisors based in non-local authority settings, where

they discussed how they valued students with first-hand experience as service users and carers. For students in the study, this encouragement was useful but had more impact upon their professional identity, when placement supervisors also shared comparable values, experiences, motivations and at times political stances and theoretical perspectives with the student. Placement supervisors were portrayed by students as key to their development of professional identity, if they shared these qualities, coupled with being open to sharing their own life experiences with students. Therefore, if this reciprocal relationship worked well between the placement supervisor and student this was a significant factor in assisting the student in developing their professional identity (see chapter six, 6.4).

The importance of this reciprocal relationship was also highlighted by Lefevre (2005:576, see chapter three, 3.4.2 and chapter six, 6.4), in her research concerning 'expectation clashes', between the student and their practice educator. This 'expectation clash' could be extended to the relationship between students and their placement supervisor, where within the study the dual role of practice educators and placement supervisors was found to be a positive experience for students (chapter six, 6.5). In particular practice educators in this dual role were able to support students to develop their resilience and confidence through supervision, to reflect upon their previous and current placement experiences.

#### **8.4.4 Interaction with Placement Personnel and Other Professionals**

The study highlighted that it was not just one individual that positively influenced the development of a student's professional identity, but instead it tended to be the team of personnel around the student in their placement. I found this to be consistent with my own experience, where the student is placed with a team or an organisational setting, and not just an individual placement supervisor. This was essential if the student did not find their placement supervisor supportive, as found by Bogo (2010), where students sought out the support of others if their placement supervisor was unavailable or unapproachable. This prompted me to add conflict resolution as a topic to my teaching to assist students in preparing for such eventualities (see 8.4.6).

In terms of socialisation, the interaction a student has with other professionals is pivotal, and it was clear from this study that professional identity develops further when students have the opportunity to explain their role, values and theoretical perspectives to other professionals like those within Health. For example, students within predominantly health settings strived to explain their role and professional identity to health professionals, this in turn assisted them to feel more confident in their practice. Thus this supports the idea of placing students in multi-professional settings and the value of students being based in teams which are not solely serviced by social workers. Therefore, promoting the efficacy of utilising the independent sector for placements, where students can interact with other professionals including support workers and volunteers, as found by Scholar *et al.*, (2014) in their research.

Overall, students in this study had mostly positive experiences of their placement personnel, especially their placement supervisor who assisted their overall development. Whilst placement personnel were important to the development of a student's professional identity, the placement and organisational context also played a critical role in this development.

#### **8.4.5 Institutional/Societal**

During the interviews for this study all the students commented upon how they felt their placement was a good learning opportunity, which raises the importance of matching students to placement environments that are fully equipped to meet their learning needs. For example, the importance of developing placements with adequate support from placement personnel (as described in the conclusions of this chapter, 8.6). Students within the study described various forms of contemporary working practices and bureaucratic systems within their placement agencies. In some instances, they spoke about these positively, such as hot-desking presenting unexpected opportunities to observe a range of styles of working, and systems offering frameworks for 'best' practice (Bee, 2015). On the other hand, hot-desking and remote working was described by students as potentially leading to isolation and a lack of support, whilst bureaucratic systems may restrict the time required for relationship building with service users (Ruch, *et al.*, 2010, see chapter seven, 7.2.2). These findings have also been supported by research and surveys concerning social workplace environments (BASW, 2013, Isaac, 2016 and see chapter seven, 7.2.1).

Central to the placement environment was the style employed by the placement supervisor in their work with students. Narratives from the supervisors revealed that challenging working practices might be manageable if students are supported and encouraged by their supervisors and other placement personnel. Supervisors' styles of support varied from expecting students to conform, to supervisors who actively supported students to confidently challenge the organisation. All the supervisors within the study agreed that students need to develop resilience and emotional intelligence to manage these challenges and tensions within their practice (Kinman and Grant, 2014, Beddoe, 2013). Again students explained they required 'space' to reflect upon these practices and develop their resilience and confidence. Students explored how this 'space' could be provided by supervisors and practice educators in supervision, although they described how the wider agency could also provide this space (consistent with the research of Biggart *et al.*, 2016), either formally by means of training and action learning sets, or informally by allowing for team members to support one another (as discussed in chapter six, 6.6).

All of the supervisors in the study were keen to offer students this space within supervision for critical reflection and as stated in chapter seven, supervisors expressed a wish to meet with the student group before placement to enable them to critically reflect and prepare for the realities of working with agencies (see 8.4.6).

From a wider 'societal' perspective (Houston, 2014), although Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs) recruitment initiatives are often focused upon widening participation, the current appetite for fast-track social work programmes may

alter the demographics of students enrolled on higher education courses. For instance, in my own institution the admissions tariff for the undergraduate social work course has been raised considerably to compete with similar HEIs in the region. Thus increasing the points required from previous study that students need in order to be eligible to apply for the course, which could potentially exclude students from more socially disadvantaged backgrounds and mature students who are returning to study. In addition, it is assumed in my institution that those students that require more support as a result of previous experiences or who are not able to achieve these higher tariffs, are a potential risk to receiving favourable student satisfaction results (National Student Survey). This might result in students within programmes such as 'Frontline' and Step-up', having very different placement experiences, as I explored in chapter one (1.9, McNicholl, 2016b). Students enrolled on HEI courses could experience greater financial costs, should the bursary and daily placement fee reduce or disappear, as appears to be proposed for the future. Moreover, I anticipate that the implementation of the Children and Social Work Bill (2016) will have a significant impact upon social work education, but at the time of writing this thesis there is only speculation regarding its application.

#### **8.4.6 Developments in my Own Practice**

Arising from this study I have made a number of changes to my own practice. As stated in chapter seven, placement supervisors offered to meet with students to discuss the realities of practice. For the previous two years I have made use of these offers from supervisors and other practitioners, by facilitating workshops, which have been positively received by students. In particular

students fed back that they had valued sessions concerning; 'preparing for statutory social work' (such as how to work positively within legal frameworks and bureaucratic systems), 'developing resilience' and workshops that have assisted students to make more links between theory and practice. As students in the study explained that they wanted more teaching concerning the realities of social work practice, I will continue to devise teaching opportunities for practitioners. Recently this included inviting practitioners to speak to students regarding how they can further develop their relationships with service users, through discussion around 'direct work' and 'advocacy'. In addition, I have initiated new opportunities for inviting alumni to meet with students to assist in their preparation for statutory placement work and explore ideas they have regarding the creation of informal 'spaces' for reflective work. I have also been encouraging students to establish their own informal spaces, especially amongst their peers.

Within my own teaching with students in preparation for placement I have introduced material concerning conflict resolution and managing 'use of self' in practice and writing. The latter has included when and how to share personal information and experiences. In my work with placement supervisors and practice educators I have continued to focus upon the importance of supporting students in placement settings, with the addition of emphasising the potential challenges students face in terms of disclosing their previous experiences and current personal circumstances. This has included addressing in teaching, how students might be perceived by others when sharing personal information.

This study has been fundamental in instigating improvements in my practice concerning placement allocation, which is founded upon the new insights I have acquired into students' experiences of independent and local authority settings. For example, I have been exploring the efficacy of final year placements in independent agency settings where students might gain experience of working with other professionals, including support workers and volunteers.

Following the submission of this study I will disseminate a summary of my main findings contained within this chapter to a range of local agencies, with the intention of this information being shared with placement supervisors and practice educators and other professionals. I will distribute a summary to participants of the study who at times I see in practice and who regularly ask how the study has developed. At an institutional level, I will promote the opportunity for more support and training for placement supervisors. In addition, I will provide further workshops for placement supervisors and practice educators regarding their role and expectations of the course, and to encourage discussions concerning student experiences of placement settings. I will achieve this by presenting the findings of this study at practice educator and placement supervisor developmental days, with a particular focus upon the importance of informal spaces and the reciprocal relationship between the placement supervisor and student.

## **8.5 Contribution to Knowledge**

### **8.5.1 Introduction**

Whilst I have summarised the main findings, theoretical framework and implications for practice of the study in this final chapter, I now want to draw the attention of the reader to four main areas, which I argue present a significant contribution to the understanding of how a student develops their professional identity.

### **8.5.2 Individual**

Firstly, the study highlights that a student's prior experience, particularly first-hand service user experience, is central to how their professional identity develops, as illustrated in the diagram in this chapter. Virtually all of the participants in the study highlighted the importance of prior experience in the shaping of their professional identity. This finding is broadly in line with this study's use of Jenkins' (2003) first order of 'individual', Bourdieu's (1990) habitus, and Lave and Holland's (2001, 2009) use of history in person (see 8.2). Participants explored how these experiences could be utilised positively within practice with the support of others, especially peers and placement supervisors. Students described challenges and caution regarding when, and how, to disclose prior and current experiences, particularly when these experiences involved first-hand service user and carer experiences. Key to this finding was the power that students perceived others to possess, and their concern about how this knowledge of their personal circumstances might be employed in assessing their practice. In addition to these significant personal experiences, students described how the embodiment of their identity impacted upon their work with service users and how they were perceived by other professionals.

### **8.5.3 Interaction**

Secondly, student participants explained how they required 'informal' spaces to share these experiences and reflect upon them in a 'safe' environment (see chapter six). These informal spaces were portrayed by students to be most effective if they were with peers who shared similar experiences, and where they did not feel judged or assessed. This finding is consistent with the research of Mosek and Ben-Oz (2011) and Schreiber (1989), who highlighted the positive impact of peer relationships within social work courses. These spaces were created by students in the study in addition to social media (Facebook and Twitter), and the formal groups and support offered by the course, such as tutor groups. These informal groups were described by students as essential in the development of their professional identity, as they could discuss experiences with their peers without this impacting upon the assessment of their practice. Students explained how this space could be created with their placement supervisors if they experienced a reciprocal relationship and where the perceived power imbalance was addressed positively by the placement supervisor.

### **8.5.4 Placement Supervisor**

The majority of the students described the importance of a reciprocal relationship between themselves and their placement supervisors. This was often evidenced by what students perceived as shared comparable life experiences, personal qualities, values, and even a theoretical lens of viewing the world. This finding corresponds with the study's use of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991), where placement supervisors as 'old

timers', take the role of encouraging and supporting the professional development and practice of students as 'new comers' (see chapter six). Thus assisting students to understand and navigate placement agency systems, policies and procedures. Placement supervisors also created 'spaces' for reflective discussion with the student concerning their developing practice and professional identity. Therefore, this study's findings are broadly in harmony with the recent research of Terum and Heggen (2016) that:

“Central to professional socialisation is the interaction between teachers/supervisors and students, as well as the interaction among students. A challenge facing social work education is developing knowledge of how students' perceptions of teachers and supervisors are created and of how students' motivation and dedication can be cultivated”.

(Terum and Heggen 2016: 852).

Crucial within this relationship was the use of power held by the placement supervisor, which was often exhibited in their way of working with the student. Supervisors who appeared to exert the most power were those who adopted a 'conformist' approach. Here they appeared to impose a kind of surveillance (Foucault, 1980) upon the student, ensuring that they 'fitted' with the agency identity and culture. Whereas other supervisors adopted a technique of supporting the student to develop their own identity and style of working, an approach favoured by most students in the study.

### **8.5.5 Institutional/Societal**

To create this reciprocal relationship and reflective spaces, the study emphasised the crucial role the placement agency has to play in supporting this practice. Students require a supportive placement environment and learning culture to positively assist in the development of their professional identity. As argued by Bogo (2010, see chapter seven) and Biggart *et al.*, (2016), the placement organisation and placement personnel are accountable for providing a wider culture and context for supporting the 'space' required for students to develop their professional identity. This support from the placement organisation is pivotal if the student does not experience a reciprocal relationship with their placement supervisor, or if their supervisor is unavailable. Furthermore, this support is necessary in order to enable the reciprocal relationship to form between the student and their placement supervisor, such as allowing time for reflection and supervision. This finding is compatible with the research of Ruch (2009), in which she advocated for the creation of 'contained' reflective spaces within practice agencies. Where organisations achieved this supportive and reflective space in the study, this also allowed for the 'time' that students felt was necessary to develop relationships with service users and carers, rather than restricting this time with the introduction of overly bureaucratic systems. When there was a lack of support from the agency for these spaces, both students and placement supervisors keenly felt the power exerted by the agency to restrict their practice within bureaucratic systems.

I propose that these four areas should be explored in further detail within future research as outlined in the next section.

## **8.6 Recommendations for Future Research Concluding Thoughts**

### **8.6.1 Context to Implications for Future Research**

Prior to exploring future research, I will summarise how I worked to eliminate the limitations of this study (as detailed in chapter four), as this provides the context for my rationale concerning proposals for future research.

The first challenge was my existing relationship with the participants and the lack of a comparison sample with an alternative institution. My relationship with participants transformed into a strength of the study, since participants appeared to share more of their experiences and views as a result of this relationship (4.5). Therefore, I achieved saturation of the data and was able to effectively utilise grounded theory to analyse the findings (Charmaz, 2014). In addition, congruent with my auto-biographical approach, I used 'reflexivity' (Burr, 2003) by maintaining a journal of my potential impact upon the participants and the data. This process also informed the data analysis and constructivist use of grounded theory. As Charmaz (2014) advocates for the use of 'memos' or a diary to assist in the 'construction' of the data, and use in interpretation of meaning and analysis (chapter four, 4.5), I utilised this journal and my reflections a great deal within the three analysis chapters (five, six and seven).

Another limitation is that the research was completed with postgraduate students, so the findings cannot be generalised to the experiences of undergraduate students. I would have liked to have interviewed undergraduate students in my own institution or even at an alternative institution, which could

have offered an understanding of their experiences of the development of professional identity for comparison.

Although I had reservations regarding the limited number of supervisors, the five interviews generated a generous amount of data for analysis. These supervisors were also from a range of organisations, and the fact that three supervisors were working with three of the student participants, added to the richness of the data. Thus in the findings I was able to explore the benefits that students and supervisors felt existed through the process of their relationship, and their interaction had on the development of professional identity. The student sample was also typical of a social work cohort in terms of demography as reported by Skills for Care (2016) in their research (chapter four, 4.7).

The decision to provide participants with a summary of their interview immediately following the narrative by email and a follow-up email at the end of placement, was important in ensuring that I had understood the meaning of their narrative, but also in ascertaining if there was anything further they wished to add (4.9). This process resulted in 'participant validation' (Reason and Rowan, 1981 and Silverman, 2013), a process I would replicate in future research and in any extension of this study.

Although my desire to undertake a longitudinal study was compromised by the time available, I found that interviewing students who had already settled into their placement, and prior to their formative portfolio deadline was advantageous, as this resulted in students being able to offer detailed information, as their experiences of placement and placement personnel was

fresh in their minds. Thus despite my research question concerning the impact of the organisation seeming novel to some participants (see chapter seven 7.1), they were quickly able to make connections with their current experiences of placement and offer their views. Had I interviewed participants following completion of the placement, some of this information might have been forgotten and I would have most likely collected entirely different data. Moreover, the aim of my study was to explore how students 'develop' their professional identity as an ongoing process, rather than how it has 'developed' at the end of placement. In addition, I set out to undertake the study to improve upon my own practice with students and how placements are designed and delivered, which I aim to elucidate further with future research.

### **8.6.2 Future Research**

Taking the challenges of the prior section into consideration, there are a number of areas that this study has highlighted that would benefit from further research. Firstly, the impact of embodiment on the development of a student's professional identity. This would include, the impact of physicality, age, gender, disability and even the impact of what students choose to wear (Scholar, 2013) and how students elected to present themselves to minimise the impact of their physicality and power when working with service users.

Whilst this study makes considerable progress on bridging the gap in research on the impact of placement supervisors on the development of professional identity, more research would be advantageous with a larger number of supervisors from a wider range of agency settings, to investigate, in particular,

their role in supporting students and the ingredients required in terms of comparable qualities and establishing a reciprocal relationship. This could encompass Leferve's (2005) ideas around 'expectation clashes' with placement supervisors and placement personnel and the styles employed by supervisors in working with students.

I have an ambition to extend and build upon this study in the future by undertaking a longitudinal study, exploring how students develop their professional identity over a longer period of time. This would involve interviewing students throughout their course experience, at the end of their placement, and in their first year in employment. This would require the support of agency personnel to consent to conducting interviews with supervisors and practice educators throughout this process, including the potential for interviewing other professionals and management staff in agencies. A study on this scale could encompass undergraduate and postgraduate students from more than one HEI, and personnel in both local authorities and independent sector organisations. This would incorporate the opportunity to not only interview more placement supervisors, but also more students, with a greater possibility of interviewing students who experience failure within the course.

The findings of this research have energised my original aspiration to undertake a longitudinal study with other agencies and to disseminate the findings of this study. Thus I have already begun to explore with other agencies how I might realise my aspiration to extend the study.

### **8.6.3 Final Thoughts**

My original motivation for undertaking this study was ignited by my personal experiences, thus many of the proposals elucidated in this conclusion relate to improving upon my own practice. Similarly, my ambition to continue this research in the form of a longitudinal study, is a continuous personal project.

At the conclusion of this study I find myself returning to the significance of one specific quote from 'student three', which I assert summarises some of the main findings of this thesis, and the views of participants within the study. In particular, the quote highlights the importance of life experiences and the process of professional socialisation in developing professional identity:

**“utilising all those life experiences you are building on all that and then you are using them to your advantage together with, shaped by the values of social work as well. You become like, an item, you can see you are working towards a finished project”.**

## **Appendix One – Ethical Approval**

### **Letter of Approval**

12 September 2014

#### **CONFIDENTIAL**

Julia Wheeler  
School of Health Professions  
Faculty of Health and Human Sciences  
Plymouth University

Dear Julia

#### **Application for Approval by Education Research Ethics Sub-committee**

***Reference Number: 13/14-71***

***Application Title: How do social work students develop their professional identity?***

I am pleased to inform you that the Education Research Ethics Sub-committee has granted approval to you to conduct this research.

Please note that this approval is for three years, after which you will be required to seek extension of existing approval.

Please note that should any MAJOR changes to your research design occur which effect the ethics of procedures involved you must inform the Committee. Please contact Claire Butcher on (01752) 585337 or by email [claire.butcher@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:claire.butcher@plymouth.ac.uk)

Yours sincerely



**Professor Linda la Velle**  
Chair, Education Research Ethics Sub-committee -  
Plymouth Institute of Education  
Faculty of Arts and Humanities

**APPLICATION FOR INSTITUTE ETHICAL  
APPROVAL**

**Part A: Ethics Cover Sheet**

**Part B: Ethical Review Statement**

**Part C: Ethics Protocol Proforma**



**This form consists of three sections. Parts A and B must be completed in ALL cases. Depending upon the method of data collection / analysis, Part C may also be required (see the Ethics Review Statement).**

All documentation should be submitted **electronically** to Claire Butcher, Administrative Assistant (Research), tel: 85337, [claire.butcher@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:claire.butcher@plymouth.ac.uk). At the same time, a hard copy of this application form, signed by all relevant parties, should also be submitted to Claire Butcher.

**Part A: ETHICS COVER SHEET**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | <p>Principal Investigator (staff or research student)*:<br/>         Name: Julia Wheeler<br/>         Email: <a href="mailto:Julia.wheeler@plymouth.ac.uk">Julia.wheeler@plymouth.ac.uk</a><br/>         Address for written correspondence:<br/>         Plymouth University,<br/>         9 Portland Villas,<br/>         Drakes Circus<br/>         Plymouth</p>   |
| 2 | <p>Other members of project team who will have access to the research data<br/> <i>(Please indicate School of each named individual, including collaborators external to the Faculty/University):</i></p> <p>(a) Julia Wheeler – School of Health Professions, but student within the Institute of Education<br/>         (b) Other staff investigators – N/A</p> <p>(c) Director of Studies/other supervisors (Where Principal Investigator is a research student)<br/>         Dr Anthony Gilbert – School of Health Professions<br/>         Dr Julie Anderson – Institute of Education</p> <p><i>*Note: Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that all staff employed on projects (including research assistants, technicians and clerical staff) act in accordance with the University's ethical principles, the design of the research described in this proposal and any conditions attached to its approval.</i></p> |
| 3 | <p>Type of research (tick one):</p> <p>Staff research <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>MPhil / PhD research <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>EdD research <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 4 | Project Title: How do social work students develop their professional identity?   |
| 5 | <p>Type of application:</p> <p>Initial application <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Resubmission with amendments <input type="checkbox"/> Version Number:</p> <p>Amendment to approved application * <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Renewal <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>* For full details of the amendments procedure, please see the guidance notes</i></p>   |
| 6 | <p>Duration of project with dates*:</p> <p>As this is part of my EdD which I began in September 2011, my proposed end date for completion is September 2016.</p> <p><i>*Approval is granted for the duration of projects or for a maximum of three years. An application for renewal will be required for projects exceeding three years in duration.</i></p>   |
| 7 | <p>Summary of aims, objectives and methods (max 250 words)</p> <p><b>Aims and objectives</b></p> <p>To explore how social work students develop their professional identity in preparation for qualified practice. To achieve this aim, the research will explore the impact of the placement supervisor and agency context upon the student's development of professional identity.</p> <p><b>Methods</b></p> <p>The research will involve a twin site project of final year social work students and their respective placement supervisors. Utilising a case based design, participants will be interviewed using a qualitative approach and drawing upon the principles of grounded theory.</p> <p>The target sample is six students in each site and their respective placement supervisors (24). Students and supervisors will voluntarily agree to participate, which could result in more students volunteering than required. If this occurs, students will be selected on the basis of obtaining a typical sample. To assist this process, the researcher will collect demographic details from the students.</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews of participants will be undertaken half way through the final practice placement. Participants will receive a summary of their interview, followed by the opportunity to clarify or add to the summary at the end of the practice placement.</p> <p>Participants will be interviewed using the following topics;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How does a student's experience prior to the course assist or hinder their professional identity (Bourdieu, 1993, Cree, 2013, Hussein and Moriarty et al, 2008, Scanlon et al, 2007)</li> <li>➤ How does a student's professional identity change over the duration of their final practice placement (Valutis, Rubin and Bell, 2012, Miller, 2010,2013, Wilson,2010, 2012, 2013)</li> <li>➤ How is a student's professional identity affected by their interaction with their placement supervisor (Barretti, 2004, 2007, Bogo, 2006, Shlomo, Levy and Itzhaky, 2012)</li> </ul> |

|                        |  |                           |         |                           |
|------------------------|--|---------------------------|---------|---------------------------|
|                        | <p>➤ How might a student's professional identity be affected by their experience of the placement setting and working practises within that setting (Bogo, Litvack and Mishna, 2010 &amp; Oliver, 2013)</p> <p><b>(256 words, excluding references and headings)</b></p>   |                           |         |                           |
| 8                      | <p>What will be the outcomes of this project?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact on each programme site in terms of design of the course and enhancing both the student and supervisor experience of the programmes.</li> <li>• Building upon the knowledge of the professional socialisation of social work students</li> <li>• Building on the understanding of the formation of social work identity.</li> <li>• The completion of a thesis based upon the aims, objectives and methods above</li> <li>• A summary report of the main findings to be made available to participants (students and supervisors), Programme Leads and Agency Managers that consented to participants being interviewed.</li> <li>• Dissemination through conference papers, seminars and peer reviewed journals, such as Social Work Education.</li> </ul> |                           |         |                           |
| 9                      | <p>Is the project subject to an <b>external</b> funding bid?      <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (please complete questions 10- 16)<br/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (please go to Section B)</p>   |                           |         |                           |
| 10                     | Funding body:  |                           |         |                           |
| 11                     | Bid amount:  |                           |         |                           |
| 12                     | <p>Bid status:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not yet submitted                      Submission deadline:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Submitted, decision pending</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bid granted</p>   |                           |         |                           |
| 13                     | <p>University Project Finance Team costing approved with Dean's signature?</p> <p>Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>.              No: <input type="checkbox"/> (Please contact the University Project Finance Team as soon as possible)</p>  |                           |         |                           |
| 14                     | <p>Has the funding bid undergone peer review?      <input type="checkbox"/> Yes                      <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>   |                           |         |                           |
| 15                     | <p>Partners &amp; Institutions:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Name (including title)</td> <td>School:</td> <td>Institute / Organisation:</td> </tr> </table>   | Name (including title)    | School: | Institute / Organisation: |
| Name (including title) | School:  | Institute / Organisation: |         |                           |
| 16                     | <p>Is there a potential conflict of interest in the research arising from the source of the funding for the research (for example, a tobacco company funding a study of the effects of smoking on lung function)?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yes/No</p> <p>If the answer to the above question is yes, please outline the nature of the potential conflict of interest and how you will address this:</p>   |                           |         |                           |

**Declaration:**

To the best of our knowledge and belief, this research conforms to the ethical principles laid down by Plymouth University and (where applicable) by the professional body specified in C.11 below.

Principal Investigator: Signature Date

Director of Studies (only where Principal Investigator is a postgraduate student): Signature Date

**Part B: ETHICAL REVIEW STATEMENT**

**The purpose of this statement is to clarify whether the proposed research requires ethical clearance through an Ethics Protocol. Please read the relevant section of the guidance notes before you complete your statement.**

**Please indicate all the categories into which your proposed research fits:**

|   | <b>Data collection / analysis involved:</b>   | <b>Action required:</b>  |                                     |
|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | This study does not involve data collection from or about human participants.   | ➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement and add a brief (one page) description of your research and intended data collection methods. Part C not required.</i>   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 2 | This study involves the analysis or synthesis of data obtained from/about human subjects where such data are in the public domain (i.e. available in public archives and/or previously published) | ➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement and add a brief (one page) description of your research, the nature of the data and intended data collection methods. Part C not required.</i>                                 | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 3 | This study involves the analysis of data obtained from/about human participants where the data has been previously collected but is not in the public domain                                      | ➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement</i><br>➤ <i>Please complete Part C – Ethics Protocol Proforma</i>  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 4 | This study draws upon data already collected under a previous ethical review but involves utilising the data in ways not cleared with the research participants                                   | ➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement</i><br>➤ <i>Please complete Part C – Ethics Protocol Proforma</i><br>➤ <i>Submit copy of original ethics protocol and additional consent materials (if relevant) attached.</i> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 5 | This study involves new data collection from/about human participants   | ➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement</i><br>➤ <i>Please complete Part C – Ethics Protocol Proforma</i>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
|  |  | ➤ <i>Submit copies of all information for participants AND consent forms in style and format appropriate to the participants together with your research instruments.</i> |  |
|--|--|---|--|

**Please Note:** Should the applicant wish to alter in any significant regard the nature of their research following ethical approval, an application for amendment should be submitted to the committee together with a covering letter setting out the reasons for the amendment. The application should be made with reference to one or more of the categories laid out in this document. ‘Significant’ should be interpreted as meaning changing in some fundamental way the research purposes and processes in whole or part.

## Part C: ETHICS PROTOCOL PROFORMA

Please indicate how you will ensure this research conforms with each clause of the University of Plymouth’s *Principles for Research Involving Human Participants*. Please complete each section with a statement that addresses each of the ethical principles set out below. Please note that you should provide the degree of detail suggested. Each section will expand to accommodate this information.

***Please refer to Guidance Notes when completing this proforma.***

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | <p><b>Informed consent</b></p> <p><i>Please attach copies of all draft information / documents, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules, etc intended for the participants, and list below. When it is not possible to submit research instruments (e.g. use of action research methods) the instruments should be listed together with the reason for the non-submission.</i></p>  |
|   | <p>All participants, Agency Managers and Programme Leads will be provided with an information sheet explaining the aims, objectives and methodology of the project. This summary will be included within the invitation for participants to volunteer for the research. Written permission will be obtained from the Programme Leads and Agency Managers before participants are invited volunteer and complete their own consent form.</p> <p>Draft documentation enclosed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information for participants.</li> <li>• Permission form for Programme Leads</li> <li>• Permission form for Agency Managers</li> <li>• Consent form for participants</li> <li>• Form for voluntary participation of students</li> <li>• Interview schedule – draft prior to pilot</li> </ul> |
| 2 | <p><b>Openness and honesty</b></p>   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <p>It is generally accepted that research with human participants would not involve deception. However if this is not the case, deception is permissible only where it can be shown that all three of the following conditions have been met in full.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deception is completely unavoidable if the purpose of the research is to be achieved.</li> <li>2. The research objective has strong scientific merit.</li> <li>3. Any potential harm arising from the proposed deception can be effectively neutralised or reversed by the proposed debriefing procedures.</li> </ol> <p><u>If deception is involved</u>, applicants are required to provide a detailed justification and to supply the names of two independent assessors whom the Committee can approach for advice. Please attach relevant documentation and list below.</p>  |
|   | <p>This research project and the methods planned do not require any form of deception. The researcher will seek to act with honesty and openness throughout the research, from data collection, analysis and writing of the thesis. This will be explained clearly to the participants by use of the documentation listed above, and the researcher will explain the aims, objectives and methods of research whenever required. This openness and honesty also applies to the researcher's Director of Studies and Supervisor, who will have access to the data and analysis.</p> <p>The two site design of the project reduces the level of bias by the researcher only being actively involved in one programme site. In the case of the researcher's own site, the researcher will not be involved in the assessment of students who volunteer for the project and this will be clarified in the documentation to participants (see attached).</p> <p>Finally, given that the researcher understands that ethical issues and dilemmas could occur at any point during the research, the researcher will keep a reflective journal. This will assist in exploring such dilemmas and aide discussion with her Director of Studies to ascertain how to appropriately address such dilemmas.</p> |
| 3 | <p><b>Right to withdraw</b><br/> <i>Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding their right to withdraw from the research.</i></p>   |
|   | <p>Participants will be informed that they may withdraw at any point in the process and are under no obligation to offer an explanation or reasons for this withdrawal. Although this right is limited to the stage before data analysis, as the anonymisation of data during the analysis phase will make it impossible to identify and remove the individual participant's data.</p> <p>All participating students will be informed that they have a right to withdraw their data at any point of the process without affecting their relationship with University staff and the programme. This includes making it clear that participation in the research or withdrawal at any point will not impact positively or negatively upon their progress and</p>   |

|  | <p>assessment within the social work programme.</p> <p>All participating supervisors will be informed that they have the right to withdraw their data at any point of the process without affecting their relationship with University staff and the programme.</p>   |                 |                          |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |
|--|---|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 4  | <p><b>Protection from Harm</b></p> <p><i>Indicate here any vulnerability that may be present because of the:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>participants e.g. children or vulnerable adults.</i></li> <li>○ <i>nature of the research process.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>If you tick any box below, please indicate in "further information" how you will ensure protection from harm.</i></p> <p><i>Does this research involve:</i></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td><i>Children</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Vulnerable adults</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Sensitive topics</i></td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Permission of a gatekeeper in place of consent from individuals</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Subjects being academically assessed by the researcher</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Research that is conducted without full and informed consent</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Research that could induce psychological stress and anxiety</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Intrusive intervention (eg, vigorous physical exercise)</i></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>   | <i>Children</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Vulnerable adults</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Sensitive topics</i> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <i>Permission of a gatekeeper in place of consent from individuals</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Subjects being academically assessed by the researcher</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Research that is conducted without full and informed consent</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Research that could induce psychological stress and anxiety</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Intrusive intervention (eg, vigorous physical exercise)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Children</i>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  |                 |                          |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |
| <i>Vulnerable adults</i>   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |                 |                          |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |
| <i>Sensitive topics</i>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |                 |                          |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |
| <i>Permission of a gatekeeper in place of consent from individuals</i> | <input type="checkbox"/>  |                 |                          |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |
| <i>Subjects being academically assessed by the researcher</i>          | <input type="checkbox"/>  |                 |                          |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |
| <i>Research that is conducted without full and informed consent</i>    | <input type="checkbox"/>  |                 |                          |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |
| <i>Research that could induce psychological stress and anxiety</i>     | <input type="checkbox"/>  |                 |                          |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |
| <i>Intrusive intervention (eg, vigorous physical exercise)</i>         | <input type="checkbox"/>  |                 |                          |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |
|  | <p><b>Further information:</b></p> <p>It is anticipated that students and their placement supervisors could discuss sensitive information concerning their own experience within the interviews. For instance, students and supervisors might talk about challenges and difficulties they have or are currently experiencing with their agency, university programme or with their respective student/supervisor. If this occurs the researcher will maintain confidentiality as detailed in section 10 of this form. However, the researcher might find themselves in the position of advising the participants to talk to either their Agency Manager or Programme Lead regarding these issues. The only time that the researcher will need to discuss these issues with an Agency Manager or Programme Lead, is if participants, clients or service users are at risk of significant harm. In such an instance the researcher will inform the participant of this need and the rationale for needing to speak to the Agency Manager or Programme Lead.</p> <p><i>Do ALL researchers in contact with children and vulnerable adults have current DBS clearance?</i>      Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>.    No: <input type="checkbox"/>    N/A: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>If Yes, Please give disclosure number(s)</i></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><i>Name</i></th> <th><i>Number</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | <i>Name</i>     | <i>Number</i>            |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |
| <i>Name</i>  | <i>Number</i>   |                 |                          |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |
|  |   |                 |                          |                          |                          |                         |                                     |  |                          |   |                          |   |                          |  |                          |  |                          |

|    |  |
|----|--|
|    | If No, please explain:   |
| 5  | <p><b>External Clearance</b><br/> <i>I undertake to obtain written permission from the Head of any external institutions (school, social service, prison, etc) in which research will be conducted. (please check box)</i></p>   |
| 6  | <p><b>Participant/Subject Involvement</b><br/> <i>Has this group of participants/subjects already been the subject of research in the current academic year?</i> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>   |
| 7  | <p><b>Payment</b><br/> <i>Please provide details of any payments, either financial or in kind, made to participants for participation, compensation for time given, etc.</i></p>   |
|    | N/A  |
| 8  | <p><b>Debriefing</b><br/> <i>When? By whom? How? Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding debriefing.</i></p>   |
|    | <p>The research process will involve sending a summary of each participant's interview to the corresponding participant. This is to give the participant the opportunity to confirm the content is accurate and the opportunity to discuss further at a follow up meeting in the form of Skype, or other similar electronic format. In addition a summary of the main findings will be made available for all participants and the Programme Leads and Agency Managers who agreed to participants being interviewed.</p> |
| 9  | <p><b>Dissemination of Research</b><br/> <i>Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding dissemination of this research.</i></p>  |
|    | <p>In completing the thesis and any papers for publication, the names of institutions will not be utilised and each individual's anonymity will be preserved. To clarify further, staff at any institution will remain anonymous, as will students and supervisors who have participated, as clarified further below in C10.</p>   |
| 10 | <p><b>Confidentiality</b><br/> <i>Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding confidentiality issues.</i></p>  |
|    | <p>As the responses of the participants have the potential to be sensitive in nature; the researcher will ensure that the participant's right to confidentiality is respected and maintained. Therefore the names of individuals will not be used nor institutions/organisations. This will be adhered to within the researcher's thesis, or any papers which are published. To achieve this, data will be anonymised before analysis</p>  |

|    |  |
|----|--|
|    | <p>begins by use of replacing each student and supervisor with a unique identification number. Records of student and supervisor names will be kept separately from the anonymised data.</p> <p>The researcher's notes, written records, electronic documents, audio recordings and any means by which records are kept, will be stored in a securely locked room and filing cabinet and all computer based data will be password protected. The latter includes password protected computers, laptops, individual files and memory sticks. The researcher will not make use of cloud based storage, due to the challenges in ensuring that these are secure.</p> <p>All data will be destroyed ten years after completion of the project, in line with current University policy.</p> |
| 11 | <p><b>Ethical principles of professional bodies</b><br/> <i>Where relevant professional bodies have published their own guidelines and principles, these must be followed and the current University principles interpreted and extended as necessary in this context. Please state which (if any) professional bodies' guidelines are being utilised.</i></p>   |
|    | <p>Health Care Professions Council.</p>  |

## References

Barretti, M. A. (2004). "What do we know about the professional education of our students?" Journal of Social Work Education **40**: 255–283.

Barretti, M. A. (2007). "Teachers and Field Instructors as Student Role Models." Journal of Teaching in Social Work **27**(3-4): 215-239.

Bogo, M. (2006). "Field Instruction in Social Work." The Clinical Supervisor **24**(1-2): 163-193.

Bogo, M., F. Mishna, et al. (2010). "Emotional Reactions of Students in Field Education: An Exploratory Study." Journal of Social Work Education **46**(2): 227-243.

Bourdieu, P. and R. Johnson (1993). The field of cultural production : essays on art and literature. Cambridge, Polity.

Cree, V. E. (2013). Becoming a social worker : global narratives. New York, Routledge.

Hussein, S., J. Moriarty, et al. (2008). "Diversity and Progression among Students Starting Social Work Qualifying Programmes in England between 1995 and 1998: A Quantitative Study." British Journal of Social Work **38**(8): 1588-1609.

Miller, S. E. (2010). "A Conceptual Framework for the Professional Socialization of Social Workers." Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment **20**(7): 924-938.

Miller, S. E. (2013). "Professional Socialization: A bridge between the explicit and implicit curricula." Journal of Social Work Education **49**(3): 368-386.

Oliver, C. (2013). "Social Workers as Boundary Spanners: Reframing our Professional Identity for Interprofessional Practice." Social Work Education **32**(6): 773-784.

Scanlon, L., L. Rowling, et al. (2007). "'You don't have like an identity ... you are just lost in a crowd': Forming a Student Identity in the First-year Transition to University." Journal of Youth Studies **10**(2): 223-241.

Shlomo, S. B., D. Levy, et al. (2012). "Development of Professional Identity among Social Work Students: Contributing Factors." The Clinical Supervisor **31**(2): 240-255.

Valutis, S., D. Rubin, et al. (2012). "Professional Socialization and Social Work Values: Who Are We Teaching?" Social Work Education **31**(8): 1046-1057.

Wilson, G. and B. Kelly (2010). "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Social Work Education: Preparing Students for Practice Learning." British Journal of Social Work **40**(8): 2431-2449.

Wilson, G. and A. Campbell (2012). "Developing Social Work Education: Academic Perspectives." British Journal of Social Work.

Wilson, G. (2013). "Preparing Social Workers for Practice: Re-evaluating Student Learning Needs." Social Work Education **32**(5): 590-606.

## **Appendix Two – Information for Participants**

### **How do social work students develop their professional identity?**

#### **Background**

There has been substantial research into how students develop their skills, but limited research has focused upon their development of professional identity. This project aims to explore this gap, particularly the impact of the placement supervisor and agency context upon the student's development of professional identity. The researcher has an interest in this area due to their employment as a lecturer in social work at Plymouth University and as a doctoral student at the same institution. This project forms the focus of the researcher's doctorate.

#### **Research methods**

The research will involve final year social work students and their respective placement supervisors, from two educational institutions. Six Students and their respective placement supervisors are being sought within each of these educational institutions to voluntarily participate (24 participants). The researcher will collect demographic details from the students, such as age, gender and type of placement setting; for data analysis and to assist with selecting a typical sample of students, if too many volunteer.

#### **Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews of participants will be undertaken at the midpoint of the final placement. These could take place at the educational site or within the placement setting, whichever is more convenient for participants. It is anticipated that the interview will take around an hour and audio recording of this interview will be sought from the participant. However if the participant prefers, notes can be taken by the interviewer instead. Participants will receive a summary of their interview, followed by the opportunity to clarify or add to the summary at the end of the placement via Skype or another similar electronic format. During the interview the participant can decline to answer any question without explanation.

#### **The project focuses on the following questions;**

- How does a student's experience prior to the course assist or hinder their professional identity? i.e. educational experience, home life, race and gender?
- Does a student's professional identity change over the duration of their final practice placement?
- How might a student's professional identity be affected by their interaction with their placement supervisor?
- How might a student's perception of their professional identity be affected by their experience of the placement setting and working practises within that setting?

#### **Dissemination – it is anticipated that the research will;**

- Impact on the design of the programmes and enhance the student/supervisor's experience of the programmes.

- Build upon the knowledge and understanding of professional socialisation of social work students and the formation of social work identity.
- Generate a summary report of the main findings which will be made available to participants, Programme Leads and Agency Managers that consented to participants being interviewed.
- Result in the completion of the researcher's thesis project, conference papers, seminars and peer reviewed journals, such as Social Work Education.

### **Confidentiality**

The researcher will ensure that the participant's right to confidentiality is respected and maintained. Therefore the names of individuals or institutions will not be used. This will be adhered to within the researcher's thesis, or any papers which are published. To achieve this, data will be anonymised before analysis begins and records of participant's names will be kept separately from the anonymised data.

It is anticipated that participants could discuss sensitive information concerning their own experience within the interviews. For instance, participants might talk about challenges and difficulties they have or are currently experiencing with their agency, programme or with their respective student/supervisor. Therefore, the researcher might find themselves in the position of advising the participants to talk to either their Agency Manager or Programme Lead regarding these issues. The only time when the researcher will need to discuss these issues with an Agency Manager or Programme Lead, is where there is a risk of significant harm to participants or service users. In such an instance the researcher will inform the participant of this need and the rationale for needing to speak to the Agency Manager or Programme Lead.

Only the researcher and her Director of Studies will have access to the raw data from the interviews. The researcher's notes, written records, electronic documents, audio recordings and any means by which records are kept, will be stored in a securely locked room and filing cabinet and all computer based data will be password protected. The latter includes password protected computers, laptops, individual files and memory sticks. All data will be destroyed ten years after completion of the project, in line with current Plymouth University policy. The researcher will not make use of cloud based storage, due to the challenges in ensuring that these are secure.

### **Right to withdraw**

All participants have a right to withdraw their data by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015 without affecting their relationship with University staff and the programme. This withdrawal of data is limited to the research prior to the data analysis stage, as data will have been anonymised after this point (1<sup>st</sup> July 2015) and will not be attributable to the participant. In particular, for students this means that participation in the research or withdrawal prior to data analysis will not impact positively or negatively upon their progress and assessment within the social work programme.

### **Complaints**

Any complaints regarding the research should be directed to the main researcher and/or Director of Studies (as below).

## **Appendix Three – Interview Questions and Consent Forms**

### **Interview Questions**

Before each interview participants were reminded of the 'Information for Participants' and given another copy.

This is a list of the interview questions which were used in the semi-structured interviews with participants:

#### **Students:**

1. How is your placement progressing?
2. How is your placement supervisor influencing your development as a social worker?
3. Are there any other people within your placement setting that have influenced your development as a social worker?
4. How is your placement setting influencing your development as a social worker?
5. How do you think the social work course has influenced your development as a social worker?
6. How do you think your experience prior to the course has influenced your social work development?
7. Is there anything you think is missing from the placement, course or agency, which could have supported you further in developing your professional identity?

#### **Placement Supervisors**

1. How do you feel you support and influence a student's development of professional identity?
2. What other personnel do you feel are influential in this development?
3. How does your organisation and practices within the organisation influence this development for student in their journey of becoming a social worker?
4. Is there anything that would have supported you in providing a placement setting for the student?
5. Is there anything you think is missing from the placement, course or agency, which could support students further in their development of professional identity?

## **Consent for Audio Recording**

### **How do social work students develop their professional identity?**

Signing this consent form indicates that I have read and understood the information sheet for participants concerning the research project; 'How do social work students develop their professional identity'.

Signing this form indicates that I am willing to participate in the project described in the information sheet.

Signing this form also indicates that I understand that I may withdraw my data by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015 without offering a reason or explanation and that this will not affect my relationship with university staff and the social work programme.

I am/not (please delete option as appropriate) willing to be audio recorded for the purposes of the researcher collecting and analysing the data.

I am willing for the interviewer to take notes during the interview.

Signature of participant:

Date:

Please Print Name Below:

Preferred email/address for correspondence:

## **Consent Form for Students**

### **How do social work students develop their professional identity?**

Signing this consent form indicates that I have read and understood the information sheet for participants concerning the research project; 'How do social work students develop their professional identity'.

Signing this form indicates that I am willing to participate in the project described in the information sheet.

Signing this form indicates that I understand that I may withdraw my data by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015 without offering a reason or explanation and that this will not affect my relationship with university staff and the social work programme.

Signing this form indicates that I understand that if more students volunteer than are required to participate, then the researcher will select students based upon achieving a typical sample, utilising demographic information I have given below.

I understand that this basic information might be used within the data analysis, although my anonymity will be preserved in any analysis and publication as detailed in the information for participants.

Finally I understand that the researcher will not be directly involved in assessing my work within the programme.

### **Basic volunteer details:**

Gender:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Disability:

Type of placement setting:  
(i.e. service user group, statutory, non-statutory etc).

### **Signature of participant:**

**Date**

**Please Print Name Below**

**Preferred email/address for correspondence:**

**Consent Form for Placement Supervisors**

## **How do social work students develop their professional identity?**

Signing this consent form indicates that I have read and understood the information sheet for participants concerning the research project; 'How do social work students develop their professional identity'.

Signing this form indicates that I am willing to participate in the project described in the information sheet.

Signing this form indicates that I understand that I may withdraw my data by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015 without offering a reason or explanation and that this will not affect my relationship with university staff and the social work programme.

I understand that this basic information might be used within the data analysis, although my anonymity will be preserved in any analysis and publication as detailed in the information for participants.

### **Basic volunteer details:**

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Date achieved social work qualification:

Name of any training undertaken concerning working with student social workers and year achieved:

Type of work setting:  
(i.e. service user group, statutory, non-statutory etc).

### **Signature of participant:**

**Date:**

**Preferred email/address for correspondence:**

## **Appendix Four – EdD Assignments**

### **4.1 Assignment One – Social Policy EdD611**

**An analysis of the ‘intention’ and use of Munro’s review (2011) of child protection in England and the implications for social work education and practice.**

#### **Abstract**

This is an analysis of Munro’s final report (2011) regarding child protection in England. I have used Ball and Bowe’s (1992) framework to explore ‘actual’ policy, ‘intended’ policy and ‘policy in use’. I have compared the intended outcomes of Munro (2011) with the previous ‘technical rationalist’ (Ernst, 1991) report of Laming (2003) following the death of Victoria Climbiè. To assist me in this evaluation I have utilised the work of Sennet (2008) concerning the evolving ‘craft’ and expertise of social work, and Bourdieu’s (1993) concept of ‘habitus’ in analysing the use of Munro’s recommendations. Although this is a literature based study, I have made use of documentary evidence concerning the current experiences of social workers and social work teams to illustrate my arguments. I propose that in order for the intended recommendations of Munro’s report to take place, there needs to be an ownership and commitment to her recommendations from social workers, social work teams and service users themselves. However, in order for this to be successful, there is an additional need for the appropriate resources to be made available to implement her recommendations.

## **Introduction**

In this assignment I will evaluate Professor Munro's final report (2011), concerning her review of child protection in England. In doing so I will analyse the 'actual' policy, 'intended' outcomes and explore the 'policy in use', or at least it's potential use in relation to social work (Ball and Bowe, 1992).

There are many issues in relation to Munro's report (2011) that I do not have the time to analyse or do justice to within this assignment. These include areas that I am extremely interested in and hope that I will have the opportunity to explore further in future assignments in this programme. For example, reflexivity and critical reflection as it is utilised within the Professional Capabilities Framework (Social Work Reform Board, 2010) and the importance of class in social work education. Therefore, for the purposes of this assignment, I will concentrate upon the emerging 'craft' of social work within Munro's report (2011) and compare Lord Laming's (2003, 2009) 'technical rationalist' (Ernst, 1991) approach to social work with Munro's (2011) proposed reform of social work, within the current climate of the coalition government in England.

To achieve this analysis I will utilise the theories and ideas of Richard Sennett (2008), particularly with reference to the 'craft' of social work and the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1993) and his key concepts of habitus, capital and field. Regarding the latter, I will employ Bourdieu's work as a tool to understanding the implementation of Munro's report (2011). I will use Ball and Bowe's (1992) framework of 'Actual', 'Intended' and 'Policy in Use', to assist the structure of my assignment and to present my analysis. Finally I will make recommendations for future policy development and discuss some of the challenges that might be encountered in implementing these in practice.

This is a literature based study; therefore it is subject to my interpretation of policy and my reading. It is also worth noting that my social work practice was predominantly with children and their families, so it is no accident that I have chosen to focus upon policy that relates to this area of social work practice. Unfortunately I do not have sufficient space within this assignment to theorise how this analysis could be applied to social work with adults. This means that my own experience of social work practice will influence my interpretation of the

discussion that follows. In an attempt to reduce this bias, I have utilised documentary evidence from social workers and social work teams to support my analysis and hypotheses.

### **Actual Policy**

In order to contextualise the ‘intended’ policy and reports of Laming (2003, 2009) and Munro (2011), I feel it is important to identify ‘actual’ policy and an historical timeline of child protection policy. As stated by Ball and Bowe (1992):

“Actual policy: draws our attention to the wording of legislation, circulars and policy documents – the policy texts – that set out to lay down the ground rules for policy-in-use” (1992:100).

The Children Act 1989 laid the foundations of current child protection processes and social work practice within England. This act introduced a focus upon the child’s welfare and promoted a greater emphasis on the protection of children. Originating from this act was a guidance document for social workers and the various agencies involved in child protection called, ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ (Department of Health, 1991). This document has become the vehicle by which child protection policy has been implemented in frontline agencies, but particularly within social work. For instance, within this document there are clear timescales identified by which a social worker must complete assessments of children and families. Another key guidance document developed at the time of the Children Act 1989 was a comprehensive guide for social workers undertaking assessments (Department of Health, 1988), which was later replaced by the ‘Framework for Assessing Children in Need and their Families’ (Department of Health, 2000). As its title suggests, this latter document provided a framework for social workers to adhere to when working with children and families and it enshrined the key principles of the Children Act 1989.

Following the death of Victoria Climbiè in 2000, the government tasked Lord Laming with undertaking an inquiry which Laming published in 2003 (please see ‘Intended’ section for more discussion). The government’s response to Laming’s (2003) recommendations is contained within ‘Every Child Matters’ (Department for Education, 2003) and encapsulated within the five outcomes: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, making a positive contribution and economic well-being. This policy implemented a national database, the

Common Assessment Framework, Children's Trusts, Local Safeguarding Boards and workforce reform of social work. These recommendations were converted in 2006, into a revised version of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' and the implementation of these proposals was secured by the Children Act 2004.

Laming's (2009) second report was instigated by the government following the death of Peter Connelly in 2008. Laming's report of 2009, resulted in further changes to the guidance contained in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (DCSF, 2010). In this report, Laming (2009) placed more emphasis on the need to improve the recruitment, retention, training and supervision of social workers, rather than the need to change policy itself. Consequently a 'Social Work Task Force' was established and later succeeded by the 'Social Work Reform Board' to implement this workforce development (see 'Intended' section).

Following the election of the coalition government in May 2010, Eileen Munro was asked to conduct an independent review of child protection in England (Gove, 2010). I will explore the recommendations of her report in detail within the 'Intended' section of this assignment, but a number of 'actual' policy recommendations have already taken place. Firstly, in July 2011 (Department for Education) the government responded to Munro's report, by offering its commitment to her recommendations, in particular, reducing bureaucracy and valuing professional expertise within social work. A number of actual policy actions were proposed in this response including the revision of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (DCSF, 2010) and the 'Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families' (Department of Health, 2000). For example the timescales for assessment would be removed from this guidance, thus allowing social workers more time to spend with families. Furthermore, national forms and constraints would be removed, including the electronic database of children (Department of Education, 2011:12).

More recently in Tim Loughton's parliamentary update, he confirmed the decommissioning of the eCAF (electronic version of the Common Assessment Framework), in order to reduce bureaucracy and enable social workers to use their professional judgement (2011:1). He also outlined the government's

support of the Social Work Reform Board and the newly formed College of Social Work in the “reform of the social work profession” (Loughton, 2011:3).

The College of Social Work was launched in January 2012 and has subsequently published the final version of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) on the College’s website (2012a). This framework consists of nine domains of practice that social workers will be expected to achieve by demonstrating their ‘ability’ or ‘capability’ to take on more complex, challenging and risky work (The College of Social Work, 2012a). Whilst the framework is currently undergoing consultation, it is expected to be implemented in Autumn 2012.

Therefore the ‘actual’ outcomes of Munro’s report (2011) are still emerging, so in the remainder of my assignment I hope to analyse the ‘intended outcomes’ of her report and their potential implications for social work.

### **Intended**

‘Intended’ policy is that which “seeks to affect policy” (Ball and Bowe, 1992:100), which is Munro’s (2011) agenda, with the intention that her recommendations might influence new ‘actual policy’ created by the coalition government. Munro was, as Laming before her, commissioned by the government to undertake a review in order to reform child protection processes in England. Therefore an analysis of Munro’s report (2011) and a comparison of this with the previous reports of Laming (2003, 2009), will offer insights into the dynamic world of social work.

In his first inquiry Laming (2003) made 108 recommendations to the government, 45 of which were specific to social care. Fundamentally, Laming’s (2003) recommendations and the Labour government’s guidance and policy, were made with the ‘intention’ of improving the safeguarding of children and the quality of work undertaken by social workers. The Labour government utilised Laming’s recommendations in their agenda to reduce poverty and provide processes and systems to enable more effective social work intervention with children and families. For example, the previous Labour government under the steer of Tony Blair, took an approach to the welfare state and social work

through the 'Third Way' (Giddens, 1998). Thus individuals and communities were empowered in order to improve equality of opportunity and reduce poverty (Child Poverty Act, 2010), but they did not intend to create a dominant state (Giddens, 2000:164). Therefore the 'intention' of Laming's report (2003) and Every Child Matters (Department for Education, 2003) was to provide frameworks, guidance and a better use of information technology, in order to assist social workers in the protection of children.

The key recommendations for social work within this inquiry focused upon improving the training and supervision of social workers. This led to the introduction of a new degree in social work, where the intention, as outlined in Every Child Matters, was to:

"Increase competence to practise of those completing social work training, to raise the professional status of the occupation and to bring it in line with national and international peers (Department for Education, 2003:87).

Laming (2003) offered a considerable amount of prescription regarding how to undertake assessments, home visits, case work closure and the transfer of work with families. This inquiry also introduced the national children's database and child protection plans. Thus Laming's approach to social work was viewed as 'technical rationalist' or 'technical pragmatist':

"This tradition emphasises utilitarian values, particularly the pursuit of science and craft, design and technology" (Ernst, 1991:129).

Munro dedicates a section of her report to 'unintended consequences', where she highlights that previous reforms have unintentionally created "regulated and prescribed working environments" for social workers (2011:128). Munro felt that this bureaucracy was overpowering the intended focus upon the child and preventing social workers from helping children (2011:5). For example Munro argues that the high levels of prescription have "hampered the professions ability to take responsibility for developing its own knowledge and skills" (2011:8). Similarly Sennet (2008) argues, 'craftsmen' cannot learn though machines as then they are restricted from using their judgement (2008:120). So for social workers to develop their use of professional judgment, this cannot be achieved through overreliance upon electronic tools and it needs to be achieved in 'relationship' with service users and other professionals.

Therefore Laming's (2003) perceived technical rationalist approach to social work has resulted in the unintended consequence, of an overemphasis on procedures and records, rather than enabling direct contact and relationship building with service users. As Sennett (2008) hypothesised in his exploration of staff in the medical profession; this overreliance on 'standards' results in practitioner frustration, as they are unable to utilise their skills in working with patients, or in this case, 'service users' (2008:46). Nevertheless, Laming (2003) and the Labour government's response was a carefully considered and researched attempt to safeguard children by improving practice with the support of technology, procedures and guidance. To a certain extent it could be argued that they were successful in improving the safeguarding of children and developing tools for social workers to assess and support families. For example, Every Child Matters was optimistic in its intention:

"believing services can help make life better for children and families. And it is egalitarian: it stresses the importance of every child fulfilling their potential, including those least likely to do so because of vulnerability or disadvantage" (Abrahams, 2009:3).

Laming's (2009) second report following the death of Peter Connelly, was instigated by the government following the public outcry of another child death within the authority of Haringey. This latter point is crucial, as the fact that another child death took place in the same authority, potentially discredits Laming's (2003) recommendations and the ensuing policy as ineffective (Garrett, 2005:545). Within this report, Laming (2009) built upon his earlier recommendations of 2003, for the social work profession, by focusing more upon the craft of social work:

"The message of this report is clear: without the necessary specialist knowledge and skills social workers must not be allowed to practise in child protection" (2009:5).

Consequently Laming recommended the implementation of a Newly Qualified Social Worker scheme and the formation of the Social Care Task Force to undertake a "root and branch review of social work in England" (White *et al*, 2010:407).

In response to Laming's (2009) report the Coalition Government asked Eileen Munro to conduct an "independent review of child protection in England" (Munro, 2011:5). Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Education) stated:

"I firmly believe we need reform to frontline social work practice. I want to strengthen the profession so social workers are in a better position to make well-informed judgements, based on up to date evidence, in the best interests of children, free from unnecessary bureaucracy and regulation" (Gove, 2010:1).

I find this instruction interesting, as although the coalition government tasked Munro to complete an 'independent' review, the government had clearly outlined a remit for Munro's report and recommendations. Thus meeting the government's agenda of 'localisation' (Hall, 2011) and ensuring that Munro's recommendations conform to the current 'dominant discourse' of reducing state intervention (Burr, 2003 and Fook, 2002). As Munro is a respected academic and experienced social worker, this would appear to give status and justification to any recommendations that supports the coalition government's stance and power.

"Institutions and social context therefore play an important determining role in the development, maintenance and circulation of discourses" (Mills, 2004:10).

In particular this corresponds to the coalition government's neo-liberalist approach to the welfare state and a move away from previous technical pragmatism (Ernst, 1991). I believe Munro takes more of an 'Old Humanist' approach (Ernst, 1991), as she promotes the ethos that individual social workers can be selected for their level, and position within the profession. Munro (2011) also argues for specific skills, knowledge and understanding within social work. However I find the neo-liberalist ideology most applicable to Munro (2011), as I would argue that the intention of the government in commissioning Munro's report's was to reduce the role of the state and free social workers from bureaucracy. Moreover, this intention originates from the neo-liberalist belief that that continued over reliance on the state will stifle the ambition and aspirations of individuals to succeed (Taylor, 2007:85). Therefore the current government is promoting the 'Big Society' and the ideological view that individuals are best able to meet their own needs (Taylor, 2007:75).

“The Big Society is about helping people to come together to improve their own lives. It’s about putting more power in people’s hands – a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities” (Cabinet Office, 2012)

Essentially, Munro states that previous reform, whilst having good intentions, has focused upon ‘practice’ instead of improving the knowledge and skills of social workers (2011: 85). Instead, Munro wishes to develop high levels of expertise in social work and a ‘highly trained workforce’ (2011: 85). This is similar to the intention of previous policies in creating induction standards and a common core of training for workers. However, despite these past reforms, the current government and Munro argue that there is a lack of consensus about the nature of social work expertise, in essence the ‘craft’ of social work (Sennett 2008). Consequently, Munro summarises that:

“The recommendations in this review are geared towards creating a better balance between essential rules, principles, and professional expertise. When bureaucratic aspects of work become too dominant the heart of the work is lost” (2011:10).

Sennett (2008:172) claims that to become an expert of a craft, it takes around ten thousand hours, and I would like to speculate as to whether Sennett’s concept of ‘craft’ can be applied to social work. A crucial ‘intention’ of Munro (2011) is to utilise the PCF to enable the development of a the expertise of individual social workers. Munro views the PCF as an essential set of expectations necessary for effective practice. Therefore the nine domains of the PCF (The College of Social Work, 2012b), such as knowledge, critical reflection and analysis, intervention and skills; comprise of levels which act as descriptors of the expected ability of social workers’ or social work students’ at various stages of their careers and training. In relation to the PCF Munro argues that:

“They should drive excellence in practice by helping recruit the right people who participate in appropriate and effective qualifying and post-graduate training and who are scrutinised in their ability to do their jobs” (2011:97).

The College of Social Work states that the PCF is a ‘professional’ rather than ‘occupational’ framework (2012b:1). Consequently the PCF is being utilised as a vehicle that “enables social work to be recognised as part of an international profession” (College of Social Work, 2012b: 2). However expertise and skill is a

double edged sword, as one can create something for 'good' which later can result in unintended negative outcomes (Sennett, 2008,:296). For instance a social worker might successfully safeguard a child and place them in local authority care, but in the longer term the child might experience distress and psychological damage from being separated from their carers (Butler, 2012).

Munro strongly argues that the craft of social work is about 'relationship' with service users and that this is prevented by the current bureaucratic nature of social work. Similarly, this is argued by Sennett, whereby he states that dependence on machines, technology and bureaucracy have reduced the 'craftsman's' interaction with the world (2008:87). Therefore it could be hypothesised that by building upon 'relationships' with service users and other professionals, social workers will increase their expertise and skills. Sennett (2008) takes this a stage further, stating that professionals need to be able to learn from their mistakes:

"A flamboyant worker, exuberant and excited, is willing to risk losing control over his or her work: machines break down when they lose control, whereas people make discoveries, stumble on happy accidents" (2008:113).

However when applied to social work this is not entirely successful, as some simple mistakes might be acceptable, but an error of judgment that results in the death of a child would be atrocious. Hence the intention of previous policy to employ various checks and balances to ensure the safety of children and to support social workers in making potentially life threatening decisions. In addition Munro's intention of developing the expertise of social work will not prevent child deaths, nor is it likely to change the common public perception of social workers as either causing the death of a child or overzealously removing children from their parents (O'Hara, 2012).

Moreover, whilst the 'intention' of Munro (2011), is to build upon the expertise of social workers and reduce bureaucracy, it is another matter entirely as to whether this will transpire in practice, as I will discuss in the next section of my assignment.

## Policy in Use

It is still relatively early days for Munro's (2011) recommendations and the coalition government's implementation of her guidance. Therefore the analysis that follows is somewhat speculative, but where possible I have referred to recent implementation and evidence of the 'policy in use'. 'Policy in Use' is:

“the institutional practices and discourses that emerge out of the responses of practitioners to both the intended and actual policies of their arena” (Ball and Bowe, 1992:100).

In undertaking this analysis I have utilised the work of Bourdieu, although I do appreciate that there might be difficulties in applying Bourdieu's theories to the context of social work (Garrett, 2007:362) and I will highlight these throughout my discussion.

Munro's (2011) report was not only requested by the current government, but was also a direct result of the constant complaints from social workers about the overwhelming number of forms they needed to complete and the reduced or even nonexistent time with children (College of Social Work, 2012c). This backing from social workers gives more authority to Munro's recommendations, as it is seen to be driven by social workers themselves, thus they have more of a vested interest in the implementation of her recommendations (Ball and Bowe, 1992). In terms of habitus, if Munro has consulted with practitioners, her recommendations should resonate with the 'dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1993:5) and perceptions of current social workers. Crucially, there should be a shared value base between Munro's recommendations and social workers themselves. However, if this consultation was tokenistic, it could result in a conflict with social work 'habitus', which will impact upon individual social workers' acceptance and interpretation of Munro. For instance, within one of the local authority pilots of Munro's recommendations, it has been reported “that while some social workers were inspired by the new approach, many felt uncomfortable” (Donovan, 2011).

Successful implementation of the recommendations will also be dependent upon leadership in local authorities and social work departments. For example the government is unaware of the histories of social work teams and their cultures, which will influence their commitment and motivation to implement policy (Ball and Bowe, 1992:112). So social workers' and social work teams'

choices are based upon their past history and experiences, in essence, habitus (Maton, 2008 in Grenfell, 2008:53). For instance Cornwall Children's Services recently experienced an Ofsted (2011a) inspection where they were found to be 'performing poorly', so they intend to use Munro's recommendations in an attempt to improve standards. Whereas in 2006, Plymouth City Council was a failing authority and was subjected to 'special measures' (McKitterick, 2008), but they have been commended by Ofsted (2011b) for improvements in their child protection processes and were ranked as 'performing excellently'. So it is highly improbable that Plymouth City Council will want to jeopardise their success by removing their current procedures.

In some ways Munro acknowledges these difficulties as she warns against 'cherry picking' her reforms and makes a plea to the government, not to take a short term approach to implementation (2011:10). Instead Munro is proposing 'new ways of working' which will take time to embed within social work teams (2011:10). Consequently it is positive that the pace of change is slow as Ball and Bowe (1992:110) note that previous changes (within education) have been too quick, without taking into account the complex role and tasks of a profession. In relation to Bourdieu and his notion of 'habitus', swift change could result in: "situations where the field changes more rapidly than, or in different directions to, the habitus of it's members" (Maton, 2008 in Grenfell: 2008:59).

So I would argue that this slow progress is beneficial for the nurturing of social work habitus (Bourdieu, 1993), although this could have the converse effect of having too much time to reflect upon and interpret the recommendations, resulting in the misinterpretation of the 'actual policy'. Thus Munro's recommendations and the PCF might have the unintended consequence of creating more bureaucracy as individual agencies try to implement and make sense of policy within their individual setting and context.

Concerning 'capabilities', Sen (1992), argues that in order to achieve potential and full 'capability' an individual would require the capability to achieve it. Consequently social workers would need both the resources and the freedom to achieve capability without the confinement of bureaucracy. As already stated Munro (Munro, 2011) has offered a number of recommendations to reduce the amount of bureaucracy within social work, and ensure that social workers are

adequately trained for the job of protecting children. Conversely, I would hypothesise that Munro is using 'prescriptions' within the PCF that could unintentionally, restrict and disempower social workers, rather than encouraging them to use their own judgment and expertise. For instance the introduction of 'capabilities' rather than 'competencies' or 'skills' and the appointment of a Chief Social Worker, could serve as a means of maintaining state regulation of social work rather than liberating social workers from bureaucracy. On the other hand I do appreciate that in order to develop a profession and good quality practitioners some form of framework or structure will be required (Sennett, 2008).

Furthermore, Bourdieu *et al* (1999) argues that social workers are in a 'precarious situation', where they need to assure the basic services for the public and the disadvantaged, but they are 'impacted' upon by the 'contradictions' of the state (Bourdieu *et al*, 1999:184). Therefore it is highly debatable as to whether a social worker can achieve his or her capability within the current climate of the recession and reduction of resources. I would argue that it is not feasible to reduce social work caseloads in order to increase service user time, particularly in teams where social work posts have been cut or frozen. For instance, Fuhl (2012) reports that 81% of social workers have unmanageable caseloads, so it is questionable as to whether social workers will have more time to spend on developing 'relationships' with children and their families.

This lack of resources could produce 'unintended' consequences of Munro's recommendations, if not enough money is injected into services and the economy when it is required in order to provide an adequate safety net for the vulnerable in society. In fact it could be argued that this is currently occurring, with financial cuts in the public services and unemployment rising to 2.68 million, it's highest since 1995 (The Guardian, 2012). For social work this has resulted in a rise in the number of children in local authority care, as social workers' attempt to prevent another 'Baby P' with a reduced level of resources, like the reduction of Sure Start services. Furthermore Butler (2012) notes "that this perceived increase in family stress and breakdown correlates directly with the recession and public spending cuts".

Another query this raises for me, particularly in light of the current government's influence on Munro's report, is 'who' decides what these capabilities entail? Is it the government or social work itself through the newly formed College of Social Work that is promoting and developing the 'craft' of social work? I would argue that it is the latter, as the government is not a field of power, but instead a 'site in which power operates' (Webb *et al*, 2002: 86) and the government's power comes from its relationship with other dominant fields. So optimistically, the College of Social Work could be creating a kind of social work 'community' or 'guild', which Sennett (2008) argues would support individual craftsmen, or in this context, social workers, in developing their expertise (2008:246). The troubled beginnings of the College of Social Work highlight that not all social workers are fully supportive of the College or the PCF (Brody, 2012). Therefore the College of Social Work will only become the legitimate voice of social work, if it has support from those it seeks to lead. For example, Bourdieu states that a 'community' can only exist if the members believe in its existence and identify with the shared characteristics (values and perspectives), or 'collective habitus' of this group (Webb *et al*, 2002:89).

Taking the concept of habitus further, the gulf between the practicing social worker and the service user could widen through the use of the PCF and Munro's (2011) recommendations. For instance, the habitus of the social worker and service user could become more distant, by the College promoting the recruitment and development of social workers from middle class backgrounds (Maton, 2008 in Grenfell, 2008, page 53). In addition the key concept of 'relationship' within Munro's recommendations could be viewed as being based upon a middle class value and will thus alienate social workers from the service users they hope to assist. For example the College is promoting a preference for a Masters route for achieving a social work qualification and raising the selection criteria for social work students. So the use of Munro's recommendations could produce social workers who are unable to relate to or empathise with service users. In addition prospective working class social workers could be deterred from applying to undertake social work training because they do not have the 'capital' to succeed in the PCF nor share the habitus of Munro's perception of social workers.

Alternatively, Munro (2011:2) claims to have consulted with service users, so the general public has a commitment and interest in her recommendations. The consequence of this for the government (or the government's hope) is overwhelming support for any policy that they instigate in order to implement Munro's recommendations. As Houston (2002) acknowledges:

"service users and their carers have gained symbolic capital in the sense that their power to influence services and practice standards within the social care field has never been greater" (Houston, 2002:163).

However, Houston argues that to achieve this power, there needs to be collective action where social workers seek alliances with service users (Houston, 2002:163).

To achieve this alliance, the image of social work will need to be promoted by The College of Social Work and the media. I believe that this is the impetus behind the BBC2 documentary 'Protecting Our Children' (2012), but as Philpott's (2012) argues this is an unrealistic ambition because of the way in which social workers are presented elsewhere in the public media, such as within soap operas. The College of Social Work has also recently taken action to secure its shaky foundations by appointing Munro as a 'transitional chair' of the College. Professor Munro stated:

"I am delighted to take up this role. The College will play a crucial role in enabling social workers to take control of our own standards of excellence, to enhance our level of expertise in helping children and families, and in supporting those on the front line to exercise their professional judgement to safeguard children". (Munro, 2012 in Pemberton, 2012)

Thus The College is hoping that Munro will not only lead the changes within social work, but also promote a positive image of social work amongst the general public.

Although Bourdieu's work has been criticised for being 'deterministic', Bourdieu himself did vehemently deny this (Peillon, 2008: 221). Therefore I strongly believe that this analysis indicates that if social workers and service users are not fully consulted or share Munro's (2011) vision (or habitus) of social work her recommendations will be seriously altered in their implementation.

## **Conclusion**

During this analysis of Munro's final review (2011) of child protection in England, I have established that Munro's main 'intention' was to reduce bureaucracy and promote the value of professional expertise in social work. In comparing Munro's 'Old Humanist' and 'neo-liberalist' approach to social work with Laming's (2003) 'technical rationalist' approach (Ernst, 1991), I have found that they share an endeavour to improve the safeguarding of children and the 'craft' or expertise of social work, albeit through different ideological frameworks. Essentially, Munro hopes to reform social work through the vehicle of the Professional Capabilities Framework and elevate a positive public image of social work through The College of Social Work. There are a number of challenges and 'unintended' consequences of implementing Munro's recommendations, not least the need to ensure that social workers and service users fully support and understand the 'intention' of Munro's report. In order for this to be successful the history and experiences of social workers require attention so that their 'habitus' is not in conflict with Munro's intentions. The ongoing promotion of social work is one which is being fought through The College of Social Work and media presentation, such as the 'Protecting Our Children' television series. However if the resources are not available to support social workers and local authorities in meeting the needs of families, then social workers will be hindered by what Bourdieu terms as the 'contradictions' of the state (Bourdieu *et al*, 1999,page 184).

In summary, Munro's (2011) recommendations are not being 'implemented' but 'recreated' (Ball and Bowe, 1992, page 114). So although the government has the power to dictate the remit and recommendations of Munro's report (2011), it is the individual social workers and service users that have the ultimate power in how, or even if, Munro's recommendations are implemented in practice.

**Word Count 5344**

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## **4.2 Assignment Two – Professional Learning EdD612**

### **Social work identity: An exploration through the lens of communities of practice.**

#### **Abstract**

There is no single agreed definition of social work identity, or what it might mean to be a competent social worker except through the use of competency frameworks and standards. As a consequence, social work students have the challenge of grappling with developing their social work identity in a dynamic and complex world, where they hope to move from the periphery of practice in their social work placements to become a qualified practitioner. The purpose of this paper is to explore how students might form and develop their professional identity through the theoretical lens of Wenger's "Community of Practice". In doing so, this paper examines how students legitimately participate on the periphery of their work based placement and participate as a central member of their student cohort, to assist in their development of a social work identity. Some attention is given to the role of teachers in facilitating this learning process, in particular, their potential as 'brokers' in negotiating boundaries between communities of practice, in anticipation of students succeeding in becoming fully participating members of the social work profession.

#### **Introduction**

This module has significantly challenged my understanding of the nature of professional identity within social work and doubts have emerged in my mind regarding the composition of identity and how it is established. In a search for some kind of clarity, I have undertaken extensive research of social work literature concerning professional identity, only to discover more questions and uncertainty. Despite this absence of an agreed definition of social work, The College of Social Work and The Social Work Reform Board, have established capability frameworks and statements with which to measure the competency of social work students and experienced social workers. Somehow, amongst this confusion, student social workers need to learn and develop a social work identity and become competent practitioners.

Within this paper I intend to explore the learning that final stage social work students experience and undertake in their development of forming their

professional social work identity. In doing so, I will focus upon this process at the micro, or individual plane of learning, whilst acknowledging that there is still significant impact at a macro level on the development of a profession, especially in one such as social work. To achieve this analysis I will employ “communities of practice” (Wenger 1998), including “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave and Wenger 1991), as a critical lens or heuristic model. The difficulty I might have in applying this heuristic model is that Lave and Wenger did not apply their theory to education. Fortunately, their work concerns practice and apprenticeship, which I would argue is comparable to the practice learning model utilised in social work education. Such as social work students are supported in developing their professional identity through work based placements and skills based teaching.

During the journey of writing this paper, I found that it was almost impossible to apply the theoretical lens of CoP to a study of social work as an entire profession. Therefore I have utilised a critical incident (Fook and Gardner 2007) from my own practice with adult learners, to examine the use of this lens and its application to the development of social work identity in more depth. In doing so, I have unwittingly created the opportunity to speculate about my own role in facilitating and supporting social work students in their development of social work identity. As this was a recent discovery it formed the focus of my conference presentation, where I endeavoured to sustain a more critical stance of my use of CoP through the constructive feedback of the audience. Therefore this paper not only explains my new understanding of social work identity, but also identifies the complexities of my own function in this process and some of the challenges in implementing this heuristic to my own context.

### **Communities of Practice.**

What follows is a brief description of CoP and the key features that I will employ in my assignment. Wenger (1998) argues that a ‘Community of Practice’ is one where we share social practice through a joint enterprise, shared repertoire (routines, words, stories, gestures, and symbols) and mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998:73). The overall focus of CoP is upon practice and how people come together and participate through this shared practice. Therefore, meaning is negotiated through practice and in interaction with others, whereas reification

is the solidification of this meaning and shapes our experience. For example, reification could be forms, tools, documents, monuments and points of focus (Wenger, 1998:63).

Crucial to CoP are, modes of belonging consisting of engagement, imagination and alignment. Engagement occurs through the negotiation of meaning and participation in histories and rituals. Imagination is that which determines our learning, it is creative rather than fantasy;

“Imagination in this sense is looking at an apple seed and seeing a tree”  
(Wenger 1998:176).

Whereas alignment regards directing and controlling our energy into shared practice (Wenger, 1998:180). We may belong to many CoP, such as home, work, and friends, so members can move in and out of communities as well as belong to a constellation of practice, like social work as a profession is made up of many teams of social workers and educational sites (Wenger, 1998:127).

Therefore, although there are boundaries between CoP, it is possible to participate on the periphery of other communities, through the medium of ‘boundary interactions’, such as meetings, visits and discussions (Wenger 2000). It is through this engagement, imagination and alignment that identity is created. Similarly, Sfard and Prusak argue that ‘identity’ is not ‘man-made’ but is “created and re-created in interactions with others” (2005:5).

“We move from community to community. In doing so, we carry a bit of each as we go around. Our identities are not something we can turn on and off. You don’t cease to be a parent because you go to work. You don’t cease to be a nurse because you step out of the hospital. Multimembership is an inherent aspect of our identities”  
(Wenger 2000:239).

This definition of identity sits most comfortably with my own understanding of identity and how it is developed within social work. For instance, social work students already have identities developed from their previous work experience and personal experience.

I would argue that crucial to my context, is Lave and Wenger’s work around “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave and Wenger, 1991:29). They used this term to better explain ‘situated learning’ and what many might name as

“apprenticeship” (Lave and Wenger, 1991:31). Lave and Wenger argue that it is not a pedagogical approach or form of teaching, instead legitimate peripheral participation is a means of understanding learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991:40). They do distinguish between a ‘learning curriculum’, which comprises of situated opportunities, rather than the ‘instruction’ of a ‘teaching curriculum’ or replicating the work of others (Lave and Wenger, 1991:97). Therefore learning is vital to Lave and Wenger’s work as learning occurs in practice and in belonging. This is applicable to my own professional setting, as like many higher education courses, the ‘transmission’ theory or ‘behaviourist’ approach to learning has been replaced by a more social constructivist approach to learning (Burr 2003), in particular learning within work based placements.

“Learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity”  
(Wenger, 1998:215).

To become an expert practitioner within a CoP, the member has to be fully participating in the CoP, thus committed to the shared vision of the CoP and involved with the negotiation of meaning. Wenger argues that CoP can offer newcomers access to competence and identity through their participation.

“Communities of practice define competence by combining three elements [joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire].....To be competent is to be able to engage with the community and be trusted as a partner in these interactions”  
(Wenger 2000:229).

Therefore, CoP offers a potential framework with which I can gain a better understanding of my own practice and the way in which students learn and develop their professional identity.

### **Application to Social Work**

Before narrowing this analysis to my own practice, I wish to set the scene of social work in a wider context using CoP as a heuristic. Firstly what is ‘professional’ social work? I have found the work of Eraut (1994:3) useful as he promotes professionalism as an ideology, which I believe is applicable to social work, as the concept of professionalism is re-emerging through the recent Munro (2011) report regarding child protection and the establishment of the College of Social Work (CoSW 2012b). Since the formation of the coalition government, there have been numerous developments within the Social Work

Reform Board (2012) and College of Social Work to develop social work as a profession. This includes the establishment of a Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF, CoSW 2012a), applied to assess students as competent to practice and to assist the continuing professional development of qualified and experienced social workers. Alongside this framework is the launch of an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE,) for social work graduates, similar to the first year of graduate teaching. I will explore these in more detail within my critical incident, but for now I wish to highlight that these frameworks can offer both social work students and graduates a means by which they can gain legitimate peripheral participation in social work teams and develop their professional social work identity. For example, these frameworks have attempted to define social work as a profession and the skills and knowledge required to undertake social work. This does raise some interesting questions about who defines social work competence. Is it social work practitioners themselves, policy, media or even the general public? However these debates are at a macro level rather than at the micro and individual approach that is the focus of this paper.

Returning to my focus upon the micro level of analysis, what then is social work identity? Social work focused literature provides a number of perspectives on the matter, such as many would argue it is derived from 'shared values' (Fook, Ryan et al. 2000). Whereas Lovelock et al (2004) argues that social work is a political activity, which over time has been reduced in function and profession, in response to political agendas, like the coalition government and the changes offered by the College of Social work. Jordan and Parton (Cited in Lovelock et al, 2004:23) take a more positive stance, stating that social workers see their role as a 'vocation', where they contribute to a community and have solidarity with others as a kind of 'public morality', similar to a CoP. In this instance, social workers can be viewed as challenging political agendas and developing their own identity as a social work profession. For instance, some social workers have formed their own social enterprises and independent agencies, in order to practice social work in a way that they feel is compatible with their identity, creating a community of practice outside of the boundaries of local authority teams and agencies (Guardian 2012).

Like most professions, there are variations of identity within social work, for instance, between children and adult social workers, those who work in mental health and learning disability settings. Kelly et al (2012), explored this within teaching and found that whilst there are some differences (such as in teaching different subjects), since schools are centrally controlled, teachers do share many similarities (2012:20). This is comparable to social work as a centrally controlled profession. For instance, in a recent College of Social Work magazine, Martin argues that social workers share an identity that includes; common knowledge, values, person centeredness, integrity, individualism, promoting social justice, valuing diversity and maintaining confidentiality (CoSW, 2012b:21). However I am not suggesting that an individual's identity, consisting of their previous history and experience is overpowered, instead a person's identity is further negotiated through the CoP. As Day et al (2006) found:

“There are, then, unavoidable interrelationships between professional and personal identities”  
(2006:603).

This is supported by the recent research of McSweeney's (2012) where she found that social care practitioners renegotiate their identity within the work place (2012:377). This has implications for my work with MA students as they arrive on the course with previous social care experience, a first degree and belong to numerous CoPs, thus they already have a developed sense of identity. This development of identity is something that I now wish to explore in more depth and in relation to my role in facilitating students' learning of professional identity.

### **Application to my own context**

I will explore one specific area of my work with MA in Social Work students, where I am responsible for leading a final year work based learning module. This module involves some teaching preparation prior to the students embarking on their final placement of a continuous 135 days and 6 recall days (one a month) whilst they are undertaking placement, alongside blogging online every two weeks. Regarding the latter, the blogs could be viewed as an electronic community that aids participation in social work practice. For example in Dunworth's (2009) research in establishing an online community for

social work students on placement, she found that students engaged with each other and developed a CoP. She concluded that students shared their:

“knowledge, tried out ideas, applied new understandings and learnt from others”

(Dunworth 2009:68).

However I wish to explore how I might facilitate students' learning of professional identity through module teaching, although the blogs could be considered to be an integral part of this teaching, they are not the main focus of my attention.

My speculation is that the facilitated teaching sessions offer a structured theoretical framework and information for students, so that they can successfully participate in a CoP within their placement setting and in future qualified practice. Thus I could hypothesise that students join a CoP within their work based placement, whilst remaining part of a community at the university. I would argue that the tools and frameworks within my module, promote informal learning similar to that of “situated learning” (Lave and Wenger 1991) within the agency setting. Eraut (2004), argues that we learn from experience as well as from other people and that although many equate learning with formal education and training, learning actually occurs ‘on the job’ itself (Eraut, 2004:249). Learning from mistakes is an important aspect of this learning process as is the development of skills, expertise and principally the craft of social work (Sennett 2008).

“Over time, this participation leads to the acquisition of ‘skilful knowledge’, but also to the facility to engage successfully in the discourse, norms and practices of the particular social practice, thereby emphasising relations between capacities and practice” (Billet, 2001:447).

Accordingly I could claim that the teaching offered, recall days and blogs are about sharing knowledge, but it is only in participation in practice on placement, that enables the student to make meaningful sense of knowledge and forms their professional identity (Fuller, A cited in Hughes, Jewson and Unwin, 2007:19). For example, Nixon and Murr (2006:809) examined the use of CoP in social work and discovered that whilst students rely on formal learning and instruction they need to utilise informal learning experiences, or as Evan’s

(1999) proposes, 'tacit' knowledge to learn about professional identity. Interestingly, Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) found in their study of newly qualified social workers, that students were quite critical of 'self-directed learning' and wanted more lectures and direct teaching (1996:205). For instance students wanted more teaching around interpersonal skills, communication and assessment, similar to a 'learning curriculum', potentially leading to full participation in social practice (Billett 2004:314). This is further supported by the findings of Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000), where in using Dreyfus and Dreyfus' (1986) model of competence, they concluded that students learn the formal rules and knowledge to undertake social work but are still in the early stages of developing their own 'situational rules' (2000:57). Students in their study were far more concerned about passing the course, pleasing their supervisor and 'doing the job', therefore they were still detached from the situation and practice (2000:60). Therefore this collection of studies supports my hypothesis of the importance of teaching in providing a structure for social work students, within which to develop their identity and participate in practice settings. Conversely;

“it could be argued that most university teaching and learning practices are not about inclusion but tend to position undergraduate students as permanent novices, never attaining full membership of an academic CoP “

(Lea cited in Barton and Tusting, 2005:193).

I would strongly disagree with this statement as my personal objective in teaching is to assist students with fully participating in practice and developing a professional social work identity. I hope that by employing this theoretical lens to a specific critical incident, it will enable me to illustrate this point further, although I recognise that it might also highlight the difficulties and challenges in applying this lens to my professional context.

### **Critical Incident**

Firstly I need to outline the incident for the reader, which I will try to achieve as succinctly as possible. The incident occurred on the final recall day where the students requested that I invite speakers from the local authorities to present the ASYE. I had approached two practice educators, employed by different local authorities who were developing and implementing the ASYE for its launch in September 2012. These two educators enthusiastically accepted the

invitation as I had worked with them in the past as a local authority employee and we had undertaken together similar projects and teaching. Prior to the session, I prepared the students for the presentation and sent them a number of documents and links to the Skills for Care website (2012) explaining the ASYE, which had only recently been finalised.

During the recall day, the two educators presented a short description of the ASYE and how this would be implemented through a joint collaboration between local authorities in the surrounding area of the university. This presentation was initially well received by the students until discussion ensued around some key areas of concern for the students. Explicitly; that the ASYE should be completed within the first two years of graduation, the scheme only exists within local authority employment and that at the end of the first year graduates are passed or failed. A core of five mature female students verbalised their discontent with the proposals, stressing a number of pitfalls, including; what happens if they fail? What if they can't get a local authority job? What if they want to travel? What if they need to take time out for illness, birth of a child? Although valid questions, the students were quite angry and upset (one left in tears), so the way in which they offered these questions was quite unconstructive and they were effectively 'shooting the messengers'. I intervened and attempted to explain how negatively the students were framing their questions and treating the presenters. After the presentation I spoke briefly to the educators, who were surprised by the students' reactions but it had underlined a series of difficulties that they had not anticipated.

On returning to the group I found the original five students still visibly upset, whilst the remainder of the group refrained from engaging (total of 30 students). I was concerned that the students needed to take collective action regarding their unhappiness with the scheme and I was worried that the behaviour of a few students during the session would negatively impact on the cohort, should they wish to apply for local authority employment. Therefore this experience warranted further investigation and I was hopeful that CoP could offer me an appropriate theoretical lens to achieve this.

Initially using this heuristic, I discovered that what I had not fully appreciated at the time of the incident, is that it could be postulated that the students were fully participating in their CoP, consisting of a student group, within the university. Taking this hypothesis further, I was on the periphery of this community, although in some ways I had legitimacy and participated as an academic. For example, I was in the role of teaching the module, planning the presentation and found myself intervening to support the two speakers. The two speakers were invited, but had very limited legitimacy and were in fact excluded from the community by the reaction of the students. So it felt like the speakers were denied access to the student group because they posed a threat to the students' joint enterprise and shared repertoire and vision of becoming practicing qualified social workers. Therefore the students were exercising their power and agency within this community. However there were limits to this agency, as the students wished to seek participation as a qualified social worker practitioner and potentially the ASYE framework could be utilised as a tool for gaining this participation, as a kind of competence or capability framework. As Wenger claims:

“We feel an urgent need to align our experience with the competence ‘they’ define”  
(Wenger 2000:227).

Consequently the use of the ASYE and PCF could act as reifications to assist the students as ‘newcomers’ becoming ‘old timers’ and learning to fully participate (Lave and Wenger 1991). Albeit this would mean they would be on the periphery, they would be legitimate and working towards full participation. The concentration of the ASYE and PCF on competencies raises concerns that I do share with the students, crucially that is there is a danger of reducing professional knowledge and skills into simplistic competence statements (Hodkinson and Issitt 1995:66). Although I agree that frameworks can make the achievement of ‘competency’ more accessible and transparent for a novice, I believe that competency frameworks tend to oversimplify professional identity and offer certainty in what is actually a highly complex and dynamic profession. Other social work writers have found these difficulties, where it has been stated that (Moriarty, Manthorpe et al. 2011) many confuse the meeting of ‘competencies’ with ‘practice readiness’, ‘fit to practice’ or even, ‘fitness for

purpose” (Moriarty 2011:1345). This debate is not a new one within social work, Clark (1995) argued that;

“the nature of welfare practice requires high levels of discipline and imagination which are not captured within any reasonable interpretation of the idea of competence. I submit therefore that in attempting to reduce professional education to a mechanics of competence, the official establishment of British social work has made the wrong choice” (1995:579).

This relates back to my earlier exploration of who defines social work identity and profession? Beck and Young (2005:188) argue that professions often need to create a ‘code of ethics’ and ‘standards of professional integrity, judgement and loyalty’, which social work education implements and enforces through the use of the PCF and ASYE. Consequently, it could be said that the wider governing body of the College of Social Work is defining social work, rather than the participating practitioners themselves.

CoP, could offer a more positive solution to this dilemma as Wenger maintained that competence is essentially gained through experience and participation in practice (Wenger 1998:137). Wenger (1998:138) found that competence often drives the experience for ‘newcomers’, but experience itself can also drive competence by creating new ways and ideas that need to be shared and negotiated. Thus students in my context are gaining in confidence in their own practice through interaction within the teaching session and within the participation of their own practice placements. It could then be proposed that each individual student belongs to a CoP in their placement setting where they do have legitimacy and are participating as a newcomer and learner in their agency, which in turn is a potential link to a CoP that will be supporting the ASYE. In these placements students are learning not only through observation, but by participating in practice and negotiating meaning through their practice. This practice experience, as well as the teaching from university and personal experience, is what students will take with them into qualifying practice and is essentially the foundation for the development of their professional identity as a social worker. Likewise, Kelly et al (2012: 4) suggested that novices develop their identity as they participate in communities and move from the peripheral to more competent central participation. This is further emphasised by the work of Fuller and Unwin (2003) who explored the use of ‘legitimate peripheral

participation' in their work with apprentices. They highlighted the importance of education and institutional arrangements in "making sense of the lived reality of contemporary apprenticeship" (2003:408).

However this focus on students being newcomers, suggests that students have little to offer their placement environment. Alternatively, in my own experience as a practice supervisor, students often bring important skills and abilities with them, such as more advanced skills in the use of IT and understanding of theories and legislation, which they were then able to contribute to the placement setting, and indeed to my own practice. Essentially the way in which students question routine practice and procedures in placement, often provoked change within my organisation and in my own practice. Consequently, I would agree with Fuller et al (2005) in their assertion that novices also assisted others to learn in the workplace, so learning is a two way process. This supports the 'consensus' that Wenger envisaged within CoP, where even tensions created new learning and negotiation of meaning.

This issue of consensus within CoP is one that I struggle with in social work, as we educate social work students to challenge the status quo and social injustice. Therefore I would speculate that the issue of power and agency in this situation is far more complicated than I originally anticipated. Despite being on the periphery of the practice educator's community, the students did exercise power and agency, as the educators were already beginning to negotiate and explore changes to the ASYE, which they would take back to their work places. Consequently during the critical incident we were all renegotiating and transforming practice and enabling change. For instance I encouraged the students to take collective action by contacting Skills for Care, Social Work Reform Board and the College of Social Work regarding their discontent. Reflecting upon my own role; my initial motivation for the session was to act as a 'broker', to readdress this power imbalance and enable the students to participate in the ASYE. As a broker, I was neither a full participant of the students' CoP nor the educators who were implementing the ASYE (Wenger 1998). I was on the periphery of both these communities, being a teacher within the student community and a previous colleague of the educators. It was through this brokering role and the tensions this created, that I hoped to be able

to assist the students in participating and engaging with the CoP which forms qualified social work. This is lens is useful, as immediately following the incident I felt that more damage than good had been achieved from the session, but this incident assisted me in striving to broker between the students' CoP and that of qualified practice. For example since the incident I have contacted Skills for Care, arranged to become part of a network, and have invited the educators back to teaching next year to prepare students in the next cohort. I have also made contact with voluntary and private sector agencies to assist in facilitating their involvement in the ASYE, again acting as a broker. In order to successfully achieve this boundary work I need to be on the periphery of a number of communities, such as academia, professional social work, student community and so on. In fact in this sense 'brokering' could be viewed in itself as an 'emerging' CoP as brokers like myself are part of a 'constellation of CoP' (Henry and Mackenzie 2012). For instance these boundaries between the communities are blurred and often cross over each other, so I could view my work on the recall days as assisting this intersection of boundaries. In particular, in brokering the knowledge gap that students have in participating within qualified social work practice, thus readdressing the power imbalance. This is nicely summed up by An. E, He (2009) –

“The “mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire” (Wenger, 1998) is a cluster of dynamic concepts, which could only be achieved through consistent negotiation, mediation and facilitation by highly engaged community members in the process of participation. A broker plays an important role in such negotiation”  
(He 2009:163)

In considering a critique of CoP this exploration suggests that as we all belong to many CoPs, how can we disentangle and analyse them all? For instance we belong to; society, work, gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, age, sex, home and so on. Not to mention the impact of politics, policy, social capital, bureaucracy, history, media and global concerns (Hughes, Jewson and Unwin, 2007:171). Consequently it is likely that it is not this simplistic or straight forward. This concept of boundaries, gives rise to the question of whether CoPs really exist, or if they do where each CoP begins and ends (Hughes, Jewson and Unwin, 2007:172)? It could simply be that students meet the university criteria to graduate as qualified social workers and then they have to meet the ASYE and PCF criteria. Although I do like the apparent tidy and

structured feel of CoP and its versatility in application to social work practice, I wonder whether I am being lulled into a false sense of security? In addition the 'liberation' that I have been feeling of discovering my role as a 'broker' who can address the power imbalance could be equally delusional! As it could be argued that the power imbalance between teacher and student, and qualified social workers and students, will always exist and like my criticism of competency frameworks, CoP could be viewed as making this situation far too simplistic.

Returning to identity, five of the students reacted strongly to the presentation and were potentially jeopardising their acceptance within the local authority. These five students have been quite vocal throughout their student careers and rather than demonising them, I have reflected upon whether it is actually the student community that has placed them in this position of defiance to those who might endanger their shared vision of qualifying as social workers. An alternative hypothesis I have is that these students exercised more agency than their peers, as they have a more developed sense of identity. For instance, these mature students had a substantial amount of previous social care experience and life experience that they utilised within the student community. Contrariwise, Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000), surmised that in the early days of a social worker's career and training they often 'sacrificed' their 'personal' identity for their 'professional' identity, as the students were very concerned about developing a 'professional identity' until they became more comfortable with these being 'mutually exclusive' (2000:158). This social work specific research gives further credibility to Sfard and Prusak's (2005) argument that individuals have many identities which are constantly changing and that of Day et al (2006) concerning the impact of an individual's identity on their professional identity.

In relation to this context and the response of the students, I have begun to wonder if social work students do take up employment in local authorities, will they be disillusioned to find that the practice and values of the organisation conflict with their existing identities. For example, Jack and Donnellan (2010) found in their research of the experiences of newly qualified social workers, that most agencies fail "to recognise the *person* within the developing *professional* "

(2010:317). Notwithstanding this, I still believe that the development of a student social worker's identity can be positively supported by their work based learning environment, frameworks created by the practice module, PCF and later as graduates through the ASYE, with its increased supervision and support.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this exploration of social work professional identity through the theoretical lens of CoP has highlighted the importance of learning through shared practice. For social work as a wider profession, reification like the PCF and ASYE should provide competency frameworks for students and graduates to access legitimate peripheral participation in qualified practice within social work teams. However this analysis has also highlighted that social work identity is unclear and potentially far more complex than CoP allows. There are particular questions concerning the boundaries of CoP and whether communities actually exist. However this is a heuristic so I have employed this framework subjectively to explore my own practice and in doing so, I have found it a useful and worthwhile theoretical lens with which to explore my work. In fact some of the criticisms of CoP have enabled me to explore my own practice in more detail and how students might learn and develop their professional identity. In particular I have found it beneficial to critically explore the notions of agency, power and my own role in 'brokering' between different CoPs in order to assist students in their search for social work identity.

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### 4.3 Assignment Three – Communities, Cultures and Change EDD621

**Transformative learning in social work education:** An exploration of the use of critical incident analysis, as an instrument in meeting the Professional Capabilities Framework.

#### **Abstract**

Transformative learning approaches are seldom referred to within social work education; yet such theories have much to offer social work practitioners, particularly in relation to the development of skills in critical reflection. Through the author's own use of transformative learning approaches in teaching, this article highlights the potential of critical incident analysis tools in enabling social work students to meet the Professional Capabilities Framework's (The College of Social Work, 2012(a)) focus upon critical reflection, social justice and social change. This article concludes that there is much to gain in social work educators consciously employing transformative learning approaches to meet the Professional Capabilities Framework, but also to enable social work students to manage the challenges posed by neo-liberalism and the resulting over-bureaucratic nature of the profession.

**Keywords:** transformative learning, social work education, critical incident analysis, Professional Capabilities Framework, social justice, social change, neo-liberalism.

#### **Introduction**

The social work profession appears to be in a constant state of flux, this is inevitable given that the profession works with the most vulnerable members of society and as a consequence, experiences a high profile within the media (Wilson, 2013). The tabloid coverage and public interest in the death of Baby P (Laming, 2009), resulted in a significant investigation into how children should be safeguarded within society. Unsurprisingly, this investigation focused upon the role of social workers and the ensuing recommendations (Laming 2009), provoked the government to appoint Eileen Munro to undertake a review of social work. Although Munro's (2011) review was focused upon social work with children and families, the impact of her final report has been far reaching for the entire social work profession. Commencing with; selecting students for

courses, training social work students, the practise of qualified social workers and the continual professional development of social work practitioners.

One of the major changes implemented by the coalition government in response to Munro (2011) was the introduction of the Professional Capabilities Framework (The College of Social Work (TCSW), 2012(a)). The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) heralded a number of significant changes in social work education and replaced the National Occupational Standards and the Code of Practice (TOPSS, 2002). In addition, the College of Social Work was launched in January 2012, in order to positively promote the social work profession. The intention of the PCF is to promote the abilities and capabilities of social work practitioners, rather than focusing upon a prescriptive and competence based framework, which was utilised by the National Occupational Standards (TCSW, 2012(b)). The PCF consists of nine domains of practice such as, Critical Reflection and Analysis, Rights, Justice and Economic Wellbeing, Values and Ethics; each of these domains comprise of levels which act as descriptors of the expected ability of social workers' or social work students', at various stages of their careers (TCSW, 2012(b)). Munro (2011) advocated for the PCF's potential as an essential set of expectations, necessary for effective social work practise.

“They should drive excellence in practice by helping recruit the right people who participate in appropriate and effective qualifying and post-graduate training and who are scrutinised in their ability to do their jobs”

(Munro, 2011:97).

The College of Social Work further supports this by stating that the PCF is a 'professional' rather than 'occupational' framework (2012(b):1). Consequently the PCF is currently utilised as a medium that “enables social work to be recognised as part of an international profession” (College of Social Work, 2012(b): 2).

This article will seek to explore how transformative learning theory can be utilised in social work training through the use of a critical incident analysis tool as a vehicle to enable students to meet the PCF, in particular developing their critical reflection skills and appreciation of social justice and change within their practise.

## **Current Social Work Context in England**

In my role as a social work educator, I am most interested in the domain of 'Critical Reflection and Analysis'. Although critical reflection has always been a crucial element of social work training and practise, its inclusion within the PCF reinforces its importance within social work as a profession. This acknowledgement of critical analysis supports my own teaching practise, where I have been employing a critical incident tool to assist in the development of students' critical reflection skills, particularly in preparation for, and during placements. My implementation of this tool is grounded within transformative learning theory, but whilst the use of such reflection mechanisms is common within social work education, the conscious application of transformative learning theory is mostly absent (Jones, 2009:20). It is my belief, that critical reflection can also assist students in developing their awareness of social justice and social change and how they might address this realisation within their practise. For instance, learning strategies in managing the increasingly process driven nature of social work that has been promoted by neo-liberalism.

Whilst definitions of social work vary considerably, most agree that intrinsic to social work is the attention to social justice and human rights. This is supported by the PCF (TCSW, 2012(a)) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) definition of social work:

"The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work".

(IFSW, 2012)

Contemporary social work educationalists work from what they describe as a foundation of 'critical social work theory' (Hick and Fook et al, 2005). In particular these social work theorists recognise the complex dynamics of power and its potential imbalance between the social worker and service users (Fook, 2012). Many social work writers argue that critical social work theory owes its origins to neo-Marxism, feminism and post modernism.

“Critical social work seeks to understand how dominant relations of power operate through and across systems of discourse, to deconstruct and reconstruct these discourses”

(McBeath and Webb, cited in Hick, Fook et al, 2005:169)

This ‘critical’ approach to social work has thrived with the development of neo-liberalism and its impact upon social work practice. For instance neo-liberalism has resulted in care management becoming intrinsic to the practise of social workers who work with adults. While in social work with children and families, there has been a perceivable shift from a medical model to a social and legal model of practise. Thus social workers are frequently required to act as investigators, undertaking surveillance and control in the lives of service users (Rogowski, 2012:925).

This shift in social work practice can be traced back to the political leadership of Margaret Thatcher and has continued with increased vigour to the present day. Furthermore, the death of Victoria Climbiè (Laming, 2003) has led to overly process driven social work practice, which is risk adverse and over-bureaucratic. Consequently, Munro has advocated for more time to be spent with children and families, thus allowing social workers’ to exercise their professional judgement and reflect upon their practise with service users (2011:926). However the continued spending cuts of the coalition government and their drive to reduce state intervention in order to discourage welfare dependency, presents a significant obstacle to implementing Munro’s recommendations. This is not a recent development, as Taylor (2007:85) explains that neo-liberalists believe that continued over reliance on the welfare state will stifle the ambition and aspirations of individuals to succeed in society. Thus in modern times, the public sector workforce is perceived as a financial drain on the state and the media portrays social workers as encouraging this welfare dependency (Rogowski, 2012:924).

Subsequently, social work intervention has become procedural and often unreflective, hence the resurgence in radical social work (Ferguson, 2008) and anti-globalisation movements. As stated earlier these academics often employ a Marxist or critical social work theory perspective, but there has also been an emergence of new theories based upon building ‘relationships’ with service users (Ruch, *et al*, 2010). For instance, the

Social Work Action Network was established in 2004 to promote political action and social change.

“SWAN promotes a model of social work and social care practice which is rooted in the value of social justice. This model seeks to advocate alongside, and on behalf of, service users and carers. It values both individual relationship-based practice and collective approaches”

(SWAN, 2013)

Consequently, the emphasis upon critical reflection within transformative learning and its emancipatory focus is potentially useful for contemporary social work education and practice.

### **Transformative learning theory**

Despite transformative learning theories appearing to be seldom used within social work education, Jones argues that social work education “shares a set of similar foundations” to transformative learning theories (Jones, 2009:20). So it is important to explore the theoretical foundations of transformative learning theory before applying this perspective to social work education.

Much of the development of transformative learning theory is owed to the work of Jack Mezirow (1990, 1991, 2000, 2009), an American educational theorist. Although he is not the only theorist of transformative learning, he is probably the most widely acclaimed within the field. His work is founded upon a cognitive and rational understanding of the way in which adults learn. Mezirow (2000) postulated that adults learn by constantly questioning and adapting their ‘frames of reference’, essentially altering the way in which they understand and perceive the world around them. Therefore ‘meaning’ and the way in which learners make sense of experiences is crucial to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991).

“When people critically examine their habitual expectations, revise them and act on the revised point of view, transformative learning occurs”

(Cranton, 2006:19).

Writers like Cranton (2006), have further developed Mezirow’s work. Cranton highlights that transformative learning is strongly grounded within a constructivist as well as a cognitive framework. Where we construct meaning from our personal experiences and validate them through our interaction with

others. Consequently, learning takes place when prior held beliefs are questioned, resulting in a 'disorientating dilemma' (Cranton, 2006:23). Thus discourse is essential to this learning, by reflecting with others upon experiences and critically reflecting upon practise.

Most importantly for social work, transformative learning can result in wider social change, in addition to individual learning. For example,

“Central to the goal of adult education in democratic societies is the process of helping learners become more aware of the context of their problematic understandings and beliefs, more critically reflective on their assumptions and those of others, more fully and freely engaged in discourse, and more effective in taking action on their reflective judgments”

(Mezirow, 2000:31).

It is here that critical reflection is fundamental in enabling students to explore the impact of neo-liberalism upon current social work practice.

### **Importance of Critical Reflection in Transformative Learning**

There is no doubt that critical reflection is a crucial ingredient of transformative learning theory. In the work of Mezirow and Taylor (2009) they identify critical reflection as one of the three core components of transformative learning (2009:4), the others being: individual experience and dialogue. These three elements are inextricably linked to one another, as to reflect you need experiences to explore and dialogue with others is required to achieve learning. In order to further promote learning, 'value laden' course content is required to provoke critical reflection and analysis, such as unpicking ethical dilemmas within ones practise. This view is reinforced by the extensive work of Stephen Brookfield (1983, 1995, 2005, 2009) and his emphasis on the importance of critical reflection within adult learning.

Mezirow and Taylor state that critical reflection concerns “questioning the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience” (2009:7). This learning can be further consolidated by utilising the writing of reflective journals, blogs and reports, to strengthen the reflective experience, particularly when these documents are discussed with peers (Mezirow and Taylor, 2009:9). For this sharing of experience to work effectively, trust is

required within the group, and an openness and non-judgemental attitude from participants and facilitators. It is through this interchange that the facilitator and participants become co-learners and create new meaning, whilst sharing their experiences (Mezirow, 1990). Brookfield (2009) argues that for reflection to be critical it must “have as its explicit focus uncovering, and challenging hegemonic assumptions” (2009:293). Furthermore, for Brookfield critical reflection is a political activity, where power is explored and enables participants to challenge the hegemonic assumptions that they discover. Consequently, this fits well with both the definition of social work and the professions’ ambition to tackle oppression and achieve social change.

As stated earlier, critical reflection has been utilised within social work education for many years, in particular using the work of Donald Schön (1987, 1991). The importance of critical reflection within social work has been brought to the fore by the introduction of a capability domain of ‘Critical Reflection and Analysis’ within the Professional Capabilities Framework (TCSW, 2012(a)). The main intention of using critical reflection with social work students, is to develop alternative approaches and practises, thus critical reflection has an empowering and emancipatory function. This is supported by the influential work of Paulo Freire (1996), who believed that pedagogy could be used to bring about social transformation. Jackson (2007) revisited Freire’s work and has applied his theories to more contemporary times. Jackson found that whilst those who advocate for neo-liberalist practises state that they are concerned with equality, ‘free markets’ and individualism, in reality they are oppressive and immobilising (Jackson, 2007:203). Similarly, this influence of neo-liberalism can be witnessed within current social work practice and the resulting process driven and risk-adverse nature of social work that Munro (2011) portrayed in her report. Hence numerous social work educators have employed critical analysis tools within their work with students.

For example, Fook and Gardner (2007) have applied a post-modernist framework to social work and critical reflection. They view reflection as a means of creating new knowledge and meaning within social work practice and developed a critical analysis incident tool to enable students to critically reflect. Fook and Gardner (2007) state that through this process of critical analysis with

others, practitioners are encouraged to challenge their assumptions and frames of reference as they are:

“shaken up and examined, they may be remade in ways that lead to changes in the way the individual person practises and in relation to their social contexts”

(Fook & Gardner, 2007:16).

Additionally, Bay and Farlane’s (2011) research is of great interest, as their study is one of the few social work articles to explore how critical reflection can be utilised through transformative learning theory to identify dominant discourses. Within this article, Bay and Farlane (2011) use the work of both bell hooks and Friere in promoting education as a ‘practice of freedom’. Their research concerns a critical reflection module for students undertaking an undergraduate degree course, following their return from practice placements. The module was originally developed by Jan Fook and her theoretical back drop of post modernism. The purpose of this module was:

“to identify the dominant discourses circulating in making sense of their experience, to problematize their taken for granted ‘lived experience’, to reconceptualise identity categories, disrupt assumed casual relations and to reflect on how power relations are operating”

(Bay and Farlane, 2011:745)

Their intention was to ensure that students avoid unwittingly perpetuating power inequalities within their practise, by enabling students to step back and subject their practise to a ‘critical gaze’ (Bay and Farlane, 2011:748). Of note, Bay and Farlane (2011) make links with Foucault and his theory concerning governmentality. This concerns how students are governed and govern themselves and this governmentality maintains current practises within social work. For instance,

“This process gives students some tools to question how assumptions around causality, identity and power might restrict their practice and hence limit their capacity to work with people in an empowering and empowered way”

(Bay and Farlane, 2011:754).

Fook (2012), Bay and Farlane’s (2011) research and use of critical reflection share similarities with Brookfield’s understanding of the implications and

benefits of critical reflection, as discussed earlier in this article. In reality, many social work programmes positively encourage critical reflection and use a variety of methods to achieve this, as found by Redmond (cited in Fook, Gardner and White, 2006, Chapter 15) in her small scale study of the use of critical reflection on postgraduate social work programmes. Gillian Ruch (2009) has also developed critical analysis tools for social work education, particularly within child care practice. Ruch utilises small group dialogue to create a safe space for reflection on practice (Ruch. 2009:361). A more recent use of critical reflection has been researched by Tsang (2013), exploring the use of 'surprises' in learning. Tsang developed a series of questions to assist students in exploring surprises within their practice, which is extremely similar to a critical incident exercise (2013:62).

What this exploration demonstrates is the centrality of critical reflection in social work practice and education, which is a core component of the PCF and transformative learning theory. Consequently, critical reflection tools provide a framework within which students can explore the challenges of the impact of neo-liberalism on social work practice, in the safety of the classroom with the support of peers and educators. By using transformative learning theory, a learning environment can be created that empowers students to develop these skills further and meet the requirements of the PCF.

### **An illustration of the use of a critical incident analysis tool**

I now wish to briefly illustrate how transformative learning theory is used within my own practise through the use of a critical incident tool. Essentially I have been using this tool in order to develop students' critical reflection skills, awareness of social justice and appreciate the possibilities for social change, but more recently in order to meet the requirements of the PCF.

I have been working as a social work educator for over a decade, embarking upon this role as a 'practice teacher', whilst still undertaking work as a social worker with children and families. Consequently my teaching has a practice influence and focus, which I have found to be well assisted by the use of critical reflection tools with social work students. I moved into my current role of social work lecturer three years ago, employed to focus upon teaching students in preparation for their practice placements. It has been during this role that I

discovered transformative learning theory and its potential for my teaching. In my work with final stage postgraduate students, I have been employing a critical incident analysis tool that I have developed from the work of Fook and Gardner (2007) and Green Lister and Crisp (2007). This involves at least two teaching sessions of introducing critical reflection theory and experiential use of critical incident analysis within the confines of the classroom. In preparation for the sessions, I ask that students think of a critical 'moment' within their previous practice placement to focus upon for the critical incident. They write something brief (Fook and Gardner, 2007) for the session to share with peers, which is mostly descriptive of the incident. Then in the classroom I explain the importance of critical reflection, including the potential for transformative learning, before the students are invited to divide themselves into groups of five, in order to explore their incidents. I also organise my teaching so that students become well versed with the PCF domain of 'Critical Reflection and Critical Analysis' and we explore its interdependence with the other domains regarding social justice and social change. Within the groups, each student has the opportunity to critically explore their incident with the support of their peers and the use of a series of questions on a hand-out that I have developed from Green Lister and Crisp (2007). I then circulate amongst the groups, facilitating and assisting as necessary to promote critical reflection. Prior to the second session, students are asked to write a brief reflection upon what they have learnt from the group process, in particular how this exercise might change their future practice. At the second session the students discuss this learning within the same format as the previous session, with the aim of consolidating their learning and promoting improved and best practice.

Thus, in facilitating this exercise I utilise transformative learning theory, by setting up a critical moment for students to explore in dialogue with others, in what I hope will be a supportive and safe environment. The trigger questions enable critical reflection as they challenge students to question their 'frame of reference', and consider values and ethical dilemmas within their practise. In essence they reflect upon a 'disorientating dilemma' and learn a tool which they can use once in their final social work placement, with the support of practice educators and supervisors.

I have found that much of the student discussion readily links to the PCF, as students usually bring 'moments' that have arisen as a result of the over bureaucratic and risk adverse nature of social work. In essence, they are trying to develop practises that are reflective and create opportunities to challenge social inequalities and promote social justice.

I have provided the reader with this succinct illustration, as I believe it demonstrates how transformative learning can be consciously used within social work education. This brief example will also support the discussion that now follows regarding the potential challenges of employing transformative learning within social work education.

### **Discussion of the challenges of using transformative learning in social work education**

First and foremost, a challenge within social work is the ambiguous use of the term, critical reflection (Wilson, 2013:157). Critical reflection within social work is not clearly defined and often interchanged with reflexivity, critical reflection and critical analysis (D'Cruz et al, 2007). This could result in confusion for students, especially in the absence of clear tools and explanations of critical reflection. So the use of critical incident tools like the one described by the author, are most useful for students in enabling them to become reflective practitioners and in meeting the PCF domains.

There are also a number of practical difficulties that emerge regarding how one might implement transformative learning in the classroom. In my own example, I am fortunate to be working with a group of no more than forty students, although even this is potentially too large for small group activity and facilitation. However in many other higher education institutions social work educators are under increasing pressure to work with greater numbers of students. Therefore, on the one hand, there is pressure within social work to develop critically reflective practitioners, but on the other, the impetus to produce a substantial workforce of competent social workers who can work within the increasing bureaucratic demands of policy and procedures (Wilson, 2013:169). This drive to churn out graduates is at odds with the intention of the PCF to develop social

workers who can exercise their professional judgement and become reflective practitioners.

“Moreover, the move to the managerial ‘social work business’ is anathema to social work values and its commitment to social work justice and social change “

(Rogowski, 2012:929).

With the decrease in funding many educators are not only forced to teach unwieldy numbers of students, but also to use technology to work at a distance with students (Burgess and Taylor, 2005, Ramsden, 2003). Concerning the latter, the use of technology could hinder critical reflection, as the lack of face-to-face contact will most likely result in mistrust, as within a virtual learning environment signs of honesty, empathy and understanding cannot be easily conveyed. Ramsden (2003), a prominent educational theorist, argues that the most effective teaching takes place within small groups, rather than within the confines of more traditional didactic teaching methods. He strongly advocated for student centred learning, where educators value the contributions that students bring to the classroom, such as their previous experience and skills, rather than simply being absorbers of information. This view is taken further by bell hooks (1994, 2003), where she perceived the need to create an ‘open learning community’, where all students have the opportunity to create an educational environment that is both exciting and promotes the merit of their involvement (1994:8). However:

“These conditions are never fully realized in practice. They reflect democratic ideals such as self-respect, respect for others, acceptance of the common good, and willingness to be open and engage diversity “

(Mezirow and Taylor, 2009:20).

This naivety, or false sense of security, can be further compounded by educators exercising power and surveillance without realising it (Brookfield, 2005:122). For instance, an educator might arrange a room to best facilitate learning in a group, but students are still subject to assessment and surveillance within that environment. Naturally, students will seek out non-verbal cues that indicate that the teacher agrees with their opinions, or that other students are supportive of their contribution to the wider classroom discussion. Furthermore,

Brookfield (2005) draws upon the work of Foucault (1980), to explain that an educator can never create a learning environment which is devoid of power dynamics, nor can the classroom be fully democratic, as students may talk in class to appear intelligent and to compete with other students. Alternatively some students might not talk because they feel they are under surveillance from the teacher, but also from their fellow students. For instance, bell hooks views competition in the classroom as 'disrupting connection' (2003:130), as students are interacting to obtain a better grade, or wish to appear more competent than other students.

This is similar to the Panopticon utilised by Foucault (1980:146), where students feel watched even when they are not being observed. Foucault (1980) argued that this results in 'self-surveillance', whereby students may invent highly interesting critical incidents or exaggerate them to meet what they believe to be the facilitator's and their peers' expectations. In addition, what is empowering for one student might well be oppressive and not meet the learning styles of another. Within modern society surveillance is often achieved through technology. Not only is this evident in social work education, but also within wider social work practice. A qualified social worker could easily be perceived as a type of prison or police officer, exercising control and surveillance for the state over service users (Moffat cited in Chambon and Irving et al, 1999:224), similar again to the Panopticon. Applying this to my own practise as an educator, I could be reinforcing dominant discourses and hegemony rather than nurturing the development of challenging and reflective future practitioners. This may appear to be a somewhat negative perspective, and it was not necessarily the intention of Foucault in his theory of power. As although Foucault perceived power as inescapable, he did view power in a more positive light than this implies (Mullaly, cited in Hick, Fook et al, 2005:172). For instance, Foucault believed that it is how power is exercised that is crucial, thus by being aware of power and its impact upon service users, social workers can promote social justice and even social change. Hence, it is important to remember, as Brookfield stated, that teaching can be employed as a political activity (Brookfield, 2005:354). Consequently, by uncovering hegemonic discourses, students are able to reconstruct new practises to combat the negative impact of neo-liberalism. This is essential for social work practitioners in challenging

inequalities and social exclusion within society, rather than becoming an instrument of the state and reinforcing, or even colluding with these inequalities. This is acutely important within social work in an neo-liberalist climate, where social work practice has become increasingly dominated by managerialism and has become 'rational-technical' in its approach (Munro, 201:86).

Returning to social justice and social change, this discussion raises some serious questions for social work educators when considering apply transformative learning theory to the classroom. For example, a critically reflective social work educator could enquire; in whose interests was the PCF developed? Does the PCF further the interests of the government, social workers themselves or service users? In addition how can transformative learning theories be used to enable social change in social work? Or are these theories and tools just simply a means of reinforcing and promoting dominant discourses, which only serve to set students up to fail once they are qualified, as they may not have the opportunity to practise critical reflection in the work place? I also wonder whether by using my critical incident tool with students, that I too am supporting the status quo of neo-liberalism.

“Although highlighting the importance of reflective practice in professional development, the results suggest that agency systems that have become over-reliant on rules and procedures present formidable obstacles to developing critical reflection in the way envisaged by Munro”

(Wilson,2013:155)

Finally another criticism of transformative learning that cannot be ignored, is that not all adult learners have the capacity to learn critical reflection, as they have not learnt the skills of reflective discourse, nor do they have the resources to achieve this. So rather than enabling the voices of the marginalised to be heard, transformative learning practises might reinforce these inequalities, particularly class and cultural discrimination (hooks, 2003). This perspective is taken a step further by feminist writers, where education and learning is viewed as a place where sexist practises are reinforced. Belenky (1986) argues that teaching practises are based upon how men learn, rather than women, thus teaching focuses upon 'separate' learning rather than 'connected' learning. She states that teaching is more effective if it includes facilitating a student's ability to exercise and find their own voices (Belenky, 1986:218). Belenky (1986)

hypothesises that in groups, 'connected knowers' can achieve their potential, whereas 'separate knowers' can become stagnant. Likewise, hooks (1994) argues that we need flexible practises in education to enable women to find their 'voice', and that this needs to be evident in the classroom to enable transformation to occur.

So there is a need for educators to be constantly 'critical' of their own practise to ensure they are not reinforcing this dominant ideology (Brookfield, 2005). Thus Brookfield (1995) suggests some teaching practises to enhance an educator's knowledge of these challenges, like reflective journals and seeking student feedback, all of which have been useful in my own practise.

## **Conclusion**

This exploration has highlighted a number of issues for me in my endeavour to use transformative learning theory within my practise as a social work educator. Firstly, use of transformative learning theory is compatible with meeting the PCF through the use of a critical incident tool. This implement will ensure that students are clear what is expected of them in terms of reflection, but it also offers a framework within which to uncover hegemonic discourses and develop strategies in addressing these within their practise. In particular, this analysis has further reinforced my views about the impact of neo-liberalism on social work practise and the need to enable students to work within these constraints through the use of transformative learning theory. I have discovered that social work educators do employ transformative learning theory but often without reference to its components. This can be hazardous as Mezirow and Taylor (2009) indicate, that to use the core elements of transformative learning (critical reflection, dialogue and individual experience) without awareness of transformative learning is "rudderless teaching, with no clear goal or purpose" (2009:5).

However, this discussion has illuminated the potential dangers of naively believing that transformative learning theory facilitates a pedagogy that fully empowers students to critically reflect upon their practise and challenge social injustice. Instead, educators can never fully escape the power that they hold as a teacher and the authority that students invest in these academic roles. Furthermore, social work educators could be accused of 'setting up students to

fail' once they are qualified, as they may not have the opportunity to practise critical reflection, nor have the freedom to challenge oppression.

“To create the type of learning organisations in which reflective practice is more likely to flourish, both employers and social work educators need to be aware of the dangers of risk-averse and ‘routinised’ approaches embedded in current working practises”

(Wilson,2013:170)

This pessimism and questions are important for social work educators to hold in perspective, as they enable educators to be realistic and remain ‘in touch’ with the real world of social work practice within the current climate of neo-liberalism.

“the nature of social work education will be heavily dependent on whether the goal of social work is seen to be the maintenance and reproduction of the existing social system or the making of a contribution to social transformation”

(Jones, 2009:14).

Thus, transformative learning theory has much to offer social work educators, if utilised with caution and with the assistance of critical incident analysis tools. More importantly, transformative learning theory can assist higher educational establishments in meeting the requirements of the PCF and its focus upon developing reflective practitioners who have an understanding and appreciation of social injustice and social change.

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### **Rationale for my choice of the Journal of Transformative Education.**

I knew that I wished to focus upon my work with social work students and had initially thought of choosing the Journal of Social Work Education. However my main focus was upon the use of a critical incident analysis tool in enabling students meet the new changes within the social work profession to develop critically reflective practitioners, who are fully aware of social justice and social change. Whilst undertaking reading for my presentation of my 'Schema' for this module, I renewed my interest in transformative learning, which led me to change my mind and choose this particular journal and its obvious focus upon transformative learning. This was reinforced by reading the criteria for the journal which encourages submissions from practitioners regarding their 'individual experience' and from a 'social context' (criteria, page 23).

### **Submission Guidelines for The Journal of Transformative Education.**

The *Journal of Transformative Education (JTED)* is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal focused on advancing the understanding, practice, and experience of transformative education. Transformative education is defined as those educational practices that are informed by transformative learning theory and that foster deep engagement with and reflection on our taken-for-granted ways of viewing the world, resulting in fundamental shifts in how we see and understand ourselves and our relationship with the world.

The *Journal of Transformative Education* invites researchers from a wide array of disciplines whose work reflects this overall aim and scope to submit original research, reviews and topical dialogue and communication on all aspects of transformative education and learning. These disciplines include but are not limited to:

- Adult education and lifelong learning
- Change, transition, and transformation
- [Management](#) and corporate education
- Educational and humanistic psychology
- Experiential education
- Holistic education
- Organizational development, learning, [and psychology](#)
- Social change

*JTED* is particularly interested in articles that seek to test, build on, and elaborate existing theoretical perspectives on transformative learning, that demonstrate innovative and creative applications of the theory in practice contexts, and that explore the international and cross-cultural issues of the theory and practice of transformative learning.

The journal seeks to deliver high academic quality in an engaging, thought-provoking, participative, and reflexive scholarly discourse across the spectrum of issues which transformational education encompasses, including

- Individual experience
- Educational and institutional process
- Formal and informal purposes
- Venues for transformative education
- Cultural issues
- Social context

The journal is global in scope and content and is diverse in its approaches and topics - drawing from theory, research, practice, individual experience, and retrospective insight from past major theorists.

Submit your article at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jted>.

The maximum length for most manuscripts is 7,500 words. Articles should be submitted as a Word file in Times New Roman font, size 12, with one-inch margins.

The title page should contain:

- Manuscript title;
- Full names, institutional affiliations and positions of authors;
- Complete contact information for all authors including phone, fax, e-mail, and mailing address;
- Acknowledgement of formal contributions to the work by others, if any; and
- Statement of place and date of any previous oral presentation of the paper.

The first page of text should include an abstract of no more than 150 words. The names of the authors should only appear on the title page.

Style should follow American Psychological Association (APA) (6th Edition) guidelines.

Letters to the Editor: Journal of Transformative Education encourages dialogue and communication on the subject of transformative education. Please e-mail the editor at [dirkx@msu.edu](mailto:dirkx@msu.edu).

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#### **4.4 Assignment Four – Research Module EDD622**

**Title:** How do social work students develop their professional identity?

##### **Abstract**

I have approached this final assignment as a narrative of my journey upon the EdD programme. Within this account I chart and analyse the development of my ontological, epistemological and theoretical research paradigm (Guba, 1990). To achieve this I have referred to my writing within the previous three assignments, in order to outline how my theoretical perspective of social constructionism (Burr, 2003), has influenced my research question of; How do social work students develop their professional identity? I then, explain my literature review, as this significantly informed my choice of methodology. My methodology developed somewhat like navigating a maze; with many twists, turns, dead ends and retracing of my footsteps, before finally deciding upon an appropriate range of methods. Ultimately I decided that the qualitative method of a semi-structured interview would best serve my purposes, alongside grounded theory to analyse my data. These interviews will be undertaken with students, with the potential to interview lecturers, social work practitioners and practice educators concerning their views of how students develop their professional identity.

As I progressed on this voyage, I discovered further reading that I wish to undertake, such as concerning professional socialisation and books regarding 'self' and identity development. I am excited by the prospect of further paths to follow within the maze, whilst being mindful of the requirement to be both realistic and focused in my endeavours. Consequently this venture has only just commenced, as there is much to consider and analyse, notwithstanding the ethical challenges of implementing my methodology. What is certain, is that my ideas are worthy of doctoral research, as highlighted by my literature review. My intention within this assignment is to portray my thinking thus far and establish clear routes that I wish to explore in my RDC2 and thesis as illustrated in my timeline. I hope that this exploration is as useful to the reader in understanding my thinking, as it has been for me in undertaking this adventure.

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## **My research question and interest in social work professional identity.**

My research question concerns, 'How do social work students develop their professional identity'? This is not so much 'who' defines social work identity, but 'how' students might develop and build upon their identity during the course of their studies. I arrived at this question as a result of my own personal experience of social work and particularly within my educational role with social work students. I will briefly explain this process to contextualise my ideas for the reader and explain why I am intrigued by this topic.

I completed my social work qualification in 1992 at Bath University, alongside a degree in Sociology. It was during this training that a spark of interest began in how students might develop their professional identity. This is based upon my own personal journey, where I experienced a significant transition from a council estate in multi-cultural Leicester to a largely white and middle class institution. This interest was rekindled in reading an article in the first EdD module (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009), where their research of working class students at an elite university resonated strongly with my own experience of higher education. This personal interest continued whilst developing my social work career with children and families and in supporting social work students as a supervisor, as I believe identity is constantly renegotiated and developed (Day et al, 2006).

In my current role as a lecturer, this theme of the development of professional identity has persisted, as a considerable proportion of my teaching concerns preparing postgraduate social work students for their placements. This entails teaching first year students in a module titled 'Professional Practice', preparing students for their first assessed placement. In addition I am the module lead for the final placement, involving a series of teaching sessions in readiness for placement and organising recall days during placement, with a focus upon qualifying practice. For example these recall days cover topics such as; managing stress, continuing professional development and presentations from agency representatives concerning interviews and job applications. Consequently I am personally driven to undertake research that will inform and improve my work with students, thus I have maintained a focus upon professional development and readiness for practice.

My initial research proposal for the EdD programme concerned; how I supported postgraduate social work students in the development of their critical reflection skills. However within my interview with the Programme Lead, I realised this would not be a worthwhile project for my thesis, since many have previously explored this area within social work (Fook and Gardner, 2007). Thus it would not have constituted as creating new knowledge. Embarking upon the EdD programme assisted in refining my original interest in critical reflection and harnessed my prior interest in professional identity. To understand how I arrived at my current research title I would like to briefly explain my journey upon the EdD, part of which I utilised in my summer assignment to reflect upon my learning.

At the onset of the first module I was surprised by how comfortable I felt with the sociological emphasis of the programme. This should not really have come as a surprise, given that my first degree was within sociology. Instead I mistakenly believed that I had exchanged a sociological theoretical stance, for a social work perspective. Although it could be debated, that social work theory consists of an eclectic collection of theories borrowed from a number of professions and does not have a clear theoretical basis. I discovered that my theories and thoughts were firmly based within sociological foundations and I enjoyed the opportunity to read and explore these perspectives in more depth.

During my reading I made a conscious decision to utilise the work of Bourdieu (1993) and in particular his concepts of 'habitus' and 'social capital'. I searched for literature that I could relate to social work and found one book edited by Bourdieu particularly useful (Bourdieu 1999). What was most enlightening for me in completing this first assignment was the writing of Sennett (2008) concerning 'craft'. His work encouraged me to consider social work from a new angle, in particular how social workers might develop their 'craft' and expertise. This neatly fitted with new developments within social work; especially the introduction of the 'Professional Capabilities Framework' (2012) and the rhetoric promoted by Munro (2011) in her review of social work practice (see assignment one, page 9). Including but not exclusively, the drive to encourage social workers to be confident in their own abilities and judgements and the need to develop a more positive image of social work as a profession (Munro,2011). This is congruent with my interest in the development of identity,

for instance, how does the public view of social work impact upon a student social worker's professional identity and education?

In the second module I explored social work identity and diverted my energy to, 'who' defines social work identity (see assignment two, pages 4-6). Essentially, social work is generic in nature, as is social work training; "Jack of all trades, master of none" (Beddoe, 2011:35), so clearly defining social work, let alone identity, is extremely challenging. Feedback from this assignment enabled me to reframe my ideas to a more useful exploration of 'how' social work identity is developed, and created the focus of my current research question.

In the third module I experimented with theory that I had come across in developing my theoretical schema and applied this to my practice with students. Within this assignment I returned to critical reflection but with the application of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000) in developing the reflection skills of students. What this assignment highlighted for me, is that I need not simply focus upon one single theoretical perspective as they often blur and cross over, but I do need identify my theoretical position with greater clarity. Therefore this current module has allowed me time to reflect in more depth upon my theoretical foundations. At first this was incredibly perplexing and confusing, in particular understanding the difference between ontological and epistemological standpoints. I read Crotty (1998) and made some progress in this exploration, however I found a number of references to Guba (1990) and it was in reading his work that I identified my 'research paradigm':

"a basic set of beliefs that guides action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry" (1990:17).

Reading Guba (1990) and Blaike (2007) enabled me to contextualise my understanding, in conjunction with the assistance of a number of illustrative frameworks and tables provided by Denzin and Lincoln (2012). These assisted me in clarifying my ontological and epistemological position. Unfortunately I am not suggesting this exploration is finished, or even that it can ever be final, but my current thinking follows. Firstly my ontological standpoint; that is my understanding of 'being' (Crotty, 1998) and position on "what is the nature of the knowable" (Guba, 1990: 18), is best described by Blaike (2007) as 'Idealism'. By way of explanation, in relation to my chosen research subject, reality is constructed by human beings; "the external world consists of representations

that are creations of individual minds” (Blaike, 2007: 16). This ontological position significantly impacts upon my epistemological stance, and my view of how identity is developed. Consequently my epistemological view of “what it means to know” (Crotty, 1998:10) is social constructionism. That is to say, I believe that identity is socially constructed; “recognises that social actors are engaged in both producing and reproducing their social world” (Blaike, 2007: 163). Crotty (1998:51) explains that constructionism refers to meaning being constructed through interaction with the object. Therefore there is no ‘true’ interpretation, consequently I will need to immerse myself in the life of students to fully appreciate how they construct and develop their professional identity. Crotty (1998) also makes a distinction between constructivism (individual) and constructionism (collective), however I would argue that I am interested in both how the individual constructs their identity and how they achieve this in relation to others, such as the student group. I have found the following explanation of identity formation by Burr (2003) useful in establishing my research question and methodology:

“Our identity is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us, and which we draw upon in our communications with other people. A person’s identity is achieved by a subtle interweaving of many different threads. There is the thread of age, for example they may be a child, a young adult or very old; that of class, depending on their occupation, income and level of education; ethnicity; gender; sexual orientation and so on. All these, and many more, are woven together to produce the fabric of a person’s identity” (Burr, 2003:106/7).

Thus, later in this assignment you will read that I wish to collect data concerning the characteristics and experience of students as they embark upon the course, as well as their identity development whilst in training.

My ever evolving theoretical perspective has been briefly explained in my journey on the EdD, but to summarise: I am interested in utilising Bourdieu’s (1993) notions of 'habitus' and 'social capital' and their role in the development of identity. I remain interested in critical reflection, but in terms of how this assists the development of identity. Therefore, the use of transformative learning theory is essential, in establishing those ‘penny dropping moments’ for students (Mezirow, 2009). I am extremely interested in how the dynamic of power impacts upon the process of developing identity, both in my own practice

with students and other aspects of power that might be present. Consequently I intend to utilise the work of Foucault (1980) within my research and I anticipate that the use of Foucault will assist me in drawing out ethical dilemmas and deliberations within my methodology. For example, how can I teach, assess and research the same students, when I so clearly have more power, or students invest power in me as a teacher? I have already explored some of these tensions in my third assignment, especially the impact of self-surveillance (see assignment three, page 13/14). Crotty (1998:12) refers to this theoretical view as 'critical inquiry', whereby theorists are interested in unmaking hegemony and oppressive forces. Taking this a step further, I am also interested in 'critical theories' (Guba, 1990:24), that is specifically the work of Friere (1993) and bell hooks (1994), which again I explored in my third assignment. For example, posing questions such as; how education can be utilised to empower individuals from marginalised groups and challenge the status quo? This specifically relates to my research in ascertaining the most effective means of teaching and supporting students which in turn, positively assists the development of a student's professional identity.

I will now explore a brief literature review, which not only established that my research question is worthy of doctoral research, but also enabled me to develop and refine my methodology.

### **Justification of why this is worthy of doctoral research, including a brief literature review.**

For the purposes of this assignment I will describe previous research concerning the development of professional identity, with a focus upon social work. As you will read, the range of research in this area is limited within social work, so I have extended my literature search to other professions. This literature review is by no means exhaustive and I intend to continually search for further research over the next three years (see timeline).

There have been a series of studies exploring the impact of particular characteristics of students in achieving the social work qualification. In fact one of my colleagues is currently undertaking research concerning how a student's 'traits' impact upon their success within the course. He is particularly focusing

upon the measurement of emotional intelligence and critical thinking by utilising psychometric testing. This approach is substantially different to my own research paradigm, as I postulate that identity and professionalism is socially constructed and I wish to understand this from the student's perspective rather than measure their progress. However there is mileage in exploring studies that examine the impact of factors such as age, culture, class, disability, sexuality and gender, as students bring these experiences to the course and it is these characteristics that assist or hinder the student in developing their identity. For example, Holmstrom (2012:282) focused upon age and learning; he discovered that students often lose their 'selves' to gain insider status, which is ironic when social work is committed to challenging oppression. In addition, Moffat and Miehl (1999) explored cultural differences in social work identity in Canada and specifically the manifestation of power in the class room. In doing so they made use of Foucault concerning the exercise of power and bell hooks in terms of the use of education to prevent oppression. Similarly to my position, they view identity as socially constructed and that: "Identity transformation is a process which continues throughout our lifetime" (1999:75).

There have been a small number of studies researching the progression of social work students within their training. The most relevant being Hussein and Moriarty et al (2008), who researched the progression rates of students undertaking the Diploma in Social Work in England between 1995-1998, from national data that is not usually available.

They found:

"that male students, students from a black and minority ethnic group, and students with a self-reported disability to have poorer progression rates" (2008:1589).

"In addition, many social work students are from non-traditional backgrounds in terms of participation in higher education, yet the majority achieve an award within the expected time. In contrast to higher education as a whole, being in an older age group and having lower levels of previous educational attainment do not broadly reduce students' chances of achieving an award" (2008:1604)

Therefore, this supports the necessity for me to collect data concerning the initial characteristics and experience of social work students that participate in my research. Finally, Christie and Weeks (1998) completed a study concerning

the influence of life experiences on a student's decision to train as a social worker. This emphasis upon a student's motivation is important to my research, as the impetus to undertake the course will be affected by an individual's identity and also influence their successful completion of the course. Christie and Weeks (1998) utilised questionnaires and asked questions such as: Did any life event or experience influence you to make the decision to come onto this social work programme? (1998:63). They concluded that there is value in further exploring the life experiences of social work students and the potential impact upon their success in completing social work training.

There have been a series of studies which focus upon qualified social workers, one of which was undertaken by Beddoe (2011), where she explored the impact of social work identity within a health setting. Although this study was focused upon qualified social workers in New Zealand, the valuable learning for my own research is that social workers can develop their identity in relation to other roles and professions (Beddoe, 2011:28). There have been a number of international comparative studies to explore social work professional identity (Hackett et al, 2003, Zufferey, 2011, Moorhead et al, 2013 and Frost, 2008), but again these are based upon qualified social workers and the development of identity through their qualified practice. What is of importance here, is the value of experiential learning and how practice influences and shapes a social worker's identity, which I can apply to students whilst they are on placement. Therefore, I would speculate that social work students further develop their identity on placement, particularly when interacting and working with other professions and colleagues.

I have discovered a couple of highly relevant articles that research professional identity in a different discipline to social work (Adams et al, 2006 and Scanlon et al, 2007). Adams et al (2006) researched a range of health and social care students in their development of professional identity. They attempted to measure the identity of students between differing professions, finding that physiotherapy students had the strongest identity and social workers the weakest! (2006:61). They examined characteristics of the students, (although not social class or ethnicity), and found gender to have the most impact upon professional identity. They proposed that further research was needed to explore the development of professional identity as students progress through

their study. Given the findings of this research I have wondered if professional identity significantly changes over a prolonged period of time for social work students, particularly developing during their final placement and teaching, a hypothesis that I intend to explore in my own research.

The second article concerned youth work, and students' transition in to their first year at an Australian university (Scanlon et al, 2007). This was of particular interest as Scalon (2007), made use of the work of, Bourdieu (1993), and Berger & Luckmann (1979), which I aim to utilise in my own research. In their discussions with students, they found that a lack of cohesion in the student community coupled with the reduction of contact time that lecturers have with students, negatively impacted upon a student's identity. For example, many of the students were engaged in increasing hours of employment, resulting in less of a student community and thus a lack of peer support (2007:225). In relation to Bourdieu (1990), they found that those students who successfully navigated the transition to university, tended to have 'cultural capital' and discerned how to fully utilise this capital in their new context (Scanlon et al, 2007:226).

Subsequently they deduced that students need to feel a sense of 'connectedness' (Scalon et al, 2007:237) and establish 'remooing' of their identity. They concluded that if a student has not effectively developed this 'connectedness' they run the risk of leaving the course. This could be transferable to my research, as I have confidence in the view that interaction is crucial to identity formation. Therefore I will need to not only speak to students, but also to lecturers, practice educators and supervisors to corroborate my understanding of how students develop their identity. From these two articles I am conscious of the need to further my reading in terms of identity formation not only in social work but also in other professions.

In my search for social work specific literature I came across a recent article by Clapton (2013), where he focused upon a module to prepare students for employment. Although he focused upon the development of skills and knowledge, rather than professional identity, his research is of interest in terms of how teaching can assist students in their development of professional identity. For example, similar to my own module in the final year, his students particularly found the employer's interview session useful. He also summarised

literature concerning newly qualified social workers, an area that I explored in more detail within my second assignment (see assignment 2, pages 8, 10, 14). This is probably the largest area of investigation that has been undertaken in relation to my research question. The most noteworthy of these studies are; the longitudinal studies Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) and Fook, Ryan et al (2000). The former study is now rather dated and both focused upon the acquisition of skills, values and knowledge required for competent practice, rather than the development of identity. However, both these studies will be beneficial when exploring data generated from students concerning the importance of teaching within the development of their identity. What is clear from use of these two studies is that I need to further my reading of identity and 'professional socialisation'. Here it is assumed that social work education 'gives' students the appropriate skills, values and knowledge to become a social worker. This is a process that Weiss et al (2004) label as 'identification', where a student identifies with the values, norms and behaviours of the social work profession (Weiss et al, 2004:14). This stipulation has been affirmed in my discussion with colleagues, as many have suggested that I should explore professional socialisation, not only in social work but also in other professions like teaching and nursing. However I require considerably more time and space than I have available for this assignment (see timeline).

In conclusion, previous studies have tended to focus on characteristics of students, competency and skills development rather than identity. Many have explored how newly qualified social workers have been prepared for practice, but less so on their experiences as students. Therefore my ideas of researching how social work students develop their professional identity is original and worthy of research. With the recent implementation of Professional Capabilities Framework (2012), establishment of the College of Social Work (2012) and a change of registering body to the Health Care Professions Council, this is also an auspicious time to explore social work identity.

## Research questions and methodology

I will now explore the methodology that best corresponds with my research paradigm (Guba, 1990:18) as discussed earlier. This methodology has been informed and guided by my literature review, which has acted as a kind of maze map. For instance I have been inspired by a method utilised in one study, only to discover following scrutiny, this method would be too cumbersome or impractical, so I have turned around and followed another path in the maze. Thus this section of my assignment presents another type of journey, one where I hope to have uncovered the most appropriate and realistic methods to undertake my research.

Firstly my brief literature review has given me the opportunity to develop some initial research questions:

- How does a student's experience prior to the course assist or hinder their professional identity?
- How does a student's professional identity change over the duration of the course?
- What particular aspects of the course have a greater impact upon the development of a student's professional identity?

As deduced from the literature review, I expect students will develop their professional identity through; placement, critical reflection upon their practice and in relationship with peers, social work practitioners, lecturers, and other professionals. Additionally the research indicates that the teaching of; values, skills, critical analysis and theory will impact upon a student's identity both negatively and positively (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996 & Fook, Ryan et al, 2000).

Given my knowledge of working with students as an educator and my personal experience of completing the qualification; I hypothesise that students will bring a reasonably formed identity to the course, in particular; age, gender, class, work experience and education. Some students might sail through the course, as they share a similar identity and have the 'social capital' to develop this identity further (Bourdieu, 1993 & Scanlon et al, 2007). Others may encounter challenges, as identified by research, such as those who experience disabilities, male students and those of ethnic origin (Hussein and Moriarty et al, 2008). Essentially, my aspiration is to explore how students develop their

professionally identity and then establish how educators and practitioners can assist, support and enable students to develop their professional identity and make reasonable progress within the Professional Capabilities Framework (2012).

How I propose to undertake my research has been mostly guided by my reading of Robson (2011) as a comprehensive source. Essentially, the students will be regarded as 'participants' rather than 'subjects' (Robson, 2011), thus I hope to work in collaboration with students to obtain honest responses (see later discussion). To achieve the type of in depth responses required concerning experiential learning, I will need to undertake qualitative methods. For instance, I wish to explore students' development of professional identity rather than 'explain' and measure this in a positivist and scientific manner (Crotty, 1998). I do not believe that quantitative methods will offer me this comprehensive data, although initially I will need to collect basic information of my sample, such as age, gender and other significant characteristics. From collecting this basic data and relating it to my qualitative data I might discover important links between identity development and attrition rates, as found by Hussein and Moriarty et al (2008).

In my initial expedition in to the maze, I was attracted to the path of narrative analysis, which is often utilised in researching social work practice with service users (Reissman, 2008). Within my research context, I was considering the use of a journal for students to keep notes of significant events and experiences on the course (Hayes, 2003). However, I am conscious of not imposing superfluous work for students to undertake, within an already incredibly demanding course. On the other hand, this approach was appealing as Hayes (2003) found students to be honest in their reflective accounts. Hayes (2003) also waited until students had graduated before analysing the data, which is not an option available to me, given the timescales of the EdD (see timeline). Secondly, upon further exploration of the implementation of a narrative approach (Reissman, 2005) via my reading and advice from the EdD team, I reluctantly turned to the method of semi-structured interviews. Primarily it could be challenging to manage the large quantities of data I would obtain from the use of narrative analysis. In addition I needed to establish a clear means of

analysing and drawing conclusions from the data, which on reflection, narrative analysis would not provide.

Therefore individual interviews are my preference for gathering my main data, as opposed to utilising a focus group, as in a focus group there is the danger that more dominant members will be too vocal and exclude quieter members (Barbour, 2007). In addition some of the individual responses might be quite personal in nature, and not something that students would wish to divulge to their peers. Another strategy that I have needed to revise is my ambition to undertake a longitudinal study of student experiences from beginning to the end of their two year course. This was appealing in order to obtain the most comprehensive data of student experience and track the development of their professional identity. This could be crucial as some studies and my own experience suggests that social work students develop a good deal of their identity in their final placement of the second year (Scanlon et al, 2007). However due to time restrictions of the EdD, and having completed a timeline, I understand this is entirely unrealistic and impractical. Instead I have opted to focus upon the first year of the course with the potential to continue further research post thesis. Alternatively, I do propose to obtain data from final stage students in a pilot for my research. This will be in the form of a focus group (Barbour, 2007) with the aim of generating questions for my semi-structured interviews with students. Here I intend facilitate a discussion with a group of up to eight students, who have volunteered to share their experiences of the course. I will direct the discussion to exploring what they found to be most beneficial in developing their professional identity, which should generate ideas for questions within the in-depth semi-structured interviews with stage one students.

Thus I aim to use in depth interviews over the first year of the postgraduate in social work having generated around five central questions as prompts to exploring student experiences. Therefore, I will aim to complete an initial interview at the onset of course to gain data regarding the identity and experiences the student brings to the course, and then interview students at the end of each term; consequently four times in all. The second interview will take place after the most intensive teaching on the course, whilst the third will take

place immediately before placement and at the end of teaching for year one. The final interview will be at the end of placement and prior to the start of the second year. I anticipate that these interviews will generate a substantial amount of data, indeed too much. With this in mind I have been considering my sample size. The current cohort is thirty students, far too many to interview in depth. I had considered 'purposeful' sampling but I need students to be entirely willing participants. As a consequence of the same reason I ruled out 'random' sampling and have opted for 'self-selection' (Robson, 2011). Although students will be consenting, and as a result, perhaps more honest in their responses, the sample might not then be truly 'representative' of the student cohort. For instance, I might not obtain a mix of ages, experience and gender. This is important, as my literature review has highlighted the challenges encountered by male students, those with disabilities and students from ethnic minorities, thus I would wish to gain their views and experiences of the course (Hussein and Moriarty et al, 2008). Finally I also hope to interview teaching staff on the course, and personnel involved in working with students on placement, to assist in forming an understanding of how students develop a professional identity in a more holistic way. These interviews will also be semi-structured and I intend to have around five standard questions to assist in generating discussion.

In an attempt to successfully navigate the difficulty of obtaining honest responses from students, I plan to design my research so that student responses are utilised in organising the content of teaching for the final placement module. I hope by doing this, students will understand the value in offering their views and experiences, and they will feel like true participants rather than 'subjected' to the research (Robson, 2011). Although, I am not naïvely believing that my research will be truly devoid of the impact of power. For instance, students may be fearful of my assessment of their progress on the course and might even seek to impress me of their development (Brookfield, 2005). This will require careful planning and form the basis of my application for ethical approval, thus requiring more attention than I have space within this assignment (see timeline).

Concerning analysis of my data as already stated, I will have generated a good deal of qualitative information from the interviews and so I intend to use

grounded theory. Grounded theory is particularly useful where the researcher has few preconceived ideas, as in my current research proposal (Robson, 2011). This is because grounded theory enables the researcher to develop themes and explore individual responses (Charmaz, 2006). Originating from the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory would involve beginning with coding the data obtained from interviews (open coding) then continue coding (axial coding) and creating a 'coding paradigm', identifying a 'central phenomenon', context and consequences, until I reach saturation of the data (Robson, 2011). Selective coding' can then take place resulting in 'propositions' or a 'hypothesis' and generating a theory relevant to my research. Consequently the research design can evolve with the collection of data, but is also a highly organised and systematic approach to data analysis (Robson, 2011). These attributes of grounded theory will be essential in my research as I hypothesise that my data collection will be quite large and have the potential to be unwieldy unless I use a method to coordinate my data. I might also consider using software to input and analyse my data, but I am not yet familiar enough with such programs to explore these within this assignment. From my previous limited experience of using grounded theory, I anticipate working with the data personally rather than through the medium of a computer. As I believe working with the data will encourage a deeper analysis of my research and assist in discussing and drawing conclusions from the responses I receive from students. There are a number of criticisms of grounded theory, such as how do you know when you have reached saturation of the data? However this is another area that I need to spend considerably more time thinking about and reading before pursuing this further (see timeline).

### **Final thoughts**

This assignment has been undertaken as a narrative of my journey, which is rather fitting as my chosen research question will involve working in partnership with students, as they embark upon developing their professional identity. I have explored my evolving research paradigm (Guba, 1990) and methodology as I navigated a maze of many paths. My choice of methodology has been guided by my social constructionist view of how identity is developed and the brief literature review contained within this assignment. My conclusion so far, is that I will utilise semi-structured, in-depth interviews and grounded theory to

analyse my data. However, I have substantially more work to undertake in refining and examining my research question, which is highlighted in my timeline.

## **Word count 5412**

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