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Values Development in Transitioning Spaces: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Final Placement Experiences of Master's Level Social Work Students.

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Signed: ___N.Blundell_____ (Candidate)   Date: _5th Feb 2024____

Dedication

To Martha, Ben and Jim.

Acknowledgements

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<u>Abstract</u>

In the last 15 years, social work education has undergone a series of significant reforms. This period has coincided with neoliberal ideology becoming a cultural norm, extensive cuts to welfare services reducing available resources, and an increased emphasis on individualism and personal responsibility. This research examines the evolving landscape of social work education and practice placements in this context. It considers if such developments have influenced the way social work values, such as social justice and human rights, are understood and experienced on placement by final year MA students.

Using the qualitative research approach Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this research provides a unique insight into the motivations that students share for choosing social work, and how these students navigate the transitioning spaces from classroom to practice placement. Five key themes were identified from the data analysis namely, connecting the past to the present, values development in transitioning spaces, feeling like a burden (navigating relationships), the bigger picture (doing right for others) and connecting the present to the future.

The significance of these findings confirms much of the extant literature, suggesting that although there have been many reforms, little has changed experientially for students on placements. One of the most significant enablers for the positive construction of professional identities continues to be the relationship between student and practice educator. However, the status of practice educators remains low and workload expectations remain high. Due to sustained welfare cuts the limitations of resources in practice can contribute to both staff and students experiencing ethical stress. Evidence from this research suggests that this can result in social work values, being perceived as either a motivational philosophy that supports 'doing right for

others' or an idealistic classroom theory that leads to unrealistic expectations in practice.

Through the examination of first-hand accounts from students on final placement, the original contribution of this research reveals that the combination of organisational culture, the need for belonging, and the constant scrutiny that accompanies student status, compromises the ability to challenge certain practices. Pedagogical recommendations include robust preparation for practice that empowers students to challenge and resist neoliberal discourses and have the confidence to engage in professional relationships with radical candour.

This work contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding the intersection of social work education, social work values and the prevailing neoliberal paradigm during a period where recruitment and retention in the profession is at crisis point.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Social work practice placements are considered the signature pedagogy of student education. This transitioning space, where classroom teaching and learning are consolidated in practice, provides a site for the development of professional identities (Wayne et al., 2010; Holden et al., 2010; Larrison & Korr, 2013; Asakura et al., 2018; Olson-Morrison et al., 2019). Practice placements focus on applying social work knowledge, methods, skills, and the development of professional values in practice. Despite the increasing research on the social work educational curriculum, little in-depth attention has been given to the perspectives of students on placements themselves. This study aims to address this by exploring what motivates students to pursue a social work career and how their experiences during placements impact their understanding of social work values espoused in the classroom. To achieve this, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has been employed as the research methodology. This allows for a participant-led approach which is also open to uncovering insights beyond the initial research questions.

Research questions:

1. What motivations influence students' decisions to undertake an educational route into social work?

2. What are the experiences of student social workers on final placement and how do they observe professional values in action?

1.1 Preamble

This chapter serves as an introduction to the thesis, providing context for the key ideas and concepts explored in the research. It outlines the rationale behind the study, its potential significance, and the researcher's intellectual curiosity for undertaking the project. The research explores the lifeworld of a group of five students from various Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Northwest of England. The data was gathered through semi-structured one-to-one interviews. The primary focus of the study is to gain phenomenological insights into the lived experiences of the participants during their final mandatory 100-day placement. Social work placements during education are considered its signature pedagogy, and are central to unifying all aspects of classroom teaching and learning within a practice setting (Boitel and Fromm, 2014). This work has a particular interest in how students made sense of values in action.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the term 'values' carries contested definitions within the social work profession. How individuals understand professional values can be vague and open to interpretation. The dominant discourses surrounding the meaning of values can also impact on understandings. These discourses might not always align with the best interests of the profession (Doel, 2016; Iaokimidis, 2023). They might inadvertently shape the world view of current social workers, for example some social workers might subscribe to values influenced by the political dominance of neoliberalism, which promotes individual responsibility over collective support. (Simpson et al., 2023; Brockmann and Garrett, 2022). To address this curiosity, the current research adopts the definition of values provided by BASW (British Association of Social Workers) to ensure clarity and consistency.

It is worth noting that some authors may use 'ethical principles' and 'values' interchangeably (Parrott, 2010; Beckett et al., 2017; Banks, 2021). In the code of practice issued by BASW (2021), values and ethics are integrated under one heading, and the same approach is taken by SWE (Social Work England). In the subsequent sections, these definitions will be examined in greater detail to establish a comprehensive understanding of their implications and applications within the research context.

I acknowledge my role as an endogenous (insider) researcher in this study, given that I serve as the placement lead in one of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) approached for participants. Insider research comes with recognised challenges and risks, but it also offers numerous benefits, particularly in gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, which is work-based practice learning. Additionally, being an emic researcher, or having experience and phronesis, can provide added legitimacy to the research (Trowler, 2016).

1.2 Rationale for the research including values definitions

Social work is a multifaceted profession that aims to provide support and empowerment to disadvantaged individuals, families, groups, and communities. It involves navigating relationships and understanding political dynamics from micro, meso, and macro systems perspectives. A crucial aspect of social work education involves developing an awareness of how structural inequalities, including the social, political, and economic contexts, impact vulnerable populations (Ingram & Smith, 2018; Lishman et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2011).

The mission of social work lies in advocating for, protecting, and supporting the most vulnerable members of society, assisting them to overcome challenges and enhance their quality of life. This commitment to supporting and empowering others makes social work an ethical and value-driven profession. While definitions of the profession's value base might be subject to debate, the International Federation of Social Workers (2014) provides a global definition of the profession which offers a good example of where these core values sit.

> 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 knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels. (The International Federation of Social Work 2014 *emphasis mine*)

This definition is, of course, also contested as it can be considered Western-centric and subjectively understood along with the ideas it encapsulates (Wallengren-Lynch et al., 2020; Kim, 2017). Prior to the completion of this definition, debates were critical of the lack of inclusion of social justice principles in the IFSW's previous definitions, with little reference to inequality and injustice. It can be argued that social injustice is an inherent part of the cultural hegemony and social order of a given place (McKeown,

2021). However, many scholars welcomed this new definition that culminated from these debates (Ioakimidis, 2013; Ornellas et al., 2016)

As social work continues to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of society, its dedication to promoting social justice, equality, and human rights should remain at the heart of its mission (O'Brien, 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). If we draw out two significant concepts from the above definition, that of social justice and human rights, we can begin to see the complexities of gaining specific definitions. For the purposes of this research social justice can be defined as:

> Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities. Social workers aim to open the doors of access and opportunity for everyone, particularly those in greatest need.
>
> (National Association of Social Workers, USA no pp)

Human Rights are recognised in the UK in a legislative Act and are defined by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as providing these key principles:

> …Fairness, Respect, Equality, Dignity and Autonomy (choice and control).
>
> (CQC, 2019, no pp)

Contemporary social work education and practice attempts to engage with these ideas and values, to varying degrees, despite the current troubled political and economic climate. It is important to situate this research during times of socio-political and economic instability, as these challenges are regarded as one of the biggest threats to welfare service provision and to those who use the services. In the UK, the welfare state has been significantly challenged due to austerity politics over the last 15 years at least. The economic crisis has worsened for many in the UK due to the emergence of a new cost of living crisis which began in 2021 (Institute for Government, 2022).

This combination is impacting more harshly on some of society's most vulnerable people.

Neoliberalism, which promotes personal responsibility as the basis of an ethical society has dominated political and economic discourses for over 40 years in the UK. This global ideology is considered responsible for the redistribution of wealth away from the poorest into the hands of the richest via free market fundamentalism. In the UK, it has influenced how welfare services are funded, delivered and why they are often perceived as punitive. All of which has contributed to the lack of access to much needed resources for those people who are most in need of social service interventions (Bay, 2018; Ferguson et al., 2018; Lavalette, 2019; Fenton, 2019b; Garrett, 2018; Weatherly, 2017).

The ideas of neoliberalism, specifically regarding moral personal responsibility, have been interpreted as a government tool for steering the conduct of others (Hache, 2007). Hache (ibid) concluded that by encouraging individual empowerment and independence, it implies, not that individuals are responsible but that they *should be* responsible for themselves. This philosophy demands a specific perspective and approach from those who provide services, and a specific type of action and behaviour from those who require them.

For many people in need, the means to these actions and behaviours is often out of reach. This is seen as the responsibilisation of those who do not have the means through unequal opportunities (Moth, 2023) This then exacerbates the divide between those that have access and those that don't; this lack of access can then be interpreted as individual irresponsibility and this is 'taken for its cause' (Hache, 2007 p XV).

Furthermore, there is concern that this perceived erosion of the professional value base in social work, has been an unavoidable side effect of neoliberal policy decisions made by governments in the global North (Brockman and Garrett, 2022). It is argued that this dominant discourse has influenced 'popular consent' regarding these ideas of responsibilisation (Moth, 2023 p 166). Much of the academic literature espouses the importance of social work values, including human rights and social justice and highlights concerns regarding the recent dominant discourses influence on the profession's principled-based approach (Doel, 2016; Banks, 2016; Ferguson et al., 2018; Fenton, 2016a; Hanley, 2021).

These concerns have contributed to my research interest in how values are espoused in educational classrooms and enacted in practice settings. However, the interest in student motivations and placement experiences connects to this as a continuum, with motivations to become social workers acting as a conditional probability or a trigger for the placement experience (Tuffour, 2017). Therefore, the exploration of the current generation of students' overall social work world views is of importance. As Gant et al. (2019 p 25) observe:

> The future of social work changes yearly due to cuts and issues with budgets, which means that placements and student experiences also change year on year and it is important to gain honest and realistic accounts of what is really happening on the ground, and for understanding why so many students do the course and then don't end up practising social work, or at least not in a statutory environment which is crying out for social work staff.

Personal values and professional values influence our world view and how we understand social problems, consequently supporting decisions that help and support people to overcome social problems. It is usual for our personal and professional values to align, but as social work is governed by professional regulatory standards (Social work England, 2023; BASW, 2023), professional values will always take precedence. This is because the nature of the work demands an ethical commitment when intervening in the lives of others.

Social work is often considered to be a majority state-controlled profession in the UK and social workers have powers and duties to carry out mandated work that can be unwelcome and life changing for vulnerable individuals, families, groups, and communities (Children Act, 1989; Mental Health Act, 1983; Immigration and Asylum Act, 1999). By problematising the care/control dichotomy we can see the importance of social work values and why they need to play a central role in practice (Ferguson et al., 2018; Moth, 2023; Fenton, 2016a; 2016b).

Investigating further, we find that historically the care vs control dichotomy has demonstrated that social work hasn't just been a benign, supportive practice. It has, in the past, been motivated by different values and world views. Ioakimidis (2023) asks us to consider what might happen if social work values are manipulated or even weaponised by ideological agendas. In his book Social Work Histories (2023), he brings together scholars who provide historical evidence that social work has been used to implement policies of state oppression. The collection provides stark examples of collusion with brutal regimes, from the UK's cruel policy of the forced migration of orphans to Australia. Many of these children experienced hard labour and a life of brutality; then through to social workers oppressive complicity in colonial and apartheid South Africa, which contributed to crimes against humanity (pp. 7-12).

Other scholars have added to this perspective, expressing concern that the concept of 'values' in social work is often ambiguous. (Funge, 2011; O'Brien, 2011; Doel, 2016; Taylor et al., 2017; Banks, 2021). The extensive social work literature references numerous values, some of which might even appear to conflict with one another. As a result of this ambiguity, this research focuses on the above definition by the International Federation of Social Workers (2014) whilst focusing on and exploring two of the core values that are implicit in UK policies, and governing guidance. These values that serve as the central focus of the study are, social justice and human rights. These core values are covered under 'Values and Ethical Principles' in BASW Code of Ethics (2021).

The interpretation of these two core values in social work is subject to variation based on multiple factors. The socio-political and economic context, as well as dominant cultural discourses, play a significant role in shaping how social work values are understood and applied. Each societal context can emphasise certain aspects of these values and prioritise different approaches in practice. Even the experiences of individual practitioners can contribute to the diverse interpretations of these core values. Each practitioner brings their unique background, beliefs, and experiences, which can influence how they perceive and implement these values in their work (Cemlyn and Nye, 2012; Harris, 2021). As the social, political, and cultural landscape evolves, so do the perspectives on social work values.

Changing times can bring about new challenges and opportunities, prompting practitioners to adapt their understanding of these values to address emerging issues, often within the constraints of workplace culture (Funge, 2011; Beckett et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017; Fenton, 2019b; Fenton, 2016b; Ioakimidis, 2023). It is also noted that social work practitioners have experienced heightened occupational stress due to

the increased demands of their working conditions (Storey and Billingham, 2001; Ravalier, 2019; Ravalier et al., 2021). So how might practitioners deal with such challenges and diverse understanding of values in practice and how might they successfully practice educate students who gain practice placements alongside them?

As the practice Learning Lead at a Northwest HEI, I have observed the student experience on placement over a period of many years. Having witnessed the changing and ongoing pressures within placement settings, I am motivated to explore the current quality and direction of these learning opportunities. I am curious as to how students on placement feel that they can fulfil the requirements of professional ethical codes when the lack of available resources within practice settings might not provide the support to carry out emancipatory practice.

This, it is argued, can lead to the detrimental experience of 'ethical stress' (Fenton, 2019b p 54; Beckett et al., 2017). Ethical stress was explored by Fenton in depth and is defined as stress that is experienced when social work practitioners cannot practice in a way that aligns with their values. This concept is re-discovered in the findings of this research. Emancipatory practice is enacted through commitment to the above values and promotes critical and radical engagement with oppressive political/societal structures. It is seen as a central part of the professions value base relating to social justice and human rights.

1.3 Social work as a profession

Social work is deemed a profession due to several key characteristics and defining features that distinguish it from other disciplines. Social work requires specialised knowledge and skills obtained through formal education and practice learning

placements. Student social workers in the UK attend validated academic programs such as BAs or MAs (or fast track programmes and apprenticeships) where they develop intellectual knowledge regarding theories of practice, human development, social policy, values and ethics, legislation, research skills and methods of intervention (Fenton, 2016b).

As discussed above, qualified social workers must abide by Ethical Codes of Conduct; In the UK, the governing bodies are Social Work England (SWE), Social Care Wales (SCW) Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC). All social workers must register with these professional bodies to practice. They can also lose their registration if they practice unethically or fail to keep up to date with legislation, training, and good practice principles.

To renew registration social workers, need to provide evidence of Continuous Professional Development (CPD): As a profession, social work, places great importance on continuous learning and professional development. Social workers are encouraged to update their knowledge with the latest research on interventions and best practices, to provide the most effective service. This includes training to become practice educators. However, there is a growing body of literature that is critical of these governing bodies which is also explored in the literature review. Scholars argue that there has been a proliferation of "quasi-governmental regulatory bodies" reflecting the neoliberal trend for regulatory priorities in social work (Simpson et al., 2023 p 2: King and Cartney, 2022).

This thesis problematises some of these ideas that shape our understanding of what a profession is. Included in the literature review is an analysis of the ideas of professionalism that are culturally agreed and explicit in both the education and

practice base of current social work. Fenton (2016b) argues that the concept of professionalism can risk polarising perceptions and understandings, based on the prevailing culture, into two main ideologies:

A. Professionalism in social work binds workers to the legislation in a way that can lead to authoritarian approaches based on power hierarchies with the dominance of managerial performance metrics and organisational culture.

B. Autonomy and decision making on behalf of or with service users, promoting positive outcomes for those in need.

Authoritarian approaches can be seen as oppressive and power hierarchies can be utilised to cause harm (Simpson et al., 2023; Ioakimidis, 2023; McLaughlin, 2005). Institutional culture and managerialism can promote the philosophy of A above, as the core business of social work. Students on placement may absorb these seemingly contradictory values and fail to challenge oppressive practices for fear of standing out or even being struck off the professional register once qualified (Worsley et al., 2020).

This discussion leads to an exploration of the current professional frameworks reviewed and governed by Social Work England (SWE, 2023). Standard 1 includes the following subsections. They state that social workers must:

1.2 Respect and promote the human rights, views, wishes and feelings of the people (they) work with balancing rights and risks and enabling access to advice, advocacy, support, and services.

1.5 Recognise differences across diverse communities and challenge the impact of disadvantage and discrimination on people and their families and communities.

1.6 Promote social justice, helping to confront and resolve issues of inequality and inclusion.

The British Association of Social Work (BASW) is also a professional association that has influence on social work practice in the UK. Of significance to this research are BASW's Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW, 2022) additionally, BASW Code of Ethics. These guides set the expected standards for the profession, from student recruitment onto educational training routes, through to newly qualified social worker status, individual career development and leadership roles. Some of these standards refer to social work values and ethics.

The Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW, 2022, no pp) includes a specific domain which focus on values and ethics; this domain states that students and practitioners must:

> Apply social work ethical principles and values to guide professional practice. Social workers have an obligation to conduct themselves ethically and to engage in ethical decision-making, including through partnership with people who use their services. Social workers are knowledgeable about the value base of their profession, its ethical standards and relevant law.

There is also a domain that states that social workers must "Advance human rights and promote social justice and economic wellbeing" (Ibid. no pp). This thesis refers to these specific domains of the PCFs and the professional standards whilst exploring how students experienced learning and professional development in placement. Placements are designed to be safe settings where they can begin to develop their professional identities in practice, but how much attention is given to developing and understanding these core values whilst on placement is relatively unexplored.

1.4 Why are values important?

Introducing the importance of social work values in the context of the current troubled times requires an acknowledgment of the subjective nature of what constitutes troubling times. Returning to the discussion above, what may seem concerning to some individuals might be acceptable or even desirable to others. The crux of this dichotomy lies in the value positions adopted by observers, often influenced by their political ideologies, specifically right-wing and left-wing perspectives. Simplifying this debate into these two values positions, demonstrates that the interpretation of troubling times and the proposed solutions can vary significantly based on an individual's political affiliation or worldview.

It is conceivable that both political positions perceive the current times as troubling, but their approach to addressing these challenges might diverge due to differing value systems. Given this conflicting knowledge and varying value positions, how does a social worker remain committed to upholding their ethical responsibilities and making sense of their professional values?

Values in social work, include a commitment to social justice, equality, diversity, human rights, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice. At the heart of the profession and central to the definition of values applied to this research are these two core values and their ethical principles from the Code of Ethics with examples of what they mean in actions (BASW 2014).

1. **Human Rights**

    1 Upholding and promoting human dignity and well-being.

    2 Respecting the right to self-determination.

    3 Promoting the right to participation.

4 Working holistically.

5 Identifying and developing strengths.

2. **Social Justice**

1 Challenging oppression.

2 Respecting diversity.

3 Distributing resources.

4 Challenging unjust policies and practices.

5 Working in solidarity.

Much of the literature explored in the review chapter endorses an emancipatory position as detailed above and promotes the perspective that societal structures are the main contributor to people's disadvantage, rather than individual moral deficits. This value position reaches into human rights and social justice (Parrott, 2010; Fenton, 2016a; 2016b; Banks, 2021). By taking a principled-based approach, social workers can centre these values in what Banks refers to as 'Ethics work' (Banks, 2016 p 2). If there is concern that value positions are becoming a casualty of the neoliberal project, then as discussed above, the work of Ioakimidis (2023) and Fenton (2016a, 2016b, 2019) become more significant for social work education. Social work education has experienced many reforms over the past 15 years. These reforms, however, often take a critical stance of existing educational programmes which is explored below.

1.5 Brief historical overview of SW education reforms

Social work education has been subjected to many reviews and reforms over the years from Government, from its ever-changing external governing bodies and from inside the profession itself (BASW, SWE). Some of these changes are for the betterment of

the profession but others are not (Hanley, 2021; 2022). This is explored in both the literature review and the discussion chapters to give substance and context for the changing nature of social work. It highlights the mostly consistent value base which prevails in the face of a narrative of deficit (Hanley, 2021) and presents the sometimes-challenging experiences of the participants in relation to these values and principles.

1.5.1 The dominance of a deficit discourse

The calibre of social work students and practitioners has been called into question each time there has been a serious case review (now known as Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, Scie, 2020). Hanley (2021), also noticing the many reviews and reforms, offers a chronology of major reports and policy documents from 2002-2018. He analyses the dominant discourses and media narratives present in the reports and publicity to support the reforms, which he argues are based on perceived deficits in the `quality` of social work students. He notes that this is a theme that appears in policy and reports over and again. The paper doesn't include reference to social work values, as indeed neither does the rhetoric which accompanies reform.

However, the 'criticisms' of social work and social work education over recent years have escalated (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014; Munro, 2011). It was proposed by a Conservative MP, that universities were teaching student social workers too much abstract left-wing political theory (Butler, 2014). Similarly, Funge (2011, p76) describes the earlier criticisms of social work education in the USA, coming from the political right, as promoting narrow ideological views.

The same UK MP suggested that the inability of safeguarding measures to address cases of neglect and abuse, stems from social workers perceptions that perpetrators

are victims of oppression. The then Prime Minister, also described university teaching as 'deficient' (no pp). Following from this the report 'Making the Education of Social Workers Consistently Effective' (Narey, 2014) was commissioned and subsequently published.

Narey (ibid) highlighted in this report for the department of education, that social work education lacked ministerial and public confidence, suggesting that academic standards were too low. He even suggested that some graduates were 'barely literate'. He was strongly criticised at the time for appearing to have no evidence base for such assertions (Schraer, 2014 no pp). He did correctly point out that there were confusing standards set by many differing governing bodies that issued new requirements each time there was a serious case review.

The chart below is adapted from the work of Hanley (2021) which concludes in 2018; I have updated this with relevant policy and guidance up to 2023.

Figure 1.

Name of Report	Year	Organisation/Author
Raising Standards: Social work education in England 2008-09	2010	General Social Care council
The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final report: A Child Centred System.	2011	Department for Education/Munro, E.

Regulating Social Work Education (2001-2012)	2012	General Social Care Council
An introduction to the qualifying standards and professional social work education	2012	The College of Social Work
Making the education of social workers consistently effective	2014	Narey. M
Re-visioning social work education: An independent review	2014	Croisdale-Appleby, D.
Taking forward Professor Croisdale-Appleby's Review of Social Work Education	2014	Department for Health
Introduction of Teaching Partnerships	2015	Department for Education.
Social work reform: Third report of session 2016-17	2016a	House of Commons Education Committee
Social work reform: Government Response to the	2016b	House of Commons education committee.

Committees third report session 2016-17		
Regulating Social Workers: Policy Statement	2016	Department for Education and Department for health
Social Work England Register for practicing social workers	2017	Social Work England in the process of taking over regulation from HCPC
The 2018 Refresh of the professional Capabilities Framework	2018	British Association of social work
QAA Subject Benchmark Statement: Social Work	2019	QAA
England Practice Educator Professional Standards Refresh (PEPS)	2019	British Association of Social Work (BASW)
Qualifying education and training standards	2021	Social Work England
Refreshed framework for Quality Assurance in Practice Learning	2022	BASW
Re-Refresh of England Practice Educator Professional Standards	2022	BASW

Ongoing consultation on the usefulness of the Professional Capabilities Framework	2023 onwards	Social Work England

Adapted from Hanley (2021) with permission.

As a result of the criticisms of mainstream education, new work-based routes into the profession where introduce, providing a plethora of new teaching standards and approaches (Hanley, 2022). By focusing solely on master's routes into social work, this research can maintain a clear and targeted approach, avoiding potential dilution of the lived experiences by mixing routes. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of the experiences and challenges faced by these specific students. Also, by concentrating on the final placement experience, this allows the research to capture the culminating thoughts and reflections of the participants, concluding their formal educational journeys.

By focusing on the final practice placement experience, the research gains a deeper understanding of how the master's route contributes to the development of students' professional identities, their ability to put theory into practice, and how they develop a commitment to the professions value base. Having established that the idea of values is an elusive concept that has, over time, become 'taken for granted' (Taylor et al., 2017 p 47) this research hopes to explore the lived experiences of students in real-world contexts. This focused approach ensures that the findings of the research are well-defined and offer significant contributions to the field of social work education and practice.

1.6 An introduction to the practice placement element of social work education

Students place great importance on and value their placement experience highly. This experience can make or break students' motivation to continue into their careers (Scholar et al., 2012). Boath et al. (2018) claim that placements can be a trigger point for social work students dropping out of university. Apposite, placement experiences can bring together the theoretical and legislative learning provided on programmes. This can offer new areas of interest in practice settings, helping students construct their professional identities (Wayne et al., 2010; Kuusisto et al., 2022; Roscoe, 2023). So, placements are regarded as social work's signature pedagogy which students consider to be one of the most important aspects of their education. (Larrison et al., 2013; Asakura et al., 2018; Olson-Morrison et al., 2019).

Most HEI students in England undertake a first placement in a Private, Voluntary, Independent (PVI) setting for 70 days and a final statutory placement in a local authority, hospital, or mental health care provision for 100 days. Placements hold such significance that since 2015, consistent efforts have been made to strengthen and improve the placement experiences in social work education. One crucial policy contributing to this enhancement is the Quality Assurance of Practice Learning (QAPL) policy, which has been regularly updated (QAPL Refresh, 2019; 2022) and is under the ownership of BASW (British Association of Social Workers). QAPL is concerned with quality of practice placements and quality practice education.

Additionally, the introduction of Social Work Teaching Partnerships in 2015, on a national level, further reinforces the importance of placements. These partnerships were primarily established in response to challenges in workforce recruitment and retention. Concerns had arisen about the limited availability of placements and the

apparent unwillingness from local authorities to support the training of social work students, including the quality assurance processes (Baginsky et al., 2019; Repesa et al., 2023).

Overall, social work teaching partnerships have played a role in enhancing the quality and availability of placement experiences in the UK. However, the government has recently pulled their funding. These partnerships fostered collaboration between academia and practice, which aimed to produce better-prepared, competent social work graduates. Although a criticism of TP's is that they naively pushed a narrative of partnerships between universities, in the face of marketisation, which clearly promotes competition (King and Cartney, 2022). Also, there is still work to be done to foreground social work values, with what can be seen as their overly bureaucratic demands.

A core task for these partnerships has been to enhance the numbers of Practice Educators.

1.7 The role of Practice Educators

Central to social work pedagogy is the role of the Practice Educator (PE). A PE is a qualified, SWE registered social worker who has completed a recognised qualifying practice education course. Their responsibility is to support students through the transitioning space, from classroom to practice by facilitating teaching and learning. Practice Educators are instrumental in providing guidance, and mentorship to students, which also encourages a sense of belonging to the placement setting and the profession. PEs play a critical role; making the professional decision whether a student meets the required Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and Social Work England (SWE) professional standards. They determine whether the student

passes or fails their placement (Finch and Taylor, 2012). Acknowledging and valuing the efforts of this key individual is vital in strengthening social work education and encouraging the development of competent and skilled social work professionals (Thompson, 2010; Field et al., 2016; Beesley and Taplin, 2023)

Given the significance of the PE's role in social work education, there are governing standards for their own education and training. The Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) were initially introduced in 2012 by the College of Social Work. However, after its closure, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) took over responsibility for these standards. Subsequently, in response to the current climate, including the impact of Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, the standards were refreshed in 2019 and re-refreshed in 2022. These updates included the enhanced integration of anti-oppressive and anti-racist values in all practice educator training. By doing so, the standards are firmly aligned with contemporary ethical principles.

The evolution of the PEPS ensures that PEs are well-equipped to provide quality teaching and mentorship to social work students. This alignment with core values and standards contributes to the overall enhancement of social work education and the preparation of competent social work professionals. However, the findings from this research do pose some additional questions around the process of practice education, the support given to PEs by organisations and the status of Practice Education in the profession.

1.8 Research design context

The research design chapter celebrates the relatively unique use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in social work educational research. IPA was chosen due to the ontological theoretical framework of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. This approach centres the experience of each of the participants equally but includes the voice of the researcher who is making sense of the participants sense-making (double hermeneutic). IPA is a complete approach to research, not just a tool for data analysis (Smith et al., 2022). The research design chapter offers a full account of the approach and the refinement process that occurred through the development of the thesis from conception to completion. The specifics outlined in the chapter include the formulation of research questions that align to the approach. Selecting the participants by seeking out homogeny, which ensures contextual perspectives and an in-depth view of a shared experience. Larkin et al. (2019) propose that often a specific group's perspective is missing from the literature or is misrepresented, so an idiographic enquiry which centres the voice of the student is an important creative contribution to our educational understanding (Gant et al., 2019).

IPA is a recent addition to the qualitative research cannon; it emerged from the discipline of health psychology and is finding popularity amongst other disciplines. By utilising this approach in education research, it provides a novel approach for gathering in depth data.

1.9 Theoretical influences

The idea of transitioning spaces was influenced by threshold concept theory (Meyer and Land, 2003; 2006) This theory proposes that learners expand their disciplinary

knowledge, by moving through liminal spaces; from not knowing to knowing, thus gaining new insights into challenging concepts or 'troublesome knowledge' as 'rites of passage' (Meyer and Land, 2006 p 374; Kiley, 2009 p 293). This is often encountered as learning how core disciplinary concepts work together. The transition from classroom to practice placement is an example of a threshold concept, which by its nature, will contribute many threshold moments during the learning experience. Threshold crossing consolidates these troublesome disciplinary concepts, creating new patterns of thinking and understanding of, for example, value informed practice. This theory can provide a helpful framework for understanding ways to support students during these significant moments that help to construct professional identities.

1.10 Aims and objectives

This research aims to explore students' motivation for choosing social work and to understand their lived experience on their final placements. Included in this examination is a focus on how values are perceived by students on placement and how they make sense of this important life event. Their motivations for choosing social work acts as a catalyst for the placement experience. This research ensures that an up-to-date student perspective feeds into the dissemination of knowledge (Gant et al., 2019).

Throughout the course of this research, it is important to note that I had prior knowledge of two of the participants. To ensure ethical and transparent practices during the interviews and subsequent analysis of their experiences, I engaged in reflexive interrogation of my position as a researcher. I sought out honest discussions

with colleagues, fellow researchers, and my supervisor, thus taking proactive steps to navigate any potential biases or conflicts of interest. By acknowledging and addressing these aspects of insider research, I aim to uphold the integrity and rigor of the study, while minimising any potential bias that could influence the findings. Transparency and ethical considerations remain at the forefront of this research endeavour. This will be addressed in detail in the methodology chapter.

1.11 Significance of the research

I hope that this research will help key stakeholders examine the implications of the findings to initiate development and improvement to the learning experience for students both in the HEI and placement context, ultimately strengthening the occupational identity around values commitment. It is also hoped that the research findings will act as a vehicle for mobilising compassion and empathy within these educational spaces, with an emphasis on trauma informed approaches post-pandemic.

This work is of significance to social work educators, placement coordinators, social work students, practice educators, social workers, Teaching Partnerships and placement providers.

1. Social work educators can benefit from hearing about the lived experiences and interpretations of students regarding their motivations to become social workers and their experiences of teaching and learning about values in social work education and placements.

2. Placement coordinators within HEIs who understand the complex negotiated pedagogy they perform in relation to the students they place, can hear the voice

of the student with empathy and compassion as student satisfaction takes a lead in the commodified world of education.

3. Social work students can analyse their own experiences compared to this specific group of students in each time and place. They can comprehend how to enhance their own understanding and application of value-based practice.

4. Practice educators, both experienced and those in training, can benefit from hearing about the experiences this group of students shared to inform their own practice as PEs. This research promotes the centrality of the student experience on placement and the value placed on the support and educative quality of the relationship between the student and the PE.

5. Understanding the significance of transitioning spaces for both students and Practice Educators is something that can enhance the educational process and relationship building as a core component of placement.

6. Social workers can use this research to support reflective practice and continuing professional development.

7. Teaching Partnerships and those involved in the design and delivery of PEPS training courses. The recent BASW 2022 re-refresh of the PEPS has included the mainstreaming of values such as anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice throughout all teaching. Prior to this it was a patchier landscape which might be reflected in the student experience in this research.

8. Placement providers and coordinators in both PVI and statutory settings can use this work to inform their approach to offering social work student placements, supporting students on placement, and ensuring that values remain central to the ethos of these settings.

Alongside these discipline specific recommendations, this work is useful to other researchers choosing to adopt IPA as their main methodology.

1.12 Conclusion

The above background offers a comprehensive context for my professional curiosity as a social work educator, touching on the nature of social work as a profession, the contested understanding of professional values, and the broader socio-political and economic landscape impacting the field. It also acknowledges governmental criticisms concerning the quality of students and university curriculums in social work education. The exploration of the profession's ethical codes and professional guidelines for practice provides the foundations for the subsequent focus on the practice placement, which is regarded as social work's signature pedagogy.

The significance of the practice educator in this pedagogy is emphasised, underscoring their critical role in gatekeeping the profession by mentoring, educating, and assessing social work student's practice. However, the key focus for this research is the voice of the student themselves and how their placement experiences and perspectives, align with the profession's values and ethical principles espoused in the classroom.

This contributes to a wider debate around the findings and the 5 group experiential themes identified. The research discussion and recommendations chapters highlight key insights from the findings, providing valuable implications for social work education, practice, and policy. Addressing the challenges and opportunities identified within the research, the discussion proposes practical and evidence-based recommendations to enhance the quality and impact of social work education and

placement experiences. It adds to the body of social work education knowledge by providing a unique approach to knowledge discovery and understanding.

1.13 Positionality statement

Professional background

As a social work educator, my research interest lies in understanding the significance and impact social work values have in education and practice placements. I am a qualified social worker and I previously worked in PVI adult mental health as a service manager for ten years. I am a qualified Practice Educator and I have supervised many social work students on placement in this setting. My current role in a HEI, involves leading on practice learning modules and finding placements for both undergraduate and postgraduate social work students. I am also a member of a regional social work teaching partnership, specifically in the pre-qualifying workstream group. I support the teaching of the PEPS programme as part of this role. I am also responsible for the QAPL implementation and placement auditing. As a registrant with Social Work England, I am committed to fulfilling all the requirements of the governing body.

I recognise that this indicates that my own interpretations might be influenced by my status, and I have therefore endeavoured to bracket off any biases I may have to provide a clean hermeneutic reading of the participants horizon of understanding (Gadamer,1991). I have also drawn upon my own interpretations during that specific stage of the analysis.

Personal Background

Having my own lived experience of social work involvement as an 'adopted' baby, I absorbed the concern of my adopted parents each time a social worker visit was scheduled. I was made a 'ward of the court' as my adopting parents were in their late 50s when I was placed with them, hence the regular social work input remained throughout my childhood. My parents experienced anxiety and concern that the social worker might remove me from their care.

Unfortunately, my mum died when I was aged seven and my dad died when I was aged eleven, so I went into foster care at this point. This experience was mostly negative, but the relationship I had with two social workers over this six-year period was very good. I am thankful for their commitment to hearing me and understanding my distress, not only of early bereavement, but residing in large noisy family after being an only child living in a very quiet household.

My interest in human behaviour grew out of a need to understand myself and why I always felt like an outsider. I would argue that my negative experiences made me who I am today; I achieved a BSc (hons) in Applied Psychology and worked in a range of care settings including disability, learning disability, residential mental health settings and day centre settings after graduating. I qualified as a social worker in 2005 and trained as a Practice Educator in 2007, supporting many students on placement with me. I remained in service until 2012 when I moved into, HE. I achieved an MA in Education in 2014. I have remained in this employment to present. I identify as neurodivergent and I endorse the principles of trauma informed practice in my work by adopting the core principles of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and a deep understanding of how lived experience impacts on life chances.

My positionality statement is intended to share vulnerabilities to help normalise experiences that can impede functioning to the expected neurotypical standard. My aim is to promote empathy and understanding, which in social work is a core requirement and can be found lacking, particularly in the academy, where self-confidence, competence and extreme productivity are expectations.

I will now consider the available literature to locate this work in the wider field.

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Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I carry out a purposive narrative review of specific published literature and research that aligns with the areas of interest outlined in the preceding chapter (Aveyard et al., 2016; Morris et al., 2013). The objective is to critically examine existing scholarly works that have explored the context of social work education and practice placements. This includes the challenges, and significance of social work values, ethics, of professional practice in the current socio-political landscape. This provides context to support the significance and development of my topic of inquiry. Over the time spent working on this thesis, the focus for the literature review has developed alongside the research analysis from the transcripts detailing the participant's experience, and further literature is included in the discussion chapter (Smith et al., 2022)

The chapter evaluates notions of professionalism and the significant changes and responsibilities of social work over the past 15 years. The need to understand organisational culture is important, for the student placement experience and how social work values contribute to professional identity construction in transitioning spaces. Studies examining student education and placements are included alongside research looking at what motivates people to want to become social workers.

As this work is a professional doctorate, a strategy for including and excluding work was aligned to the research questions, therefore, even though the literature revealed that there is a range of work around values in professional practices, this is less so in education and even less looking at the combination. As pointed out by Papouli (2016) although values are at the heart of social work practice, defining what this means is

problematic and complex. This review focuses on the values of social justice and human rights as its starting point then explores further literature that aligns with the data findings in the discussion chapter.

2.2 Values in Social Work: The Context

Social works commitment to values, such as social justice, human rights are regarded as the professions most distinctive feature. These values are central to the profession, shaping its ethical framework, and defining its capacity to be ethically responsible (Beckett et al., 2017; Fenton, 2016; Fenton, 2016a; Manttari-Van Der Kuip, 2015; Knezevic, 1996). Social work is a complex multi-dimensional profession that provides support to vulnerable individuals, families, groups, and communities. Values and ethics are considered central to all professions that work with vulnerable people but in social work, formal decision making relies on the ethical value base of the social worker alongside practice knowledge, legislation, and role responsibility (Banks, 2004; Parrott, 2010; Banks, 2016; 2022 Fenton, 2016a; 2016).

This is of crucial importance, as social work interventions tend to be carried out alongside some of society's most vulnerable, marginalised, and impoverished communities. These individuals, families and communities will be more likely to experience poverty, discrimination, increased mental health problems, increased probability of substance use disorder, multiple disabilities, difficulties parenting and domestic abuse, which might bring them to the attention of services. It is for this reason that practitioners, who have the power to instigate the removal of children under the Children Act 1989; recommend detention under the Mental Health Act 1983; and refer

to the Home Office or police, need to commit to a shared understanding of social work values.

However, values, as a contested concept that may change over time, are often debated in international social work gatherings and Conferences (Ioakimidis, 2023; Fenton, 2017; Bisman, 2004; Reamer, 2006; Papouli, 2016). Currently these debates pose an argument that neoliberal agendas, promoting narratives of individual moral responsibility, have moved these values away from the fundamentals of social justice (Carey, 2021; Fenton, 2014; Fenton, 2016; Bay, 2018; Tyler, 2019; Beddoe, 2019; Fenton, 2022). Other debates critique the use of coercive practices that might medicalise people's social problems rather than interrogate how structural inequalities can impact on the lives of the vulnerable and oppressed (Moth, 2023; Frawley, 2015; Carey, 2018; Lishman et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2011).

There has always been an entanglement between politics and the profession, so to contextualise these current debates I look back at the history of social work values and the socio-political contexts using Gregory and Holloways (2005) model to inform this work. Their paper proposes a three-phase chronology of social work practice culture in the UK from the late 1800's to 2005. Their work is concerned with the power of language from a socio-political perspective, and how this might shape the identity of, and control the direction of the profession. I have proposed an extension to their work which includes austerity impacts.

Gregory and Holloway (2005) conducted a Foucauldian discourse analysis to examine the language employed in core social work educational texts spanning the 1970s to the 1990s. Through this analysis, they identified three distinct phases of social work

practice: the moral enterprise, the therapeutic enterprise, and the managerial enterprise. I have developed this chronology from my research proposal.

2.3 The Chronology

Historically social work practices grew out of moral concerns for the plight of the poor, during and post the industrial revolution (Bamford, 2015; McNutt, 2013; Bisman, 2004; Woodroofe,1962). During this time concerned 'helpers' tended to observe individual struggles as personal moral failings. This moral enterprise concentrated on the relationship between the individual and the social worker rather than the socio-political climate. The post war years saw the profession evolve away from individualistic moral philanthropy and espoused a more therapeutic approach to practice.

Social work become more politically aware with social workers standing with activist groups, such as the disability movement and the black civil rights movement (Shakespeare, 1993; Bell, 2014). Social workers were influenced by the emancipatory values espoused by these groups which developed an anti-oppressive approach within their endeavours.

As a politically engaged profession, social workers were now challenging class inequality in the UK (Lavalette, 2011; Carey 2018). However, towards the end of this time according to Gregory and Holloway (2005) there was a growing rift between the rich and the poor, a disaggregation of communities and an aggressive promotion of individualisation (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; Brockman and Garrett, 2022). The new discourse regarding social work replaced the language of care with the language of risk and consumerism.

Arising from the neoliberal discourse of the 1970's, was the managerial enterprise. This phase created significant challenges in the profession because the principles of social justice lost significance in the face of metrics (Chu et al., 2009; O Brien, 2011; Fenton 2019b).

During this period, social work in the UK faced ideological criticisms from both the political left and right. Critics noted that the political right expressed concerns about social work's perceived tolerance towards various service user groups. For example, in the highly moralised debates around addictions, the seemingly morally neutral stance of harm reduction services was seen as complicit in drug misuse (Keane, 2003). These criticisms became part of a dominant media narrative (Ferguson, 2013; Jones, 1998) This popularist narrative was used by the government to implement a series of policy reforms to not only social work but also the welfare state.

Dominelli (2004) observed that anti-oppressive practice in British social work was downgraded by the ideological restructuring of the welfare state. This meant that a free-market model which emphasised competition and profit, was introduced into social care services. This shift involved the implementation of outcome measurements, performance indicators, and payment by results (Challis, 1981; Orovwuje, 2001; Gardner, 2014; Fenton, 2016b; Moth, 2023). All of this challenged emancipatory social work practitioners.

Austerity became the dominant discourse in policy from 2010. As a result of the sustained reductions in public spending, ordered by the Coalition and the Conservative governments in office at the time, services experienced the introduction of tighter eligibility criteria, making social workers bureaucratic gatekeepers of scarce resources (Banks, 2011; Ferguson et al., 2018; Lavalette, 2019). Research confirmed that

austerity impacted on social workers capacity to practice ethically responsible social work. The experiences of work-related economic constraints and reduced resources were associated with the perceived erosion of values (Fenton, 2019b; Manttari-Van Der Kuip, 2015; Fenton, 2016; Ravalier, 2019; Moth, 2023).

Overall, the literature discussed above demonstrates the interdependence of social work values, practice, and political agendas. A criticism of the work of Gregory and Holloway is that they only used a limited range of texts to inform the analysis. Also, they hold a strong left-wing ideological perspective. However, understanding the historical context of the profession helps to inform us of the development and changes made to the guiding principles, values, and ethics. Harris, (2008; 2001) and Bamford (2015) are amongst many that offer a similar analysis of the contingent nature of social work and the contexts that inform welfare regimes. Having a commitment to professional values plays a significant part in informing contemporary professional practice. So, what is it that makes social work a profession?

2.4 Social work as a moral profession?

Professionality encompasses the specialised knowledge, skills, and procedures used in paid occupations, typically characterised by non-manual work with an emphasis on autonomy. It represents an individual's ideological, attitudinal, and intellectual, orientation towards their profession and its practice. Professionality embodies a holistic approach that combines technical expertise with ethical and value-based considerations, reflecting the practitioner's commitment to upholding the principles and standards of their chosen profession. (Saks, 2012; Evans, 2008). However, it is noted that autonomy has more recently given way to accountability. Fenton (2016) partly

contests this and proposes that there is still an element of professionalism which involves stepping up to decision making, autonomy and advocacy in social work. However, she argues that too often the ideas of accountability are conjoined to the principles of autonomy, which could contribute to risk averse practice and managerialism more likely to be included under the umbrella of organisational values.

Adams (2012) adds a layer of status by proposes that professionals-as-experts, maintain moral authority because of their extensive education. Other researchers argue that professionalism is a form of social closure, admitting only an elite few into the fold and promoting self-interest and self-protection (Saks, 2012; Ramirez, 2001; Abbott,1998; Simpkin,1979) For instance, Ramirez (2001) proposes that the concept of a profession is a strategic social construct that legitimises power. In his paper, he explores a socio-historical perspective of social closure in the profession of accounting. He illustrates how the monopolisation of economic and social rewards was a collective strategy of closure from within the profession. This work highlights how the boundaries and privileges of a profession can be shaped by social factors and strategic actions taken by its members. These actions often maintain status and control over specific resources and rewards.

When exploring the idea of professional social closure, in social work education as the starting point for entering the profession, this might be considered problematic for inclusive values and the widening participation project for HEIs (GovUK Widening Participation in HE 2021-22). Government statistics show a general rise in young people accessing HE with a progression rate to high tariff HE increasing from 29.9% to 34.3% in 2021-22. Although numbers applying for social work are not separated in these statistics, they do appear positive. However, the strict entry requirements set by

SWE, means social work programmes could still be seen as restrictive, but could this be considered morally correct?

Harris (2021 p10) argues that the process of social work student selection, which traditionally forefronts the observation of the 'correct' values in prospective candidates, is flawed. He proposes that most candidates are familiar with what is expected of them at interview and that they might "…have no problem rattling out what the interviewers want to hear." Petersen (2022) adds to this argument suggesting that over time, individuals develop an understanding of which narratives are most effective in various situations and contexts, often influenced by how they wish to be perceived by others.

Educators, who also act as gatekeepers for the profession, abiding by SWE Professional Standards, need to make robust judgements about selection for entry into the profession. Contemporary selection processes in social work now include service users in decision making, which goes some way into democratising equality of access (Tanner et al., 2017) along with the widening participation agenda. This is because the profession holds powers and duties that are enshrined in legislation. Social workers are recognised as professionals with a legal mandate to intervene in areas such as child protection and mental health. Their role is governed by laws and regulations that outline their responsibilities and authority to address social issues, safeguard vulnerable individuals, and promote the well-being of communities. For these reasons, social workers must have a commitment to the professional values of the occupation (SWE, 2023; BASW, 2022; Chu et al., 2009)

So, although contested, professionalism in the 21st century is badged as a positive, this positive face can mask a process of marginalisation and precarity for professionals

themselves and hide politically motivated ideologies as introduced above (Hache, 2007; Adams, 2012; Saks, 2012; Fenton, 2019b; Harris, 2021; Ioakimidis, 2023).

Further, moral professionalism is enacted in practice that is consistent with a range of ethical codes that both contribute to and reflect perceptions of, the profession's purpose, status, and nature (Evans, 2008; Saks, 2012). Social works governing bodies and code of ethics are part of the professions mission statement and protect both the public and the workers themselves form the potentially corrupting power and authority. Some scholars would argue that these delegated quasi-governmental bodies do more to uphold neoliberal managerial discourses and depoliticise the profession (Simpson et al., 2023: Worsley et al., 2020; Wood and Flinders, 2016). This could mean the dilution of the values of social justice and human rights.

Chu et al. (2009 p 288) go so far as to suggest that '...social justice is the core purpose of social work'. The key principles within social work's codes and guidance's are an expectation that professionals will be committed to social work values. Banks (2016 pp 35-36) advances this position and provides further thoughts regarding what she calls 'Ethics work'.

She discusses professional ethics as governed by external regulatory bodies but residing in the compliance of individual workers decision making processes. She defines ethics work as

> …the effort (professionals) put into seeing ethically salient aspects of
> situations, developing themselves as good practitioners, working out the
> right course of action and justifying who they are and what they have done.

This approach moves away from simply following rules and adapting to the constant reforms of ethical codes (Harris, 2021; Worsley, 2020). Banks' important work will be

explored further in the values section below along with the work of Fenton (2016) as we problematise our understanding of professional value.

2.5 Social Work Values: A problematised approach

Harris (2021) takes a critical and radical perspective whilst offering an historical overview of social work values in post-war Britain. His position aligns with Gregory and Holloway (2005). He articulates frustration with the multitudinous cycles of reform the profession had endured, but he also observes an erosion of values, starting around the publication of Paper 30: Rules and Requirements for the Diploma in Social Work (CCETSW, 1989). He argues that a campaign of extensive media coverage began to dismiss the professions commitment to challenging discrimination and oppression as 'political correctness'. A narrative of 'common sense' began to grow from this discourse with key conservative voices announcing that a National Core Curriculum for Social Work Training "…will be no place for trendy theories or the theory that 'isms or 'ologies come before common sense and practical skills" (Preston-Shoot, 1996 quoted in Harris, 2021 p 5) and so CCETSW duly removed references to anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice from the curriculum.

Harris sees this as a more individualised approach consistent with neoliberal ideologies, like other scholars who argue that neoliberalism is a barrier to a human rights and social justice practice orientation (Morley and Macfarlane, 2014; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2006). He does critique the introduction of the SW degree in 2002, noting that an understanding of social divisions is only referenced in one of 100's of standards that assess performance, again removing any focus of systematic oppression.

However, Harris agrees with Higgins (2016) in that the introduction of the PCF's, which he accredits to the College of Social Work, do align more with a broader curriculum that promotes a values-based approach, including anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice. The development of the PCF domains has been described as providing a unifying professional pedagogy for social work that includes skills, knowledge, and ethical principles, and values (Burgess et al., 2014; Fenton, 2014). One which according to Higgins (2016) provides an integrated model across education and practice. Burgess et al. (2014) offer support for this approach with the following 4 observations:

The PCF domains have:

•Introduced capabilities rather than competencies

•A conceptual integrity across the nine domains

•An integrated approach to assessment and learning

•Four qualifying levels from prequalification to advanced practice

There is an integration of the nine PCF domains in terms of their emphasis on knowledge, values, and social justice (Higgins, 2016). However, Harris (2021) notes that social work values dominate educational processes and have become a prominent aspect of contemporary social work and social work education, solidifying their position, to the extent that they are now widely accepted without much scrutiny. Harris suggests that the insistence that students adhere to social work values has a "…tinge of totalitarianism" (p 10). This position is problematic, he posits, because the value statements can often be changed when new governing bodies are introduced, or reforms are imposed (Hanley, 2022; Simpson et al., 2023) and then ALL social workers professional values must also change in unison from a specific date.

It has been argued that it is through these governing bodies, that the state has been able to institutionalise some of the professions core values contributing to a loss of their original meaning. Once considered radical, they became domesticated and depoliticised (Mclaughlin, 2005; Simpson, 2023; Taylor et al., 2017). McLaughlin (ibid) argues that anti-racist (ARP) and anti-oppressive practice (AOP), introduced to challenge the oppressive structures that hindered the life chances and opportunities of people based on gender, class, race, disability etc, were feared by the establishment. Both ARP and AOP were seen as a threat to the status quo. In accepting policy changes and regulations that could re-enforce colonial moral superiority (Badwell, 2016) and by the state taking ownership of some of these once radical ideas, practitioners might start to lose the links between social work practice and social justice (Hache, 2007; Fenton, 2014; Simpson et al., 2023).

It is argued that these governing bodies can act as a barrier to emancipatory practice and conform to a neoliberal narrative of individualisation. A study that looked at the numbers of professional 'struck off' the official register, for malpractice in health and social care settings suggested that there was little attention paid to the impact funding cuts may have had on service capabilities. Instead, these governing bodies look to blame and punish individual registrants (Worsley et al., 2020; Simpson et al., 2023).

Complicating this further, perceptions of professional integrity could be compromised when applying values in a specific way when advocating for emancipatory rights. As an example, this could be responding to the human needs of asylum seekers and accidentally breaking immigration controls or by providing financial support for someone deemed 'illegal' through what is known as the "crimmigration" system (Bhatia, 2020 p 36; Cemlyn and Nye, 2012; Androff and Mathis, 2021).

The work of Cemlyn and Nye (2012) illustrates the above point whilst considering the controversial process of age assessments with young asylum seekers. They report on the ethical issues that occur between immigration control and core social work values. However, their conclusion is clear that social work values need to be maintained. This study explored the views of social workers involved in this duty. Findings suggested that social workers often compartmentalise their values and see the assessments as a bureaucratic feature that is separate to the social work role.

The often-hostile nature of these processes appears to induce a culture of disbelief which compromises the social workers ability to provide support and access to care and protection. Communication with the Home office, it was identified, erodes the value base of social justice, human rights, and practitioner integrity by enforcing a narrative that asylum seekers abuse the system. What the social workers in this study described, aligns with the idea of 'ethical stress'

Ethical stress, as identified by Fenton (2014; 2019b), is a phenomenon experienced by social workers when they find themselves unable to align their values with their actions. She uses her research to support claims that criminal justice social workers in Scotland experienced ethical stress when they felt unable to provide values-based practice. She breaks this concept down into two components: Disjuncture (the practice context hinders agency) and ontological guilt (having to practice in a way that is incongruent to values). However, as a way of coping with this unease, Fenton argues that some social workers may perceive certain ethical issues as merely practical challenges or secondary to the priority tasks of public protection and, as a result, choose not to summon the moral courage needed to confront these ethical dilemmas driven by dominant discourses. This notion is exemplified in the work of Cemlyn and Nye (2012).

There is evidence to support the notion that social work values are influenced by the dominant discourses in the socio-political context and that these values hold a central position in the profession (Pascoe et al., 2022; Hill and Laredo, 2020; Morris et al., 2018; Harris, 2008). This plays an implicit role in shaping decisions regarding interventions (Fenton, 2016b p 199). Fenton examines the tension between organisational professionalism and the need for moral courage. She proposes that even though in 2011, Munro called for a renewed focus on professional autonomy where social workers could 'step-up' to responsibility, organisational professionalism still dominates. She explains that when control sits with the agency and the culture cherishes hierarchical structures, budgets, procedures, performance reviews, then professional autonomy is diminished (Pascoe et al., 2022; Karvinen-Niinikoski et al., 2019).

Educators and social workers are encouraged to resist uncritical collusion with managerial and bureaucratic practices that negatively impact the lives of service users (Fenton, 2019b). Instead, Fenton advocates for embracing ethical stress as a catalyst for moral action. Rather than resorting to individual coping mechanisms (like mindfulness!) to alleviate these uncomfortable feelings, Fenton emphasises the importance of using ethical stress as a driving force to effect positive change. This approach encourages social workers to confront ethical challenges and seek solutions that align with their core values, thus contributing to a more ethically responsible practice.

Similarly, Banks (2016), introduced the concept of ethics work. Ethics work involves individual practitioner effort to see situations through an ethical lens. This she argues, promotes good practice that goes beyond conforming to ethical codes (Simpson et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2022) The way she defines this makes it seem like an embodied

holistic approach to understanding how to intervene. In calling this approach everyday ethics rather than textbook ethics she hopes it promotes practitioners as moral agents in context and moves away from managerialism. Both approaches can be taught in the classroom and encouraged on placement although further research would be required to observe the impacts (Boitel and Fromm, 2014)

2.6 Social Work Values in Education

Back in 1996 Jones was warning us of a directional change in social work education that could fundamentally change its occupational identity. Concurring with the analysis of Gregory and Holloway (2005), his analysis noted the movement away from the radical discourses that gained prominence in the 1970's. Post 1975 he observed the increased involvement of employers in shaping the curriculums in HEI's. Notably, this was away from challenging injustice to emphasising practical rule and regulation-based approaches. This also created a hostile stance towards intellectual knowledge. The shape of professional identity construction would be highly impacted by this turn, which is explored in the discussion chapter further. This employer involvement remains significant today and is supported by the TP's.

To understand educational provision in HEI's it is salient to contextualise the marketisation of education in the 'neoliberal university'. Carey (2021, p4) argues that HEI's are not immune to the influence of neoliberal discourses when he debates such influences on social work education. He posits that the narrowing of ideological perspectives, through a push for skills-based curricula, fits with free market and authoritarian agendas and appears to play away from the 'moral and social enlightenment' perspective of university education. Partly he blames the intrusion of

government and employer led perspectives such as those driven by Teaching Partnerships. This position highlights concerns regarding the erosion of values in social work education and research.

Prior to the introduction of the undergraduate degree, there was criticism from Carpenter (2005) that most research into social work education practices, used narrative accounts rather than controlled evaluations, which reflected the ideological push away from qualitative research at the time (Goldacre, 2013; Cousins, 2013). Carpenter noted that there was a lack of outcome focused research, which he addresses in his report "Evaluating Outcomes in Social Work Education" published by the *Social Care Institute for Excellence* (SCIE, 2005). This report was concerned with impact and outcomes and made little mention of values acquisition in the student cohort.

Motivated by this report, Woodward and Mackay (2012 p 3) carried out a literature review. This indicated that educators both in the classroom and fieldwork placements across the UK, reported that students seemed to have difficulties articulating how values might guide practice in terms of recognising structural inequalities and how these might be challenged. They noted that students were able to express how values might support their direct work with individuals and used Higham's 2006 model illustrate what social work values should include:

a. Values for working with individuals. This helps to inform relational processes.

b. Structural values. Awareness of discrimination and oppression from top-down structures/policies in society

c. Emancipatory values. This includes collective responsibility to challenge and address inequalities alongside service users.

Their findings demonstrated that students engage more with individual involvement. and less so with structural values, and emancipatory values (Higham, 2006). Although these findings indicate a lack of a deeper understandings of values such as social justice, the fact that the students were only halfway through their studies could be a limitation, by focusing on students who are at the end of their final 100-day placements, this research could highlight a more advanced understanding of values such as social justice.

When considering how students make sense of their educational experiences and how values are internalised, Butler-Warke and Bolger (2021) carried out research exploring how social work students who studied between 1968-2012 (now qualified practitioners) reflected on their own educational outcomes. Their findings indicate that both the classroom and the placement elements were equally important in developing positive preparations for their careers. They also confirmed that social work education supports the internalisation of social work values. They call for more in-depth research from a student/practitioner's perspective, as much of the research in this area uses surveys as the main method of data collection.

However, this does not discount the significance of the findings from surveys. Tompsett et al. (2017) used a longitudinal quantitative survey questioning how social work students acquire core pre-placement skills during their time in the university classroom. This paper offers some insights around the development of critical refection skills but emphasises that the development of technical skills dominated over theories and values such as social justice (Carey, 2021; Lee et al., 2022). Interestingly, they found that undergraduates report that group support, peer feedback and good relationships offer a strong and safe learning environment whereas postgraduates preferred feedback from a perceived authoritative independent and credible source.

There are links to other research findings here regarding the importance of significant relationships during learning (McCulloch, 2021; Gant et al., 2019; Vassos et al., 2018; Gulalia, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). There is some research that highlights the significance of the relationship on placement between students and Practice Educators, as detailed below, but less around classroom relationships.

When looking at the social work classroom, we need to look at social work educators and examine their understanding and commitment to social work values. Research carried out by Funge (2011) proposes that the educators of students are obligated to teach social justice, anti-oppressive practice and promote social change, but how do they understand these concepts? Using interviews with HEI educators he similarly found that individual tutors had different understandings of what this meant. This research connects with the work of Carey (2021) discussed above where he argues that neoliberal discourses have invaded HEI's, diluting the value focus of social work education.

So, if the first level educators were confused, it's of no surprise that the PEs were often under-prepared, confused and even dismissive about such values. As evidenced above, managerial organisational culture and austerity often puts constraints or limitations on social workers abilities to adhere to this approach (Pascoe et al., 2022; Fenton, 2016b; Banks, 2016).

A scoping review looking at pedagogical methods of teaching social justice, found some of the best ways of supporting 'teachable curricula' for social justice orientated practice was through intergroup debate, simulations and role play and group work (Lee et al., 2022 p 762). They found that competency-based teaching dominated most classrooms and proposed that this could lead to creating neo-liberal social workers

rather than social justice orientated social workers (Carey, 2021: Jones, 1996). They emphasised the need for more transformative social justice training in the classroom using the above pedagogical tools, to support embodied practice.

When considering the initial teaching of values in the classroom, an interesting perspective regarding social closure and access into professions such as social work was found, which makes links to the widening participation programmes in HEI's. Sayre and Sar (2015) argue that without levelling up of underprepared students, then social inequalities will be perpetuated rather than challenged. They insist that a starting point for modelling social justice needs to reside at the heart of classroom pedagogies by supporting more vulnerable student populations. This idea also has significance for the practice placement elements of courses, particularly as the HEIs do not have control over what placements are made available for final year students going into statutory settings.

Diverging from, but adding to this argument, McCusker and McCulloch (2016) reviewed the social work curriculum in Scottish universities. They asked, that as social work education seems under constant scrutiny, would a unified core curriculum help to consolidate different expectations? Noting the literature provided evidence of a contrasting picture, where practitioners were frustrated by academic teaching, perceiving it as being worlds apart from the realities of practice (Domakin, 2014, p 724, cited in McCusker and McCulloch, 2016). Contrary to Lee et al. (2022) they posed the question whether a skills-based curriculum, focused on working in regulated settings would help or should wider theoretical value driven debates continue. Their finding did not arrive at a consensus for what should be included in a core curriculum, but there was a willingness to consider ways forward to improve the issue identified above. By examining the nuances of this work, of concern is the idea that some employers don't

see students as well prepared for practice. This is something that needs to be addressed, as expectations are often too high.

On a final note, Hanley (2021) carried out a Foucauldian discourse analysis of government policy papers from 2002-2018, a time during which, neoliberal narratives dominated, and the social work profession experienced a multitude of reviews and reforms. He found that there was a narrative that suggested the quality of social work education is poor, with a persistent criticism aimed at the quality of applicants being accepting onto qualifying courses (Holmstrom, 2014; Narey, 2014).

With multiple reforms in the ever-changing landscape of education, it is not surprising to find that the emergence of multiple differing routes into the profession was deemed a solution. The 'mainstream' routes continue to dominate but Hanley argues that it is the 'splintering of social work education' (p 127) that should cause us alarm. He does note that the difference between the learning opportunities afforded to students taking traditional routes over those on 'training' routes is the freedom to take more learning risks and to challenge when they might perceive unjust practice.

Although he has a robust argument, the findings of this research suggest that this might not be the case for traditional route students either. In conclusion, the concern he articulates is that increased choice and the marketisation of all routes reduces the opportunity to challenge systems of social injustice. This is something that is important for the practice placement element of social work education.

2.7 Social Work Placements: A site for value based professional identity formation

A core qualifying component of social work education is the requirement for students to undertake two practice placements. This is a well-established approach to developing professional competence and the integration of theory to practice (Wayne et al., 2010). *Social Work England* suggests that HEI's need to secure placements in at least two practice settings providing contrasting experiences. Most HEIs in England configure these placements as a first 70-day placement taking place in majority PVI sector settings and the second 100-day placement as a statutory setting. This amounts to a significant BA and MA programme time.

There is a body of literature that looks at Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) as an increasing pedagogical strategy for many disciplines in universities. The discussions here have generated question regarding the transition from classroom to workspace. Specifically, there are concerns that looking at work-based learning through the same lens as classroom-based learning could be problematic (Dean and Sykes, 2020; Higgs, 2014). When looking at the literature around social work practice placements this and other concerns have been highlighted, however the devolvement of assessment to practice educators does provide a separation from general work-based learning. Though this might present different issues that are explored below (Flannagan and Wilson, 2018).

There is a rich stream of research around placements (fieldwork) emerging from North America. According to Boitel and Fromm (2014 p 608)

> In 2008 the Council on Social Work Education identified field education as the signature pedagogy of social work. In doing so, it designated field education as

the synthetic, integrative curricular area in which students are socialized to the profession.

They propose that this signature pedagogy needs to inspire and support students to learn from complex interactions between theories, methods, and practical skills to promote thinking, performing, and acting with integrity. This, in turn, develops critical thinking, proficient performance, and ethical conduct. By placing an emphasis on applying ethical principles in thoughts, actions, and behaviours, this approach nurtures professional identities. This concept was proposed by Shulman (2005) and he called placements the site where professionals in training could learn from complex and ambiguous situations in the field (Boitel and Fromm, 2014; McCulloch, 2021). The CSWE is based in the United States and is the accrediting body for social workers.

This elevation of practice placements in social work education, as its signature pedagogy, produced a renewed interest in research, prevalently in the USA and Canada (Litvack et al., 2010; Asakura et al., 2018; Todd and Schwartz, 2009). However, Holden et al. (2010) carried out an investigation into the claim that practice placements are social works signature pedagogy, they conducted a meta-analysis of literature and research papers. Their findings suggested that there was not enough evidence available to support this accolade. However, this work also inspired other researchers to argue that practice placements should be viewed as the signature pedagogy of social work education.

Challenging Holdens position, Larrison and Korr (2013) offered a conceptualisation of what a signature pedagogy should embrace, based on the work of Shulman (2005) they present the following concept as central: Thinking and performing like a social worker and developing a professional self. In agreement Boitel and Fromm (2014)

proposed that to claim this title, field work required a learning contract to specify learning theories and outcomes to structure the experience, but also the field supervisor's (Practice Educator) teaching role needs to be a key component as proposed by Levy et al. (2014). The influence of these ideas soon expanded from the USA to include Europe.

To try to identify if there is a cross-national signature pedagogy of social work education, Wallengren-Lynch et al. (2020) compared the approaches used in Universities across England, Israel, Finland, Spain and Sweden, they concluded that despite there being different welfare models across the countries, they were able to provide empirical evidence that commonalities in pedagogies do exist, not just limited to the placement. They were also able to demonstrate that Larrison and Korr's (2013) framework supported this insight.

In contrast to the USA and general European context, the UK social work arena appears to operate from a position of deficit. Social work education and practice is often on the receiving end of a narrative of improvement, as noted in the introduction with the table of multiple and continuing reviews and reforms This situation is also destabilised by the multitude changes of governing bodies and stakeholder organisations (Hanley, 2021; Simpson et al., 2023).

Research looking into student experiences whilst on placement is less abundant but there are notable papers from the UK that examine experiences and ethical issues relating to values. Some research findings suggest that a lack of support on placement led to passivity in student learning and other research noted that there needed to be more collaboration between universities and placement settings to strengthen relationships (Caspersen and Smeby, 2021; Caffrey et al., 2021; Gant et al., 2019).

However, there is much research that finds the relationship between the Practice Educator and student to be one of the most significant factors in professional identity formation.

Fitzgerald (2020 p 470) carried out a concept analysis to help health and care researchers use a common language to gain clarity on what defines professional identity. The conclusions she reached provided the following as consistent attributes that help define professional identity:

> There are many common themes throughout the literature, which could make the task of formalizing this concept easier. These include actions and behaviours, knowledge and skills, values, beliefs and ethics, context and socialization, and group and personal identity.

I would argue that professional identity formation must also include developing a sense of belonging, in the classroom, in the placement and to the profession (Rogers and Allen, 2023; Brown, 2017).The teaching of knowledge, skills and values occurs in both classroom-based curriculums and in work-based placements which act as transitioning spaces to integrate theoretical learning to socialise and develop students' professional identities (Roscoe, 2023; Butler-Warke and Bolger, 2020; Dean and Sykes, 2020; Pithouse and Roscoe, 2018).

Cardoso et al (2014), carried out a systematic review of the literature exploring professional identity development. They start their work by noting people have many different identities which are not fixed and interact with each other. They also note that identity can be viewed as both as individual and as part of the collective. Their findings reveal that there are developmental stages in professional identity formation, particularly around the literature looking at nursing and teaching; they concluded that

there are "…two main stages of development, in which the studies focus: the learning and professional process" (p.96). This has resonance for this research as the learning from classroom and the transition to professional processes where professional identity becomes a significant part of the collective community. This emphasises the significance of the transition from classroom to placement and the importance of the interpersonal relationships on placement.

Research conducted by Levy et al. (2014) using survey feedback gathered from 160 social work students, discovered that satisfactory supervision on placement was one of the key influencers of professional identity formation (McCulloch, 2021; Dean and Sykes, 2020; Vassos et al., 2018). Pithouse and Roscoe (2018), note that interrelationships serve to develop and construct professional identities, but they challenge the dominance of the neoliberal discourse in socio-cultural social settings which includes institutional knowledge. They take a critical stance in their research and use conversations with student social workers to analyse the language that can influence students' professional identity construction. They found that the participants reproduced the neoliberal ideologies within the knowledge of the institution. Placement socialisation and the significance of those supervisory relationships are explored in more detail below as these discussions are pertinent to this research.

2.8 Relationships on placement

When looking into research around practice placements in social work, the universal quality that centres the experience appears to be relationality. Learning is promoted via human relationships and interactions (Ingram and Smith, 2018; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020; del-Rio and Alvarez, 2007) for the student this means

relationships with service users, teams, and their Practice Educator/supervisor (McCulloch, 2021; Vassos et al., 2018; Gulalia, 2014; Roulston et al., 2018; Gant et al., 2019). McCulloch provides commentary on the centrality of these relationships in providing formative and summative assessments of student capabilities. She offers practice examples of successful supervisions built from strong relationships between practice educators and students and concludes that these relationships provide the foundation for good practice. I would propose that good support from a knowledgeable other is essential for navigating transitioning spaces (Eraut, 2004; Vygotsky,1978).

Similarly, Gulalia (2014) proposes that the relationship between the placement supervisor (Practice Educator in the UK) provides the context for that learning. In India, unlike the UK context, they do note that there is no systematic guide for how the field instructors undertake teaching. Other research also found that the supervisory relationship was one of the aspects of placements that students felt was important (Roulston et al., 2018; Roulston et al., 2022; Gant et al., 2019). As Fenton (2022) articulates, at the core of teaching students about social justice should lay a belief in human-to-human connection and the universalism of our humanity.

Recognising and promoting this understanding can help develop empathy, compassion, and a sense of solidarity among students along with a sense of belonging. For students, the experience of good relationships in practice can exemplify and harness the learning of core values (Grant, 2014). However, what if this relationship isn't perceived as good?

Roulston et al. (2022) focused on the failing student experience in four universities in Ireland. They discovered five key themes. Of most relevance to this research are the Importance of working relationships and use and misuse of power, which resonates

with the themes identified here and with the broader literature. Although this study looked at failing students specifically the themes reach out to wider discussions. Power differentials appeared to underpin relationships and they were not always seen as supportive working alliances. Other relationships were considered important from their findings and the relationship between the HEI tutor and the placement was highlighted as needing more development.

Practice educators are sometimes critical of the support offered by universities and have reported feeling unsupported themselves, particularly when faced with the difficult task of failing a student. Building on this insight and considering the previous research discussed, it becomes evident that the significance of broader academic and practice-based relationships should not be overlooked.

Caffrey et al. (2021; 2019) employed photo elicitation to investigate social work students' perceptions of relationships whilst on placement. While the primary focus of this study centred on the tutor-student relationship and the need for clearer and more targeted support, an interesting observation emerged. A harmonious collaboration between these stakeholders is essential for providing comprehensive support to social work students during their placements. This also highlights the broader significance of academic and practice-based relationships, where both universities and practice educators play integral roles in supporting students' growth and learning.

In a significant study for this research, Papouli (2016) carried out an exploration of how values and ethics are developed during final year placements for social work students at a Greek university. Her methodology differs from this research as she uses Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and focuses just on participants from one university. Her findings suggest that students can articulate their understanding of values, not just

as theoretical concepts taught in the classroom but as core concepts that take on concrete meaning in practice. The critical Incidents shared by the participants fell into two categories, insights from positive experiences and insights from negative experiences, both of which developed professional practice skills and values. The key categories that themed the way students learned about values in practice was through their relationships with service users, Practice Educators and the wider team confirming previous observations (McCulloch, 2021; Gulalia, 2014; Caffrey et al., 2021; 2019; Roulston et al., 2022).

Further research providing similar conclusions regarding relationships for student learning in placement, was conducted by Lam et al. (2007). They carried out a qualitative study in which they analysed student's reflective journals. They noted that students believed that they developed knowledge and skills through the validation of significant others. It was also notable that disturbing events appeared to act as the catalyst to reflection and self-discovery. However other research found that perceptions of learning might mean that novice students miss the essentials of the day-to-day learning in favour of the hands-on critical experiences (Dean and Sykes, 2020; Eraut and Hirsh, 2007).

Similarly, Sicora (2019) analysed student reflective journals with a particular focus on when they made mistakes. He noted that often students were unable to see the wider picture and tended to self-blame when they made a mistake. The emotional impact of making mistakes combined with a perceived culture of blame acted as a barrier to learning. Sicora proposes that learning from mistakes through reflective practice should be encouraged by educators' who could emphasise responsibility over blame. Wallengren-Lynch et al. (2020 p 9) concurred with Sicora (2019) as they found that in one university in Israel:

...the students were encouraged to bring their own practice mistakes (from placement) to the classroom for discussion. A critical perspective also means recognising the self is vulnerable and identifying blind spots and challenges is an essential aspect of social work education.

This practice, they believe, encouraged critical reflection for social justice, which they propose is central to social work educational pedagogies. Flannagan and Wilson (2018) shared the findings from their student-to-student online survey-based research project. They sought to improve the confidence of year 1 students by engaging them in collaborative knowledge production alongside staff. The design was to get year 1 students to find out about year 2 students practice learning experience. This also gave the lead researcher the opportunity to analyse the quality of the learning experiences from the student's perspective.

Their most significant findings replicated some of the findings from other research. Overall satisfaction with placement experience and perceptions of learning correlated to student satisfaction with both their practice educator and their placement setting. There was no mention in their report of values, but they noted that devolving the teaching role to the agency did produce a more competence-based model of assessment, which was outcome orientated, focused on skills and procedures rather than values focused. Areas for improvement were identified as providing more clarity around the roles, for example they highlight the role of placement tutor, as students didn't seem to understand this role and therefore were reluctant to ask for support (Caffrey et al., 2021).

Whilst reviewing the literature it was of interest to find research that helped to inform this work but was carried out within other professional disciplines aligning with social

work. For example, Clarke et al. (2014) used IPA to explore occupational therapy student's placement experiences, specifically around the emergence of a professional identity. The findings of this in-depth study of five M level occupational therapy (OT) students studying on a UK programme, revealed some unique findings. Unlike many studies this research found that students felt they developed from autonomy in practice (the role-emerging placements were not in specific OT settings and were supervised by off-site OTs).

This finding contradicts findings from research in social work, where the preference is to have an on-site practice educator and role model. However, the growth of and commitment to their professional identity was remarkable. One participant articulated their 'values' around client centred work, saying that collaborative relationships need to be central rather than fitting clients into pre-existing systems. Clarke et al. (ibid.) took this to demonstrate how these placements had supported students to move away from a passive assimilation of values and practices by simply conforming to the role models' practices. This resonates with aspects of threshold concept theory (Meyer and Land, 2006). Clarke et al. (2014) conclude by considering how curricula needs to de-emphasise technical knowledge and skills and emphasise a focus on the process of becoming, which is consolidated on practice placements. As noted above, social work students and many PEs tended to value technical knowledge and skills over more abstract critical reflection (Carey, 2021; Sicora, 2019; Lam et al., 2007).

Other research partly contradicts the idea that the placement experience of students is considered the most significant aspect of social work pedagogy. Specifically, Caspersen and Smeby (2021) noted the growing appetite in many HE programmes for the inclusion of work-based vocational modules to improve educational outcomes. They posit that there could be a tendency to over emphasise the significance of

practice learning and downplaying the importance of abstract knowledge development in the classroom. They argue for an integration of learning from both work placements and the university classroom to provide coherence for students (Smeby and Heggen, 2014). They examined attitudes concerning the effects of placement quality, programme coherence and classroom preparation for placement on learning outcomes. They conclude from their findings that programme coherence has a direct positive impact on all three types of learning outcomes (knowledge, general competence, and skills).

> Preparation before placement has a direct positive impact on knowledge and general competence and indirect impacts on all three types of learning outcomes, mediated by placement quality and programme coherence. Placement quality only indirectly affects learning outcomes positively and is mediated by programme coherence (p 2658).

Research undertaken by Roulston et al. (2016) does corroborate with one part of the above research; using cross-sectional survey feedback they were able to identify that improved preparation before going out on placement could help build practice confidence which is supported by the work of Tompsett et al. (2021).

However, much research, contrary to Caspersen and Smeby's (2021) position, provides evidence that social work students themselves value the placement experience as the single most important aspect of their education and learning journeys, particularly in UK and Ireland based student research. Much of the scholarly knowledge also forefronts the relationship with Practice Educator and service users (Brodie and Williams, 2013; Roulston et al., 2018; Kuusisto et al., 2022; Gant et al., 2019; Roulston et al., 2022; Repesa et al., 2023).

By examining the nuances in the literature, a gap can be perceived regarding the student voice and values development. However, as the motivation to go into social work was the trigger point for the shared experience of the placement phenomena (Truffour, 2017), the following section is important, as without this understanding we could miss significant connections to the above experiences.

2.9 Student motivation for entering education.

Understanding the concept of motivation has long interested psychologists and in seeking to define and understand what we mean by motivation I initially engaged with the ideas of Sansone and Harackiewicz (2000) to inform my position. They propose that knowledge has developed to include notions of *extrinsic motivation*, which includes behavioural approaches such as external reward and punishment, and *intrinsic motivations* which arise from an inner desire. Reiss (2005) argues that this approach is reductive at best and that a complex range of motivations can't be forced into just two competing categories.

Much research has been undertaken to explore student motivations for entering social work training. According to Bozek et al. (2017) many of the studies available explore the BA level experience and less so MA level experience. They noted that previous research findings indicated that motivations to train in social work were often altruistic (Peteresen, 2022; Toros and Medar, 2015; Butler-Warke and Bolger, 2020). They discovered that there were two types of motivations; the desire to improve the life conditions of those affected by poverty (altruistic) and a desire to develop a professional career (practical). I would argue that altruistic motivations might have a range of additional factors to be explored. However, they do note that there are a

complex range of reasons that inspire students to train as social workers (Stevens et al., 2012; Buchanan and Bisham, 2009 cited in Bozek et al., 2017).

Developing knowledge around the motivations, needs to explore the range of reasons students give for choosing the discipline. Butler-Warke et al. (2021) confirm previous research, as they found that a sense of altruism was the dominant motivator. Prompted by a curiosity as to the motivations to join other related professions, the wider literature demonstrated some intrinsic differences. For example, regarding allied medical professions, although altruism remains a motivator, the social and cultural status of certain professions was key (Nikolovska et al., 2020). When a profession is seen as having a high social status, respect, and cultural prestige, then parental/familial pressure can become another external motivator (Griffin and Hu, 2019). The first two chapters of this thesis have provided evidence that social work is not considered a high status or highly respected profession. This is something that is also developed in the discussion chapter.

2.10 Conclusion

Having looked at the various perspectives presented in the relevant literature, exploring the historical context of social work values and social work as a moral profession. We moved on to problematise ideas around values and look at social work education in the classroom and then on placement. Students found placements to be where the theoretical learning consolidates with practice and that both are essential for their professional development. We also found that students see their relationships on placement as important in shaping their professional identities. Finally, we notice that motivations for social work are highly altruistic and not based on social status or prestige.

Having explored the relevant literature in the areas of interest for this research I will now offer a detailed overview of the research design process.

Chapter 3 Research Design

3.1 Introduction.

This chapter will give an overview of the research design decisions made to support this exploratory project. It explains the ontological and epistemological rationale for undertaking a qualitative research study. It discusses how the decision to employ the research approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was arrived at. It includes an in-depth examination of the theoretical and conceptual ideas that underpin IPA. Ethical issues are considered alongside the decision to use purposive sampling and semi-structured one-to-one interviews. The chapter concludes by outlining any perceived limitations of the research design. It begins with the research aims.

3.2 Aim of this Research

The aim of this research is to explore student placement experiences and the significance of social work values. How are values perceived by students during social work interventions in an increasingly resource restricted environment? To facilitate this exploration, I have identified three principal domains; These domains were included in the semi-structured interview framework. They encompass the following:

1. Motivations for choosing social work: I aimed to explore what led individuals to pursue a career in social work.

2. Experiences of final placement, including transitioning from classroom to placement setting.

3. Enactment of values in practice settings.

An integral part of this inquiry was to investigate how these values manifested in real-world practice. This includes engaging with how an understanding of social work values was established in the classroom.

I have centred my attention on the value concept of social justice, as I believe it to be implicit to good practice. This concept is also intricately linked with human rights. However, as discussed in the preceding chapter, current ideological and instrumental challenges seem to have diminished the significance of this value in social work education and practice (Fenton, 2022; 2016; Banks, 2021; Lavalette, 2011).

The research questions are as follows:

Research Questions

1. What motivations influence students' decisions to undertake an educational route into social work

2. What are the experiences of student social workers on final placement and how do they observe professional values in action.

3.3 Research design process.

The exploratory nature of this investigation is concerned with the lived experience of student social workers. Lived experience in qualitative research has been described as the epistemological basis for understanding human experience (Van Manen, 2016; Dilthey,1985).

This led to the deliberate selection of a qualitative paradigm also known as a post-positivist. Post-positivism represents a more nuanced and reflective approach to research, acknowledging the role of subjectivity and interpretation, whilst still valuing

empirical evidence. It encourages researchers to critically engage with their assumptions, question underlying paradigms, and embrace complexity in their pursuit of knowledge.

As this research is exploring a phenomenon in its own terms, from the subjective position of the participants, it can be described as inductive, or data driven. This means that the analysis of the data is at the core of the research rather than pre-existing literature, theories, and hypothesis. Therefore, a robust methodology was required to support this perspective.

The approach used is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which was developed by Jonathan Smith. This was as a reaction against the dominance of positivistic approaches to the psychology of experience in health and clinical/counselling psychology (Eatough and Smith, 2017). It is significant to highlight this as Smith is widely published and widely cited in this work. IPA forefronts the in-depth examination of how people understand their life experiences, and how they perceive and make sense of significant phenomena (Smith, 1996; 2007; Smith et al., 2009; 2022; Van Manen, 2016).

This is achieved by systematically exploring how people make sense of these experiences, but also to draw on how the researcher interprets what the participant expresses, (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2022). The researcher isn't just describing emergent themes from the data but is actively interpreting and making sense of the participants cognitive landscape; therefore, a co-constructed understanding of the nature of the subjective experience can be drawn (Pringle et al., 2011; Alase, 2017).

Co-construction usually involves participants and researcher having a commonality with the phenomenon being explored. Therefore, it is also helpful for the researcher to recognise their own position. For myself, as a social work educator, my insider position may be perceived as a position of power and privilege vis a vis the participants; This could reproduce the potential inequalities experienced by students as learners (Williams et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2022). To mitigate for this, I had an open recruitment process via four HEI social work subject leads. Participants self-selected. This will be explored further below and is also acknowledged in my positionality statement in the introduction.

IPA, as an approach, argues that knowledge is relative, with the researcher contributing their own pre-existing and future-existing (or changing) perspective. To have a systematic, transparent, and participant led methodology, IPA draws on three main theories: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Smith et al., 2022; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Groenewald, 2004). IPA and these theoretical concepts are discussed in the subsection called 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The chosen approach'. Firstly, I present a justification for the use of a qualitative paradigm in this research.

3.4 Qualitative over quantitative

When considering the research questions, it was evident that the focus wasn't to explore facts and figures but to seek out personal narratives that inform the subjective understandings students make of their educational experiences. This research is ontologically contextual constructivist and therefore uses an interpretivist post-positive paradigm rather than a positivist paradigm.

A positivist paradigm's ontological understanding of the world is based on the idea that a single truth or reality exists outside of our perceptions. This single truth or reality can be discovered by the objective, and rigorous application of scientific experimentation. This set of beliefs encourages a value-free research approach, or epistemology, which claims neutrality and is hypothesis driven (Madill et al., 2000; Cohen et al., 2018). This epistemology fits with the natural sciences which utilises large sample Random Control Trial's (RCT's). Results from this methodology are usually numerical in nature and statistically analysed to find generalised significance (Cohen et al., 2018; Salkind, 2014).

For education research, a qualitative approach is often preferred, however Goldacre (2013), was critical of research that didn't adhere to positivist principles and argued that knowledge should be accumulating, progressive and value-free. He claimed that much research in education is below standard as it doesn't use a positivist methodology. In an article in the Guardian education section, Smith (2013 no pp), stated that "Goldacre has suggested that education should embrace the Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT), favoured by the medical profession, in order to create an education system that is truly evidence-based".

However, within education research, this epistemological stance encountered wide debate (Styles and Torgerson, 2018). Critiques began by questioning the feasibility of employing RCT's within classroom contexts. Could the effects of education be quantified in the same manner as medical research? Is it possible to remove values entirely from the classroom environment?

Connolly et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive systematic review of RTC's in the educational research from 1980 to 2016. Their findings revealed an observable

increase in the use of this approach within educational research. However, these findings also spotlighted concerns regarding the generation of overly simplistic and descriptive data. While their findings did present supportive evidence for the viability of employing RTCs in educational settings, they also acknowledged that further work needs to be done to improve this approach. However, the debates that values cannot be wholly extracted from educational research continues.

Other researchers argue that it is neither possible or necessary to remove subjective values from research, and in fact they serve to enhance our knowledge, providing the insider-outsider perspectives are made clear and transparent (Cousin, 2013; Freeman and Sullivan, 2019; Van Manen, 2016; Trowler, 2016). An argument that illustrates this comes from both a liberal feminist and radical feminist framework which critiques the androcentric nature of 'science'. It is proposed that the male voice has dominated science and that the focus and explanation for the discoveries of reality are presented through a masculine lens rather than value free (Harding, 1986). Furthermore, Kuhn (1970) argues that quite often findings from positivist research need revising in the light of new discoveries. This leads into an overview of the ontological and epistemological justification for choosing a qualitative approach.

3.5 Ontology, Epistemology, and methodology.

In determining my position, subjective understandings require an acceptance that reality is socially constructed, meaning multiple realities coexist, depending on the context and perspective of the observer (Robson, 2002; Blaikie, 2007; Mason, 2018). This means I am choosing a constructivist paradigm, which relies on qualitative

approaches to research. This works with a relativist ontology and covers a broad range of epistemologies.

Epistemology is the theory of how we know things and how we acquire knowledge. It is therefore important when undertaking research, as how I might view this will influence how I analyse the data and make interpretations. Therefore, this work will draw upon a subjectivist epistemic perspective. The reliance on language as a way of understanding the world is significant for this research and corresponds to the idea that the participants will all have subjective understanding of the phenomena in question.

Having determined that the ontological position of the research is relativist within a contextual constructivist paradigm, with a subjectivist epistemology. Methodological decisions will be influenced by the interaction of these concepts. Therefore, the chosen methodology is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

The focus of the enquiry is on the lived experience of the participants. To capture rich data, IPA utilises dyadic interviews as its method for data collection. It is concerned with exploring individual subjective experience, noting the divergences and convergences of experience of the social world (Smith et al., 2022; Shaw, 2019)

This approach does not assume, as with the natural sciences, that findings provide an absolute truth and therefore findings are not generalisable. However, it is important to note that when utilising an IPA approach, the phenomena being explored needs to be a significant experience for all participants to help the findings of the research have homogeny. Homogeny can be used to describe the presence of consistency, sameness, or a shared quality among individuals. (Smith and Eatough, 2007)

Good IPA conveys something important about the individual participants as well as noting shared themes and differences (Smith et al., 2009; Nizza et al., 2021). Eatough and Shaw (2019 p 51) write that 'IPA seeks to retain the rich and personal detail of the particular whilst pointing to ways in which the particular illuminates (and is illuminated by) characteristics of the lifeworld that are common to us all'.

3.6 Methodological decisions

To make an informed decision regarding which qualitative approach to use I developed an understanding of other available approaches that give voice to participants whose experience is complex and multi-layered. I was able to argue for the use of an approach that satisfies the research curiosity. This was achieved by examining similar research in this field and the methodological choices made by other researchers.

I then interrogated the literature in related disciplines such as nursing, occupational therapy, and teaching. A more in-depth exploration of the theoretical paradigms regarding the nature of truth followed this due to the range of approaches discovered (Kvale, 1996; Bryman, 2016). IPA research resonated strongly with both the research intention and me as researcher with a background in psychology. Also, the approach connects to my world view as a social work educator.

What appealed was "IPA's explicit commitment to understanding phenomena of interest from a first-person perspective and its belief in the value of subjective knowledge for psychological understanding" (Eatough and Smith, 2017 p 193). I also felt that the approach complimented social work values and principles in that they attempt to centre and amplify the voice of those with lived experience which often includes marginalisation and disadvantaged groups. Therefore, choosing IPA to

centre the voice of students seemed appropriate. Although technically, social work students are not regarded as a disadvantaged group, there are implicit power imbalances created via their position as learners who are being assessed. IPA is also considered an empathic method (Shaw, 2019); this means as a researcher I do not take a critical stance regarding the reported lived experience of the participants.

3.7 Process of elimination

As stated above there are a broad range of methodologies in qualitative research; I had considered and rejected discourse analysis even though it is also an interpretative approach. Language is of interest in IPA, for example how people might employ metaphors or use repeated verbal ticks and use physical and emotional descriptors rather than the evolution of the language itself and the power dynamics that emerge from language use.

Discourse analysis evolved from linguistics and literary criticism. Analysts say language is meaningless until a mutually agreed meaning is created, and it is language that constructs our understanding of reality. Discourse analysis tracks the evolution of language and the impacts this has on culture, society, and individuals (Hanley, 2021; Starks and Trinidad, 2007; Hook, 2007; Gregory and Holloway, 2005). Although the data in this research is language, the focus is not how language itself is used to denote power structures, but the meaning ascribed to the phenomena and how the language describes it. IPA has been criticised for not paying attention to language (Tuffour, 2017) but this is rebuffed by Smith et al. (2009), who say that language is its main tool, including the use of language, metaphor, and expression. By looking at each case individually the language is explored in detail. However, by taking each case as a unique journey, IPA's idiographic approach resonates with a case study method.

The case study methodology was also rejected although it has a firm tradition in the history of social research. Like IPA, case study design is about the specific, not the general (Thomas, 2011). However, naming the case that would be scrutinised as social work education, then this is too broad an area, and if the case was to be the student themselves then only one or two students would be required to take part and be the case study (Creswell,1994; 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2012). This research is interested in the divergences and convergences of the placement experience of students from different HEIs, so a case study approach would not highlight this as the focus is on descriptive experience.

It could be argued that the research problem lends itself to a critical approach as the geo-political context is central to my motivation to research values; however, this research is not intended to challenge systems, but to use the findings to improve educational practices where appropriate. Phenomenology held an interest from my first degree in psychology.

Phenomenology has different methodologies available within its philosophical boundaries, but all have an overarching goal to explore the essence of lived experiences of the participants, whilst the researcher suspends their own preconceptions, using bracketing (or epochè), (Moustakas, 1994; Husserl,1913 cited in Trufford and Newman, 2010). It was felt that as an insider researcher, this might prove difficult, so pure phenomenology wouldn't work well for the remit. I came across IPA (Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2009; 2022; Eatough and Smith, 2006; Larkin et al., 2006) which immediately resonated with the research aims.

3.8 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): The chosen approach

IPA is a rapidly developing approach to qualitative inquiry in psychology and health related disciplines. Barbour (2014) noted that when she reviewed the literature most research that used IPA positioned itself within the discipline of psychology. Within recent years this approach has begun to appear in other social science disciplines but within the field of education there are still relatively few examples in the literature.

There is no a-priori reason why this approach can't be applied in education research therefore this research examining educational experiences for social work students will be championing the use of IPA in both education and social work disciplines. IPA, as part of its unique methodology, draws upon three main theories: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009; Groenewald, 2004). I will now explore what these philosophical theories mean.

Phenomenology

The first of the theoretical principles applied in IPA is phenomenology. The constructivist ontology was influenced by the underpinnings of Phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to understanding the experience of being human and a research method which studies experience in the lived world. It focuses on the way experiences are perceived subjectively (Shaw, 2019; Smith et al., 2022) There are three main theorists that are significant in the development of phenomenology from a historical perspective. Husserl (1859-1938), Heidegger (1889-1976), and Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). Husserl, the pioneer of phenomenology, called for the careful and systematic examination of the human experience by going back-to-the-thing-itself (Smith et al., 2009 p13). He believed that we are too quick to

assume an experience sits with our pre-existing ideas about the experience itself. He named this epochè, which describes the act of removing presuppositions.

So, when we examine an experience, we need to direct our interest away from the thing being experienced and towards our perception of the experience. In other words, our pre-existing assumptions about the thing must be set aside, if we are to really see the experience (Smith et al., 2009). Within IPA bracketing is encouraged during the first stage of data analysis and involves the researcher setting aside preconceptions and strongly held worldviews to understand the essence of the phenomena as experienced by the other.

Heidegger was a student of Husserl, and he fundamentally disagreed with the idea of bracketing. He proposes that the practice of meaning making, and understanding is dynamic and inter-subjectively grounded in the social world of interactions, so therefore it is not possible to bracket oneself. Heidegger is seen as the driving force in moving phenomenology away from the transcendental or descriptive and emphasising the hermeneutic, meaning making or interpretation (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). Whilst designing this research it became significant to me that I wanted to bracket off some of my preconceptions, but at the same time recognise my own strong values in the field. Van Manen (2016 p 354, italics own) agrees with this and offers Gadamer's argument that 'prejudices are not only unavoidable, but they are also necessary, as long as they (*researchers?)* are self-reflectively aware'.

Merleau-Ponty argued for a more contextualised or situated phenomenology by drawing upon how we are embodied in the world and in our situations and relationships. As Smith et al. (2022) explain, this means that we can experience empathy for another human, but we can't fully know their experience because of our

different embodied positions in the world. This resonates with how social workers might experience relationships and adds a layer of insight into the idea of embodiment.

 It is through this thinking that IPA pays attention to both physical feelings and emotions, when described in the data. For example, Ratcliffe, (2023) discusses the phenomenology of grief and the feeling obtained through the body in the form of pain, which help to illustrate the importance of this for many IPA studies. This research pays attention to the emotions and feelings of each participant, recognising the significance of everyone's experience to the research findings, which again, mirrors good social work practice.

Hermeneutics

As above Heidegger is seen as promoting a hermeneutic approach within phenomenology. Hermeneutics is a philosophical and methodological approach that focuses on the interpretation and understanding of texts, symbols, and other forms of communication, particularly those that involve human expressions of meaning. It encourages researchers to approach texts and expressions through a critical yet empathetic lens, aiming to uncover layers of meaning and fostering a deeper understanding of human communication. IPA focuses on three leading voices in the field of hermeneutics, Heidegger, Ricoeur (1913-2005) and Gadamer (1900-2002).

Heidegger argues for a hermeneutic phenomenology, believing that experience comes via interpretation. He proposes the idea that things can have hidden meanings, which overlaps with the work of Ricoeur who proposes a need for hermeneutic suspicion (Scott-Baumann, 2009). These ideas, although promoting scepticism, also consider that as humans we might apply self-deception when sharing our experiences

and how we feel, they see the idea of suspicion as a tool to seek deeper implications, to help unmask hidden meanings.

This leans into the ideas of Gadamer who proposes the term horizons of understanding to mean "Understanding happens when our present understanding or horizon is moved to a new understanding or horizon by an encounter. Thus, the process of understanding is a 'fusion of horizons', the old and the new horizon combining into something of living value." (Clark, 2008 p 59). This idea should help lead to a better co-constructed understanding of an experience or issue.

Hermeneutic researchers co-interpret findings via the hermeneutic cycle as described by Smith et al. (2022) they try to make meaning out of the participants trying-to-make-meaning from their experience. In IPA this is referred to as a double hermeneutic. This can be abstracted one step further becoming a triple hermeneutic when the research is written up and a reader tries to make meaning from the researcher making meaning from the participants' meaning making (Smith et al., 2009)

Hermeneutic circle is central to the analysis of data in IPA. As discussed above the interpretation begins by looking at one transcript of a participant's narrative. This needs to be recursive to foreground new meanings and understandings that will eventually provide the personal experiential themes. This is called an idiographic approach (Smith et al., 2022)

Ideography

IPA is an idiographic approach and celebrates this as one of IPA's main differences from other qualitative methodologies. Ideography is the in-depth analysis of a single case, focusing on the particular and not the general. Ideography eschews the nomothetic domain; the nomothetic domain refers to research and knowledge where

general laws and principles are established based on the identification of common patterns across multiple cases. It doesn't make claims regarding groups and populations, but it doesn't disregard making generalisations offered as localised and with caution (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA starts by looking at and understanding the meaning of a phenomena to a specific individual, locating individuals in their unique contexts, then moves to look at other individuals with the same specific focus and detail, gathering and analysing unique perspectives. Because of this detailed iteration, it is considered a rigorous method (Evans et al., 2023). This aspect of IPA is of importance to my research, as social work celebrates the individual and pays attention to each case uniquely.

3.9 Validity of the qualitative paradigm

Criticisms of qualitative research argue that this approach lacks validity and reliability, which are key concepts used to back up findings in quantitative research. For example, the inclusion of a control group in experimental research is to prove the validity of the hypothesis being tested and measured (Bryman, 2016; Malay and Chung, 2013). The failure to confirm this in qualitative research have led to doubts that its findings have anything concrete to offer because '...accounts of the social are fallible and subject to constant revision.' (Dunne et al., 2005, p 87).

Smith et al. (2009) propose that although validity and reliability are important considerations, qualitative research should not be evaluated according to quantitative measures. Denzin and Lincoln (2012), attempted to address this criticism by developing a model for authentication and trustworthiness in qualitative research. It is of note then when planning this IPA research, the 'Truth Value' of this model called

Authenticity, is obtained from the lived experience as described by the participants and is subject orientated to offer credibility (Krefting, 1990, p 215).

This research adheres to the ideas of 'verstehen' which was introduced by Weber and Dilthey in support of an empathetic insider in qualitative research (Platt, 1985 p 457). To develop 'verstehen' this research will be informed by the theoretical framework of interpretivism (Hennink et al. 2011 p 17). This concept also endorses the interpretation and understanding of social phenomena through narrative participation with another within their cultural and social context, to capture subjective meanings, both hidden and on the surface. (Shaw 2019; Elwell, 2013; Scott-Baumann, 2009).

We are products of our professional and disciplinary socialisation which contributes to our worldview as noted by Barbour (2014). The use of positionality statement in qualitative research helps to not only highlight perspectives and potential biases, but it also helps readers to understand how interpretations might have been arrived at.

As it is accepted that values play a part in the selection of research methodologies, then the choice of IPA is justified on all the above grounds, it matches the research problem. Plus, I consider this approach mirrors some of the person-centred approaches central to good social work practice.

The next section will focus on conducting the research process.

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3.9 Methodology

3.9.1 Literature review methodology.

A systematic narrative review identified current knowledge related to the research questions. It focuses on key academic voices in the field using a purposive search. This supports brevity and offers a concise overview of the research interest (Aveyard et al., 2016). This approach complies with EdD guidelines regarding precision of writing. However, critiques of this approach include concerns of early saturation and potential bias, therefore the discussion chapter brings in additional literature related to the findings chapter. It has been noted that the extensive range of literature currently available, coupled with the use of over 35 terms to describe review methods, can cause literature review confusion (Aveyard and Bradbury-Jones, 2019)

Articles, catalogues, e book central and electronic data bases by subject such as EBSCO were included in the search process. I received weekly email alerts when articles appeared in the LHU library and from Academia.edu. I also browsed social work toolkit for up-to-date information that might relate to this research. https://www.socialworktoolkit.com/

The focus was on peer reviewed papers, articles, books, and grey literature that present from a majority European based perspective. I included examples of research conducted in North America, Canada, and Asia and Africa. I made efforts to hold an awareness of the decolonisation of knowledge in the academy whilst selecting authors of relevant papers. However, as this research itself took place in the Northwest of England, there are regional differences regarding education, approaches to practice, governing bodies, powers, and duties, so seeking out majority UK based work was

appropriate for this thesis. I have therefore included UK guidance documents, government whiter papers and some limited media reports.

The use of optimal and consistent search terms and key words was employed to ensure a systematic and focused inclusion and exclusion criteria. I also followed cited references and bibliographies from key voices in the field to further refine my search. This approach proved more productive in generating relevant papers.

I have chosen to exclude work that explores the impact of Covid -19 on social work education and social work practice as the interviews conducted for this research pre-date the pandemic.

The search mainly focuses on literature and research generated from 2010 to 2022. I included some more historical work where appropriate, such as when exploring the history of professionalism and its influence on the more recent history of social work values. After my data analysis was completed, as is the norm with the IPA approach, I returned to the literature to explore some of the key group experiential themes which added a new depth to the review. This brought the literature up to 2023-4.

I initially chose to include literature relating to the profession from the time the qualifying route changed from a diploma in higher education to a degree in 2002, however for the scope of an EdD I further refined this to 2010. The rationale for this restricted timeline is that the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) was introduced by the Social Work Reform Board in 2010. This capabilities model was introduced as a response to the Social Work Task Forces 2009. There seems to be some stability and continuity with the PCFs at the point of writing. However, Social Work England (SWE) is in the process of a consultation regarding the usefulness of the PCFs with a view to publishing their results in 2024.

Key search words and phrases: **Social Work Values, Social Work Education, Practice Educator, Social Work Practice, Practice Placements, Fieldwork, Student motivation, Moral and Ethical Practice, Social Justice, Classroom**.

3.9.2 Pilot Study

A pilot study was carried out prior to conducting the research. This pilot was designed to test out the interview questions. I opted to test these as elite interviews and contacted significant members of social work governing body BASW. Through carrying out two interviews with 'elite' members and from their feedback I was able to critically reflect on what went well and what wasn't as satisfactory. I adjusted the questions to reduce complexity, thus streamlining my part in the 'conversation' (See appendix A). The interview questions became more reflective and open (Ryan et al., 2013; Dodd et al., 2012; Roulston, 2010). I was now ready to recruit participants.

3.9.3 Research Participants

Purposive sampling was used for the selection of participants although caution is advised about using scientific terms such as 'sample,' as it presupposes seeking the empirically generalisable which is not the aim in IPA (Van Manen, 2016). This approach selects participants based on a feature that is significant for the study rather than through probability methods (Ritchie et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2009). IPA research advises that a homogenous group of participants is helpful as exploring a specific phenomenon will require that the participants have all experienced that phenomena, and that it has personal relevance. In other words, IPA requires participants to be knowledgeable about the phenomena (Cohen et al., 2018).

In this study I invited final year social work students gaining their master's in social work via different HEIs in the North West of England. There were practical and logistical elements to the decision making. Firstly, the proposal had specified researching both pre- and post-qualifying social workers, however this changed as the research developed. Accessing participants was more difficult than anticipated plus the time constraints on both the researcher and the timescales to complete meant that all participants were still on placement, a more accessible group.

Because IPA takes an idiographic approach, a small sample size is adequate. The clinical psychology doctoral programme in the UK suggests that six to eight participants give enough scope to examine similarities and differences (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). According to Heffron et al. (2011) for professional doctorates, between four to ten data points is adequate, suggesting that in IPA less is more. Noon (2018 p 76) provides the following advice:

> Clarke (2010) stipulated that three is the default sample size for
> undergraduate or Masters-level IPA study, whereas 4-10 is advised for
> professional doctorates.

This is because the data analysis is a time-consuming idiographic approach. Larger sample sizes often inhibit core components of IPA analysis, such as dedicated time to reflect upon and interpret the data. Smith (2009) encourages the single case IPA in some instances, but also advises that making the sample as uniform as possible gives scope to analyse the convergences and divergences of the group in more detail.

As this is educational based research rather than psychological, and due to the limited IPA research in this field the researcher opted for five participants to adequately address the aim to achieve depth rather than breadth (Hennink et al., 2011). Two

males and three females were chosen from a range of 10 completed interviews: 11 students volunteered to take part in total, but one withdrew before they were interviewed. The criteria for choosing which interviews were included in the final analysis was to ensure a range of voices and settings were included, but also to remain homogenous, all five MA interviews were chosen, with participants attending different HEIs. The sample has limited diversity, but future studies could explore a similar topic with diverse groups such as mature students or Black and Global Majority students. Further studies such as this would ensure that generalisations could become more possible over time (Smith et al., 1995).

3.9.4 Recruitment

I emailed the Heads of Department (or Subject Leads) to authorise my request and to send out to programme leads who would then promote to students. My research information sheets, and consent forms were then circulated. Responses came directly to me via email and participants were then selected based on mutual availability.

Figure 2. Participants information

Pseudonym	Age range	Gender	Institution	Placement setting
Jim,	40-45	Male	A MA	Adult Mental Health (NHS)
Joy,	26-29	Female	B MA	Children /Families (LA)
Ash,	40-45	Male	C MA	Fostering Agency/LA
Jen,	21-25	Female	D MA	Children /Families (LA)
Sue,	23-28	Female	C MA	Children /Families (LA)

3.9.5 Collecting Data

IPA nearly always uses in depth semi-structured or unstructured one to one interviews and occasionally other instruments are used such as focus group discussion, diaries, and chat dialogues (Farr et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2009; Larkin et al., 2006). In a review of longitudinal IPA studies, Farr and Nizza (2019) looked at 66 published articles and found, using an extensive search on three databases that interviews were the main data gathering method in 90% of articles reviewed.

IPA gathers data from participants that describes their lived experience in depth. Developing the skill to do this without directing or suggesting description, but encouraging open discussion, including thoughts and feelings regarding the phenomena under investigation is essential (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). As a social worker who is also trained in counselling, I found that these skills mirrored some of the person-centred counselling approaches (Tolan, 2017; Dryden, 1995)

The semi-structured interview is considered collaborative or co-produced, with the participant leading the talk, but it isn't considered natural occurring talk which yields the purest form of data (Silverman, 2010). This research had a pre-identified focus and therefore some structure was required to gather relevant data. In designing the interview schedule, it was important to consider the IPA methodology carefully as the need to gather in depth details meant that the interview questions fitted the approach.

An interview schedule containing open-ended, non-directive questions and some brief prompts were produced prior to the interviews (See Appendix A). Smith and Osborn (2008) noted that formulating a schedule will lead IPA researchers to explicitly consider what direction they want the interview to take and enable them to identify any

potential difficulties in terms of wording, pace, and sensitive topics. As stated above the pilot was used to test the questions, but also it supported the development of interview skills. The skills required for an in-depth IPA interview were easily developed such as active listening, the use of open questions, working with silence and an awareness of non-verbal communication.

Like all other interview-based methods there is the need for the researcher to set aside their own preconceptions to mitigate for their own biases during the interview and interpretation stages. This idea, previously called bracketing, is not without its tensions. Debates span back to Husserl's introduction of the concept as a method to see the world as new, which he called epoche, and Heidegger's argument that phenomenological reduction, or bracketing ourselves is not possible. However, some theorists have recently attempted to integrate the ideas of both and call for a setting aside but not an abandoning of our preconceptions (Alase, 2017; Moustakas, 1994).

Each Interview was designed to last around 45-60 minutes in line with IPA guidelines (Smith et al., 2009). The participants were given the choice of where they would prefer the interview to take place. The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of each participant. Five open-ended questions relating to the phenomena being explored were asked. However, all participants were informed that the questions acted as a guide only and that they could take the lead on the direction of the interview, to be as natural and un-prescriptive as possible.

3.9.6 Ethical Considerations

BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) seeks to ensure that researchers are responsible for all aspects of their research from their participants, the educational research community, publication, and dissemination of findings. Ethical guidelines apply to all research in all disciplines. These guides were introduced after a health-based research study carried out by Tuskegee in the 1930's in the USA, covertly followed African Americans infected with syphilis (Schutt, 2006). Formal protective procedures for human subjects were developed due to the preventable deaths of between 28-100 men and the moral outrage caused by this violation. In the US the Belmont Report (United States Department of Health Education and Welfare, 1979) was designed in response to concerns that much research relied on the integrity of individual researchers alone. Basic protections were included in this report based on Western ethical and philosophical principles which now appear in most ethical codes of conduct for research including BERA (2018).

I abide by BERA guidelines throughout the study but also as a registrant with Social Work England (SWE) I am obliged to act within the SWE, professional standards for social workers (2023). These professional standards encode the values of the profession, but as a registrant these codes, ethics, and values apply regardless of where the practice is situated, to maintain personal and professional integrity (Costley and Fulton, 2019). The focus of ethical procedures in research is the protection of both the participants and researcher from physical and psychological harm.

I completed an ethics proposal which was reviewed by an ethics board at the university supervising the research. After three rounds of corrections, start-up approval was granted. However as pointed out by Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009 p 53) 'Ethical

research practice is a dynamic process which needs to be monitored throughout data collection and analysis...' via sustained epistemological reflexivity. Approval also included the information sheet that was given to inform newly recruited participants about the research. The informed consent form, which outlined all practices in line with data protection, confidentiality and anonymity was also approved.

3.9.7 Informed Consent

The BERA guidelines hold paramount the protection of research participants, and that educational researchers operate within the ethic of respect for any person involved in the research being undertaken. Participants should be treated with dignity and sensitivity and free from prejudice regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, class, cultural identity, partnership status and sexuality, faith, disability, and any other significant protected characteristic (Equalities Act, 2010) and respect for autonomy as directed by the Belmont Report (1979). A key attribute of respect for autonomy is informed consent.

An approved information sheet was made available to all individuals who volunteered to take part in the research. This gave an honest account of the research goals and what would be expected of the participants in advance. The sheet required a signature, I was aware of literacy issues but as all participants were undertaking professional educational, this was not a concern. However, the language used in the information sheet was clear, precise and jargon free (Appendix B).

The right to withdraw is also central to informed consent. There should be no coercion and if participants are involved in research that engages them more than once then multi-stage consent should be applied. BERA (2018 p 9) states that 'It is normally

expected that participants' voluntary informed consent to be involved in a study will be obtained at the start of the study, and that researchers will remain sensitive and open to the possibility that participants may wish, for any reason and at any time, to withdraw their consent.'

In addition, there should be no attempt to persuade individuals to continue to participate, and if a participant would like to withdraw this should be accepted without question. The right to withdraw without prejudice or duress was made clear in the consent forms. These signed forms were stored separately from the research data and are available for scrutiny if required.

3.9.8 Privacy and anonymity

Smith et al. (2009) note that in IPA confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as this implies no one else will see or hear the data gathered at interview. Also, as with most qualitative research, IPA uses verbatim extracts in publications, so the word anonymity is preferred. Anonymity will be maintained throughout the research process. Participants were informed that they would be given a pseudonym to anonymise their data.

A pseudonym rather than a code number is encouraged in IPA as the participants humanity is to be celebrated. They were also informed that their HEI would not be named, and any identifiable names of people or places would not be presented in the thesis. Participants were made aware that approval to carry out the research was granted by an ethics committee and that the GDPR/Data Protection Act (2018) would be complied with when storing personal data. Interviews were recorded digitally and

stored on a fingerprint protected laptop. The laptop was stored in the home-office of the researcher.

The identity of the interviewee was not made explicit in the interviews, which were labelled by their pseudonyms. The recordings will be destroyed at the end of the research in line with legislation and duty. The transcribed data will be kept for future work and publications for as long as necessary (GDPR/Data Protection Act, 2018).

3.9.9 Critical reflections on ethics

There have been debates in research communities, that argue that the bureaucratisation of the ethics approval procedures are damaging researcher freedom and creativity. Haggarty (2004, p 391) first proposed the notion of 'Ethics Creep' to describe the micro-management of research projects by larger institutions in the form of the university research ethics committee and put forward the argument that increasing regulation wasn't increasing ethical behaviour but was encouraging compliance with rules.

Other research papers have contributed to this debate, with evidence that the ESRC's 2010 Framework for research ethics is not fit for purpose (Stanley and Wise, 2010); that there are contradictions of expectations made by institutional review boards that complicate ethical approval (Guta et al., 2013). The whole process can be emotionally damaging for individual researchers (Monaghan et al., 2013). However, I felt that the level of scrutiny by the ethics team and my supervisors was appropriate to the work being undertaken.

3.9.10 Data Analysis

IPA has been criticised by researchers who utilise thematic analysis as they perceived the IPA approach as inflexible and overly structured (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is argued that this is not the case (Smith et al., 2009) and advocates for flexibility, but he does note that IPA goes beyond standard thematic analysis because it is idiographic and includes the analysis of the researcher which is its essence.

IPA has a set of common processes and principles which are applied to the analytic task for creating an in-depth understanding of individual experience and guidelines support quality coding and analysis at each stage of the hermeneutic circle. This process is referred to as iterative and inductive (Ibid.). It is considered time consuming but inspiring as the researcher moves between emic and etic perspectives, developing a hermeneutic 'fusion of horizons' (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014; Gadamer, 1991). I kept journals throughout the process, including the process of writing up the work which supports the interpretation process and feeds into the hermeneutic circle. The diagram below shows the steps required for IPA data analysis. It is important to note that the analysis continues throughout the write up stage.

Ideographic approach

Map of analysis journey

| Interview | → | Transcript | → | Create IPA pro-forma | → | Populate |

Double hermeneutic

| First read colour code for:
• facts
• emotions
• language | Explanatory notes in right hand column | Experiential statement notes | Formulations PETS |

Phenomenology

Abstracting

| Back up quote selection | Notes on language, etc (additional) | Analysis of PETS | Cross-care analysis of PETS and interpretation |

| First pass read themes | Name the Group Experiential Themes (GETS) | Table of supporting quotes | Write findings chapter, analysis continues |

Convergence Divergence

Theories

Concept: Blundell; Design: Cosslett 2024

Figure 3: Data analysis flowchart based on Smith et al. (2022)

Smith (2011, p 6) proposes that it is the task of the researcher to 'dive for pearls' when analysing transcripts. He refers to these 'gems' as '…a relatively rare utterance that is especially resonant...' The research will be applying this concept and paying attention to Smiths spectrum of gems from a hermeneutic, phenomenological perspective. A gem may not appear in every study or every transcript, but it is the thing than can have an impact on the work or can turn it in an unexpected direction, add depth and help it to shine. He proposes that the spectrum includes 'shining' 'suggestive' and 'secret'

utterances, where the meaning being made is obvious, is hinted at or is easy to miss. This work revealed 2 Gems, discussed in the findings chapter.

3.9.11 Presentation of findings

I used colour coding on each individual transcript to denote 'facts', 'cognitions' and 'emotions'. This matches the remit of IPA that suggests exploring the descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual (Smith et al., 2009). I made notes of exploratory comments, experiential statements alongside the colour coding. I made notes on emerging themes and significant statements called personal experiential themes (PETs). I returned to the transcript many times and continued to make notes prior to moving onto the next transcript. (See Appendix C)

Cross case analysis involved working with the PETs and clustering themes into Group Experiential Themes (GETs). I did this by writing in large sketch pads and cutting out statements to re-arrange until they resonated as themes (see Appendices D and E).

3.9.12 Limitations

As IPA relies on conversations, there are some criticisms regarding the limitations and exclusivity of the approach. Willig (2013) argues that to analyse talk, the participants will need to be able to articulate well. This immediately excludes people who struggle to communicate using language; it excludes people who are less articulate and may favour the more articulate and therefore limit the range of experience explored. As communication is a key skill in social work it was of no surprise that the participants

used in this research, were able to articulate complex thoughts and feelings well (Koprowska, 2010).

Tuffour (2017 p 4) proposed that IPA was becoming increasingly prevalent in qualitative research outside of health psychology. He carried out a systematic literature review and concluded that IPA provides rich and nuanced insights into experience but that the methodology has had four main conceptual and practical limitations identified; the following two are noted for this research.

1. It is questioned whether IPA is capturing the meaning of experience or just 'opinions' of the experience.

2. It has been observed that IPA relies on articulate and skilled communication from both the researcher and the participant, which some have denounced as elitist.

To combat these issues, this work paid detailed attention to the use of language, it paid attention to meanings and opinions, emotions, gaps, and what was being hinted at. Participants were not recruited based on their communication skills. although there is an assumption that people studying at master's degree level will have good communication skills.

In favour of this approach Noon (2018 no pp) states that:

Having reflected upon my use of IPA, I hold that it has the potential to be a powerful tool in helping researchers to understand the lived experiences of those within the education system. Through appreciating said experiences, it is possible that the findings of IPA studies can contribute to assisting educationalists in shaping future policy and practice around the needs and expectations of both students and educators.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the decision-making processes employed in this inquiry have been described. This encompasses the research design, which also explains underlying philosophical motivations. The chapter further explains the rationale a qualitative paradigm and subsequently selecting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the methodology.

The second part of the chapter covers all the salient points in carrying out the research from recruitment of participants, the procedures for conducting interviews, the process of coding the individual testimonies, and the reinforcement of a transparent and trustworthy analysis. These decisions were all motivated by a dedication to upholding ethical procedures within both the university and the wider framework of IPA. The chapter concludes with an overview of some of the limitations of IPA. The following chapter will present the findings. This chapter is considered the most significant in IPA and therefore is often the longest chapter.

Chapter 4. Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses solely on the participants utterances and the hermeneutic interpretations of the researcher. As is the convention of IPA, this chapter is the most important in the thesis. as it clearly shows the fusion of horizons, and the double hermeneutic, which means that as the participant is making sense of their experience, the researcher is also making sense of the data (Gadamer, 1996). This means the chapter presents substantial extracts from the transcripts in support of the themes (Smith et al., 2009; 2022; Alase, 2017). This is different from other qualitative findings chapters as it doesn't engage with theory and literature. This will be revisited in the discussion chapter.

A table illustrating the findings in brief with direct quotes to support this thematic conceptualisation is presented in appendix E. The findings and analysis are given a respectful idiographic depth to celebrate the participants voice in each group experiential theme. Their personal narratives or the phenomenality of their human experience are central to this research (Van Manen, 2016). A unique merit of IPA, and an example of excellence. is that the findings can be presented as a '…compelling unfolding narrative' (Nizza et al., 2021 p 369). These findings follow a narrative arc that ends positively. It knits together the motivations for a career in social work, the educational experiences, the practice learning experiences and the participants commitment to their aspirations, even when some of the above experiences were not positive.

4.2 Connecting past to present

The Group Experiential Theme of connecting past to present was obtained through the cross-case analysis of responses to the opening question on the interview schedule and as such this aligns to the chronology of all the conversations that occurred.

When exploring what influences participants to train as social workers it is not unusual that past experiences will play a part. Participants described how childhood experiences both positive and negative, family relationships, influential role models or lack of role models contributed to their desire to train as social workers. Some participants described how work experience (in similar or very different settings) had formed part of their motivation. These external influences were significant in shaping their decisions, leading participants to apply to social work master's degree programmes. Participants reported that this was considered a meaningful life event.

The theme has been broken down into two sub-themes, the emotional intensity and existential sense making is more apparent in 1.a. Within sub theme 1.b participants report of their experiences in a more practical and focused way. However, whilst discussing the presenting practical utterances in more depth, there were other significant personal experiences revealed.

4.2.1 Experience from childhood and family

The level of sense making around childhood and family influences was notably different for all participants. The interview with Ash took the longest out of the group and he tended to focus more on his recollections of a troubled working-class childhood which he believes led to a turbulent and criminal youth. I was able to hold space for

his deep explorations by assuming a person-centred approach during the interview, which is helpful in providing trauma-sensitive spaces (Joseph, 2017; Mersky, 2019). His conversation was open, thoughtful, rich, and deep and because of this Ash's transcript was the first one chosen for the idiographic hermeneutic cycle; It also took the most iterations to work through in terms of discovering personal experiential themes and analysis.

Ash touched on themes going back to his own abusive childhood and subsequent "chaotic turn" his early adulthood took. He discussed his experience of addiction and the criminal justice system. He was able to express how he made sense of his experience in some depth, and I draw upon his voice to tell his story of why he chose social work.

> **Ash:** "...my own childhood experiences relating to, there was abuse
> when I was younger, there was also, my dad had left which had a
> significant effect on my life and my blueprint for life was all distorted
> from a young age"

Ash refers to trauma as a motivating factor. He feels that the trauma he experienced and then the subsequent behaviours he exhibited in his youth gave him insights into social and psychological problems that he might not have gained otherwise; insights through lived experience that provide a powerful understanding of certain issues relevant to social work practice. His use of the term 'blueprint' is a useful metaphor for his life model. Ash feels his life model was distorted and that he didn't have appropriate guidance.

He discussed his young adult years with an openness that deserved attention and time.

> **Ash:** "My life took a chaotic turn, where I went to addiction for many years".

In making sense of his addictions, he connects his past to present in an articulate and thoughtful way and he sees the consequences of his 'poor' decisions as being partly a result of his trauma's which he calls a "distorted blueprint".

> **Ash:** "It didn't have to be that way, so fast forward kind of to the age of 30, when my life was virtually destroyed and everything fell apart, I knew when I had (a) sort of awakening".

Ash explains that his awakening was the first significant step to making life-long changes. Ash entered rehabilitation at this point. Ash also expresses a regretful concern for these events, although recognising they were out of his control to some extent, it could have gone a different way if there had been support available to him and his family. Here Ash is clearly making links to his aspiration of wanting to make a difference for others and to provide that support that he had lacked.

> **Ash:** "I had this realisation now, you know, my life could have been a lot different if there would have been a little bit more intervention or a little bit more support for me, maybe it wouldn't have, maybe it would have, I don't know but that was the driving force that led me into social work"

Although Ash was able to express his personal truth, he is clearly 'driven' to become a social worker and he experiences this as a force. He was also able to make connections to systemic oppressions that impacted on him and his family's life at the time. He was able to relate how structural issues had played a part. He didn't feel that

the personal shame of his family's 'poverty' was justified and that the 'Thatcher government 'was to blame.

> **Ash**: "...although I love my mum to bits, she did the best she can, she was a single parent at the time, through the Thatcher years, so we were literally poor, impoverished".

The warmth that Ash radiates for his Mum is expressed in the use of the present tense implying that love continues but he uses the past tense regarding the struggles which appear to have left a traumatic legacy. There is a clear separation from past to present in terms of how he sees himself in the here and now. Later in the interview he uses terms such as 'recovery' to show this separation from past to present but forefronts his connections to the past as key motivators. He wants me to understand that he knows what it is to be poor, by emphasising this concept with the word 'literally' and then adding the word 'impoverished'. Throughout the interview Ash identifies as working class and very open and proud about this. This is a core self-concept developed from his subjective reality.

Ash also disclosed, in passing, that he had family members that were social workers. So, his family and personal experience sent Ash on a journey of self-discovery which he explains is what has led him to want to 'be of service to others'.

> **Ash:** "I live by the Twelve Steps now but I've also been to (redacted) for two weeks on an inner child kind of workshop…. which was really intense, so my life is about discovering who I am at the moment and trying to hopefully be of service to others and help others, you know what I mean?"

Unlike Ash, Joy doesn't discuss her family of origin, she mentions that after graduating from her first degree she had to move back in with her parents aged 21, which she

describes as 'disheartening' along with her struggles to secure employment. She mostly refers to friends as positive influences.

Joy mentions that at the time she made the decision to go into social work her then partner was a social worker. She expresses how his support, and the encouragement of others motivated her to apply for a programme.

> **Joy:** "… I think I just seemed to be meeting people all along the way that all seemed to be social workers, it was like someone was holding a flashing sign up to me, like just go and do it!"

The imagery of the flashing sign denotes a form of magical thinking, this implies that the motivation came from outside of herself. That others were encouraging her to make the decision.

Joy also mentions that the people she met through work had influenced her decision to apply for social work programmes. It feels that Joy doesn't want to elaborate further on her 'families' sphere of influence. Although brief, it is important to acknowledge this.

Jen doesn't make a family connection to her own motivations until much later in the interview. She discloses that her Mum was adopted as a child and now works supporting other adoptees. She makes the connections with this and her own choice to study social work later.

Similarly, Joy is keen to move away from family influences to discuss more practical motivations such as money, something that neither Ash nor Jen refer to at all as motivations. However, Joy doesn't discuss money in terms of career finances, but in terms of how she could survive financially during a two-year master's degree, which I have included below.

Sue and Jim diverge from discussing the influence of family and friends and take a more practical approach initially, however all participants describe what I am calling 'hidden passions' at some point during their interviews.

4.2.2 Practical experience and hidden passions for 'social worky roles'

Making a big life decision regarding a career change was topical with most participants. It was interesting how some explained this in quite practical and matter of fact terms, considering what a consequential decision it is.

Sue began the conversation by considering practical aspects of wanting to become a social worker, she talked about being settled in the Northwest and not wanting to be office based anymore. She applied to two programmes and then, when she was offered places on both, she found that she moved away from the practical aspects of merely getting onto a programme, accepting an offer based on her perceptions of the HEI's commitment to social justice. This led to an in-depth exploration of her experience of "values in action" on her final placement which is explored in a later section below.

Sue talked about how she felt she had developed a range of transferable skills from having had diverse experiences including international travel. However, it was her job as an administrator in a local authority that inspired her to change careers.

> **Sue:** "So I guess what motivated me was probably from my experience
>
> of working in a local authority doing the minute taking for child
>
> protection conferences and reviews…"

It was in this role that Sue observed social workers in the field and felt that she had the strengths and skills to do the job. Her previous work gave her a rich and diverse knowledge base that contributed to her strengths and personal attributes that matched the role of social worker. The fact that Sue had some experience of what Joy calls 'social worky roles' acted as a catalyst for applying to social work programmes. She also began to explore the idea of change a little deeper:

> **Sue:** "...I felt like I wanted to challenge myself more in a way that I was working more directly and building relationships with people, rather than being office based."

This revelation prompted Sue to reflect on how she would like to do something that would challenge her but would also be "rewarding" and might have a wider beneficial impact. When prompted with the query from me as researcher **"Yes, so beneficial for….?"** she revealed her 'hidden passions.' She became more enthusiastic and replied definitively.

> **Sue:** "Oh beneficial in terms of society and working with people…"

This is something we came back to when discussing her placement, as it became clear that Sue had a developed understanding and commitment to the value of social justice in terms of equality.

Sue returned to practicalities when asked further about her decisions, she began to explore why she had chosen the specific route and programme. She made sense of her decision-making process as she discussed the Step-up programme, which she rejected. She didn't want to limit herself to just children's work. She was drawn to the versatility of the generic master's route and to her HEI because during the interview process the focus on social justice was apparent.

Consistent with both the practical and emotional themes, Jen shared that she felt her job lacked passion and it was through volunteering with a charitable helpline that she felt the biggest motivation. She saw the decision to go into social work initially as a practical one but then included more emotional reasons.

> **Jen:** "It wasn't a set thing. My previous job, it was kind of an analytical office job, and it was something I'm quite good at, but it just wasn't fulfilling..."

Jen felt that she was analytical and practical in her decision making, she describes herself as "practical minded" but some of her language choices and expressions in her conversation are quite emotional. She started the conversation minimising her language, and needing encouragement to explore, but later she revealed a passion for social work and a commitment to values in practice. Jen makes links to her motivation with ideas of "passion" and "fulfilment" although she was quick to minimise this by adding a reductive phrase such as "simple as that":

> **Jen:** "I originally picked my work based on what was easy and what I could do and I realised it's just not, so through like voluntary experience I realised that's what I've got a kind of more passion for, and it's as simple as that really".

Her perceptions here reveal she is more emotionally committed and dedicated to becoming a social worker, but she soon navigated the conversation back to practicalities such as money and savings. It's as though there is a tension here between economic motivators and identity related goals. She wants to be seen as sensible/practical and she wants to keep her passions hidden. Conforming to expected standards before the conversation warms up and we develop a rapport.

Jen: " … I'd kind of achieved everything I wanted to achieve in the job I was at, financially as well, Like, I had some savings, I luckily hadn't had to work much during the course and that was quite important to me because I knew, if I wanted to do it, I wanted to be able to focus fully on it…I'm quite practically minded, it was just, kind of a practical decision…"

Jim describes his previous working experiences as being a key motivator like Sue and Jen. He completed an undergraduate degree in a related field and worked in care settings since graduating, however over time he noticed he was developing a respect for the "variety" of the social work perspective. He realised through working in disability services that the broader picture was more important than just the psychological.

Jim, as an older participant with a lot of previous experience, carries an air of confidence and certainty. It is as though he already has a sense of belonging to the profession. He often diverges from within the themes, and he can appear as if his professional identity is already fully formed. He does inform me at the start of the interview that he is only four weeks from "boxing off" his placement and portfolio. Drawing on this confidence he describes how he originally wanted to pursue a career in clinical services. His experience working towards that goal in hospital settings became his turning point where he mysteriously notes that "I just felt it wasn't really happening for me at that time".

Jim: "...my previous experience working in various settings and working with that client group (disabilities), I felt that, you know, social work was more me really, a bit broader, a bit more looking at more of the, not just

say the psychological aspects of someone but the sociological impact,

can have on people's mental health and well-being"

He reflects on his various experiences working with adult mental health in hospitals and working with people who have learning disabilities. From this experience he noted the dominance of the medical model. He felt that social work would bring all his previous knowledge and experiences together in a more wholistic way.

Similarly, Joy had completed a degree in social science, but then on completion couldn't get a job in her field. She felt that the sphere of influence from her initial education pushed her into looking at specific jobs and settings. She explained that she fell into Private Voluntary independent (PVI) charity work by chance which had links to her first degree. Her motivator at the time was employment. She notes that whilst doing her first degree she didn't know what she wanted to do as a career, even though she states:

> **Joy:** "…I kept thinking I wanted to be a "redacted" worker, which they
>
> seemed to drum into me on that course".

So, this initial chosen career choice didn't resonate with her, and it felt that it was forced or drummed into her. There is suggestion of oppositionality here, almost wilfully rejecting what she perceived as being 'drummed-in'. She didn't follow this 'forced' path, but she did move into a similar setting.

She got a job with "…a partner agency working with the youth offending team", which she shares:

> **Joy:** "I nearly didn't apply for 'cause I thought, there's no way I'm working with
>
> teenagers, especially young offenders, 'cause that's terrifying, but I was really

struggling, couldn't find a job at all for the best part of a year after I graduated."

Joy openly discloses how she held some strong assumptions regarding this group of service users. Her feelings of 'terror' could be based on internalised ideas about youth crime. Also, as a woman, she might have assumptions about violence. She seems almost defiant in her approach again; however, she is also emphasising her desperation after not finding work for so long. Her cognitive dissonance regarding the client group was resolved when she got the job and loved it. However, the pay was low, and the job was insecure, due to the annual funding process, which she describes as stressful.

> **Joy:** "...so every 12 months there was the whole rigmarole of whether you were going to lose your job or not, the pay wasn't great, and you were doing a lot of 'social worky' roles…"

Joy uses the phrase 'social worky' to describe her role and there feels to be some resentment in the whole system, for example, the low pay compared to the work expectations in the role might seem unfair. That she was already doing what she considered social work but had none of the job security. She uses the word 'rigmarole' to describe the insecurity of the annual funding game. This word implies a long process without purpose, the implication is that Joy had had enough, that the job had lost its purpose for her. Also, the years of austerity and cuts to public sector services have had an impact on the survival of support settings. Joy is alluding to this with her own experience of insecurity and low pay:

> **Joy:** "…So it wasn't a case of me saying, oh now I need to be a social worker so I can feel like I can change things, it was more for my own personal

development, 'cause I was already doing jobs that were similar, but without having very good pay or job security or any real responsibility."

Joy shares that she had considered doing social work for a few years but that the costs of returning to university for two years had held her back. This could be contributing to the perceived resentfulness that is referred to above. Also drawing together the previous reference in section one to having no money and being unable to find a job, moving back in with her parents at age 21 which she found "disheartening". Then the high cost of academic programmes almost acted as an 'anti-motivator'.

Through connections in her work role and support from friends she finally made the decision to apply for a master's degree in social work.

The change of first person to second person in the above two fragments is significant, Joy is at ease talking about herself as 'I' where she appears to have agency and control. At the point this changes it seems to suggest that Joy doesn't feel she has agency or control and uses 'you' instead of 'I'. This idea is explored more in the accounts of placement experience taking this perspective of agency and control to analyse the perception of power hierarchies.

4.2.3 Summary of the theme

In exploring participants' motivations for choosing social work, all five expressed a passion for making positive impacts. This aligns with the literature that shows altruistic motivations as prominent with social work students. Wanting to make a difference stemmed from personal experiences, such as Ash's commitment to providing the support he lacked during a challenging childhood. Included in altruism is ideological motivations. Some of the participants had personal experiences of social work

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involvement. None prioritised careers in management, status, or financial gain, however, Joy, recognising the social care aspect of her work, wanted improved stability and income as a qualified social worker. Previous exposure to social work through family, friends, or prior roles in health and social care settings also played a role in their decisions.

4.3 Values Development in transitioning spaces

This group experiential theme was drawn out from participant experiences of transitioning from the classroom experience onto their final placements. The theme of transitioning spaces also includes professional identity formation in the placement space. The students transitioning from students into practitioners. Later this idea will also include their relationship with their practice educator, who is also in a transitioning space as they transition their working space into a learning space.

These discussions focused on both their classroom and placement experiences and their developing understanding of social work values. Social work values a contested concept in the literature, is evidenced in the espoused understanding given by all five participants. I will start this section by capturing the essence of how the participants understand and describe these values from a conceptual basis. Then I will move onto the Group Experiential Theme itself.

4.3.1 Starting to define values

Sue had an evolved concept of values which she discussed from the start of her interview. Part of her motivation for choosing a specific course was its demonstrated commitment to social justice. She explains that social justice for her is:

> **Sue:** "…considering the wider picture and the environment people are in, not seeing it as individual problems…but wider social problems and maybe working and behaving in a way that is looking to address that..."

This expresses her comprehension well as it moves from an initial definition to an action; this captures a core understanding of social work values as the 'things' that influence practice. Although she does also note that "...it's not really easy to actually, like, address that in a practical way in practice…" This significant point is explored further in 'the bigger picture' below.

Ash similarly has a solid sense of values as informed by social justice and takes a person-in-the-world position which is influenced by politics. Ash makes connections via class and poverty in the UK to make sense of his own childhood experiences, he has lived this theme in the past and the present. Power (and powerlessness) is central to his understanding of self and others. He has also used social services in the past and openly discusses his traumatic childhood as something that gives him insight into the trouble's others may face.

Jen described what she considered to be an aspect of social justice:

> **Jen** "…I think just not seeing things so simply is a big part of it, seeing the bigger picture, thinking about the environmental factors, thinking about the different reasons why people make certain choices or certain decisions…."

Jim describes how he understands the value of social justice:

> **Jim:** "…to me social justice is an area that I'm quite passionate about, about people who are vulnerable and people who maybe face discrimination, oppression, having the opportunity to have their rights met, to be entitled to services, to be entitled to get what they should…"

Jim's passionate commitment to social justice is like a rallying call, he gets louder and more animated. He is clearly more than 'quite' passionate. He does have a good understanding of social justice and is articulate about how he feels. He goes on to explain how he has observed this happening to service users and that he feels resources are sometimes 'hidden' from people. He advocates for signposting people to access these resources.

These discussions include a variety of different experiences both positive and negative and provides, along with the next sections, some rich and deep discussions and analysis from an IPA research ontology.

4.3.2 Values: Shouldn't they already be there?

> **Jen:** "I've always been a people person…"

This subtheme starts the exploration of values. It draws upon discussions regarding value positions and although there is cross over in the two sub themes the main differences are formed here by participants opinions that values should be 'already there' to gain a place on a social work programme. This is the first marker of a transitioning space, from applicant to student. This belief comes across quite strongly from Joy and Jim in particular:

Joy: "I get that those feelings need to be developed through teaching and theory, but wanting everyone to be treated the same and working in an anti-oppressive way should be something that is already there for someone that wants to do a course like that…"

Joy is describing values here as 'feelings' that need to be developed. When she defines what she means by values as 'wanting everyone to be treated the same", which is something that could be challenged in social work, it can be understood as a shorthand for equality. She clarifies her meaning by applying the term 'anti-oppressive' which is a central value in social work. Joy also attributes social work values to 'common sense' she decides that:

Joy: "...it's not necessarily something that you think about, it's just something that comes naturally and a lot of it is just stuff that is common sense…"

Joy presents a naive position here and she avoids any deeper exploration for now. She concludes this part of the interview by saying "…you shouldn't need to be taught about it in my opinion." which signals a transition to close further exploration and move on.

Jim concurs with Joys assertion that values should be an intrinsic characteristic of anyone who wants to become a social worker, but his meaning making goes deeper than the perceived 'gatekeeping' position that Joy initially presents.

Jim: "Well I mean you can talk about the teaching of values, but I think you bring the values yourself into this environment, you know, you don't get drawn to social work without having underpinning values of wanting

to ensure that people are offered the opportunity to have social justice

and rights…"

Jim's words have an emphatic edge, there is certainty about his position which he delivers without hesitation however he moves between using the first-person pronoun and the second-person pronoun here, which creates a tension, almost suggesting an internal disagreement. Jim also brings the academic environment into this discussion. Again, this fits into the idea of transitioning spaces, however he contests that this is the site for learning about values. He posits that people who want to do their best for others and make positive changes need to hold values connected to equality and social justice already. To want to become social workers these values need to be 'already there' as Joy articulates. He starts this part of the discussion by almost dismissing the idea that values can be taught. He says "you can talk about the teaching of values" as though this should not be required.

> **Jim:** "I think it's a very difficult thing to learn in an academic
>
> environment, I think it's something that you're brought up with. I think
>
> you're influenced by significant others from childhood, and I think
>
> there's certain values that you get brought, that are in you are from your
>
> other experiences".

Jim's sense-making here suggests that values are influenced by childhood experiences. This position aligns with some of Ash's experiences and thoughts, but Jim seems to be describing personal values here, although 'other experiences' is ambiguous, in further musings he talks of the discrimination and oppression of vulnerable people and that social work should support these people to have 'their needs met' by advocating for social justice. This presents uncertainty as to what the

social work values are that Jim feels should be held by students accessing social work education. His position on professional values seems to come from a more politically informed (and learned) position.

Sue provides a more detailed understanding that merges and expands on both Jim and Joys positions.

> **Sue:** "Social work values I suppose are, you know, there's a baseline of what are standard social work values, which is why people choose to go into social work, maybe like the values of social justice, social change, right to self-determination…"

By bringing in the right to self-determination, Sue is expanding on these notions by giving us action-based rights as an example of social justice. She sees this as the baseline for people choosing to go into social work and so agrees that they should be 'already there'. Sue presents a developed understanding of social work values, and this becomes clearer as the interviews progress. She appears to have a more activist based approach to social change.

4.3.3 Values, can you teach that?

This subtheme emerges as a question because the convergences and divergences were most noticeable with this concept. Values development appears as something relating to both classroom-based experiences and experiences on placement. It is where the idea of transitioning spaces becomes more defined and where each participant becomes eager to share their experiences.

Ash is enthusiastic about both classroom-based learning and placement activities, and he begins by sharing his classroom-based experiences.

> **Ash:** "One thing I love about Uni is it gives that ability to critically
> analyse and look at stuff, and not just take things as, for me, this is
> what I have taken a lot from the course, is don't just see things as (a)
> given or evaluated, critically analyse it."

Because Ash often draws upon his situated knowledge to interpret his experiences, he is the most passionate when talking about social justice. His language is emotionally expressive. Here he recalls a conference delivered at his HEI where he felt he was energised by the learning experience from people with lived experience alongside external speakers and academics.

> **Ash:** "The…Conference, that was something that really informed me of
> the importance of social justice and being able to fight for the more
> marginalised, do you know what I mean, because it almost seems that
> its always the lower end of society, or working classes, that take the
> brunt."

Here Ash is identifying with the working class and is feeling how he also took 'the brunt' during his difficult childhood which he describes as 'impoverished'. However, learning about social justice empowers Ash to want to make change. A final observation regarding his classroom-based learning was how the teaching staff acted as positive role models for him. The extract below came from Ash's praise of how the tutors were willing to give him a place on the course, despite his criminal history:

> **Ash:** "I thought these people (the tutors) believed in what they were teaching,
> their values are, we can change you…"

He felt that by being given the chance to join the programme after being rejected by a different HEI, the enactment of values in the tutors was inspiring, in accepting him with such past issues, their belief in redemption and change made him feel visible and valued. This is like Sue's experience at interview where she also observed the modelling of value commitments by the interviewing team.

Contradicting the position Ash and Sue take, Jen is less enthusiastic and ambivalent in her position on the teaching of values in the classroom, she sees it as idealistic and disconnected from the placement experience. The transitioning space for her is more problematic. She hasn't felt prepared enough for the 'reality' of the placement experience.

> **Jen:** "I do think the teaching is very idealistic and I don't think that's bad though…but when you're in placement, your obviously like, you know, that's not really how it should be, that's how it's not taught and a few people have commented on how, like, yeah, it's not realistic, it hasn't prepared you for it..."

The language used in this segment is unusual and it takes some unpicking as there are some tangled tenses and the use of first-person pronoun and second-person pronoun could suggest a reluctance to hold this view, to push it one step away? In the context of her interview the message is understood as the teaching is idealistic, but that Jen doesn't think that's a bad thing, but she doesn't think it prepares 'you' for the reality of placement. She continues:

> **Jen:** "...I think it's good, it's an aspiration, it's what we should be aiming for…"
>
> She also contradicts herself by adding that teaching the ideal is optimistic but

that "practically it won't work like that". Practical is a word that Jen often uses throughout her interview.

Her ambivalence is clear, and this highlights an uncertainty with Jen regarding her understanding of values espoused in the classroom and enacted on placement. Also, Jen alludes to not feeling prepared enough for going out on placement. The transition from the classroom space to the practice space has proved challenging. This might be in part the translation of abstract knowledge into concrete practice and behaviour. Something that is acknowledged as 'troublesome' in Threshold concept theory (Meyer and Land, 2003 p1).

For Jen, she explains how she would like to be taught the **"…**practicalities of the certain, like how assessments are written". She then reflects further about how the practicalities are learned on the placement rather than in the classroom. She is trying to make sense of what is a complex idea, and concludes that it is probably not possible for a generic MA programme to include teaching for all the variations of settings, service user groups and individual differences, she laughingly rationalises:

> **Jen:** "…cause you're taught how to do things like an assessment, but then go to a team where it's done differently, then it's kind of invalid isn't it?"

Jen makes sense as she develops her conversation, and sometimes contradicts her initial thoughts as she thinks through the issue. Her reflective skills are noticeable, and the following section of the interview highlighted these skills in action.

Because Jen was focused on the practical aspects of transitioning, as the interviewer I felt I needed to get her to dig deeper about the teaching of values. I asked the following question, and this elicited a deep and thoughtful answer that took us both by surprise. This is described as a Gem in IPA, (Smith, 2011).

"Can you remember any specific examples of lectures seminars or tutorials that you went along to, that maybe had an impact on you thinking about your own values and your own development of values?"

Jen was hesitant to start to reflect on this question and began with:

> **Jen:** "It's one of those, I just haven't really thought about before, and I hadn't really realised the relevance of it…"

She tentatively progressed, stating that there was something that she felt might be an example of her classroom learning that had helped her personal and professional development. She disclosed that her Mum had been adopted as a child. She explained that this had a lifelong effect on her Mum and Jen hadn't understood the implications such a thing could have on a person's sense of identity; until she thought about what she had learned in the classroom. She firstly mentioned attachment theory and how she had begun to appreciate how her Mum's life experience could shape her sense of belonging. She nervously stated "I was probably a bit dismissive about that…" before celebrating how her relationship with her Mum had become closer due to her deeper understanding of their differences and an acceptance that her Mum would always feel 'different' due to this life event.

This knowledge helped Jen in her wider understanding of identity and spoke to her value development whilst on placement.

> **Jen:** "…you can't just assume, like everyone else feels the same way about their own identity and that's something I really didn't appreciate, and it has come up quite a lot, obviously in terms of like, children in care."

This felt like a revelation in Jen's sense-making process and had impacted her thinking whilst on placement. It had opened her eyes to equality and difference. Although

transitioning spaces can be more challenging for some, it felt as if Jen had made a breakthrough in this regard.

Similarly, Sue was able to connect the classroom teaching to her own values development and how this has significance for praxis.

> **Sue:** "I felt like the modules that we were taking, there was an emphasis on values and I know that one of the ones I chose last year was about social work ethics which tied into values….as well and the kind of, looking at values and the conflicts that can exist, you know, when we're having to sort of make decisions, I guess"

When Ash was asked to reflect further on his classroom learning, he quickly responded with:

> **Ash:** "Immediately the thing that jumps to mind for me is the … (Guest speaker lectures) that was really informative for me because it was outside people giving their views of particular topics and dilemmas that were going on in social work and it was quite a wide approach right across, so that was quite good…."

Often in HEIs and in social work education, guest speakers include both practitioners from the field and people with lived experience. Ash expressed how these different perspectives reminded him of the real-world importance of social justice. Much like the conference, it instilled in him a determination to fight for the rights of the marginalised. He goes on to talk about one of his recurring concerns around societal inequalities and the tendency to focus on individual moral shortcomings instead of systemic disparities. He explores this concern and how he sees this happening on placement. Although this topic will be

explored in more detail in the following section, for this theme he is describing, similarly to Jen, how the transitioning spaces might seem disconnected. However, he goes on to provides a concrete example of how he re-connected them.

Ash: "What I got from Uni is I can fight for people; I can challenge stuff…"

He then goes on to contextualise this regarding a specific placement case, reflecting on how he challenged a decision that he considered to be motivated by cost saving. He felt that the service user needed the intervention. This provided a good concrete example of him enacting social justice, rather than complying with agency culture or agreeing with a specific individual's rationale.

Sue offers some insight regarding the transitional spaces of university classroom and practice placement. Although she states that she would have liked more practical teaching in university, for example how to speak to children, she is able to see how learning theories, for example child development, does influence the practical which can only be experienced on placement.

To conclude, Joy, takes a different stance and feels that people shouldn't need to be taught about values, this is linked to her ideas that people should only be given a place on programmes if they already have values in place.

Joy: "You shouldn't need to be taught about it in my opinion."

4.3.4 Summary of the theme

Some participants felt that values should already be a part of an individual's motivation for social work. This was an interesting convergence of views and due to the contested

nature of values, this provided a good introduction to their understanding of social work values. There were some differences in their understanding, ranging from ideas around human rights and social justice, through to theories such as attachment theory, person centred theory; and then ideas around individual behaviours such as empathy, advocacy, and confidentiality.

All participants were able to reflect on aspects of their classroom learning, although again the experiences ranged in delivery. How these values transitioned into practice learning exposed the most divergences in experience and offered links to threshold concept theory (Meyer and Land, 2003). Three participants had gained much learning from classroom-based teaching, one was particularly keen on the involvement of outside speakers and those with lived experience and was able to reflect on transitioning from one space (classroom) to another (placement) with apparent ease. Another participant struggled with the transition, feeling underprepared by the ideological teaching in the classroom.

4.4 Feeling like a burden: (Navigating Relationships)

It is during these conversations that the participants move from using first person pro-noun to second person pro-noun the most. This has been interpreted as denoting agency or a lack of agency respectively. This being the crux of the concerns around the power hierarchy in relationships, that seems unavoidable for students on placement. As learners under constant scrutiny from their practice educator, they can often feel these power imbalances.

The role of practice educators features largely here, and it is gratifying to see that some excellent relationships have been experienced, but there are some concerns

raised about feeling like a burden within busy and resource challenged teams. This feeling could be a personal experience but all but one of the participants noted concerns regarding the additional pressures they perceived that they were putting on the PE; this wasn't necessarily through the time and experience shared with them, but from the busy, resource stretched teams they witnessed. Some of the challenges described by students are a result of the challenges social workers experience on a day-to-day basis.

4.4.1 How safe is it for me to challenge?

Ash talks about being encouraged by the classroom teaching to be constructively critical and to challenge things; he sees this as a positive part of his learning, but then he goes on to say:

> **Ash:** "Cause we learn a lot about power in Uni and you don't realise how evident it is until you're in placement, even social worker to social worker, even a local authority social worker to PVI social worker."

Here Ash is noting a synergy with the teaching in the classroom and the placement experience. However, he is also expressing a surprise by the reality he perceives and a disappointment in the extent of the power dynamics he is noticing. He is almost let down by this reality. His use of the term 'power' is stated broadly and is confirmed by his observations of interactions whilst on placement. He elaborates by saying:

> **Ash:** " It's almost like this language of working in partnership is just language, it's not really, it's kind of to me, it's sometimes all bullshit and you know it's quite disheartening for me because I've learned a lot of good stuff at Uni, and a lot of passion has been engulfed with that…and then you go into practice,

and then you think are people living this stuff or doing this stuff or are they just ticking boxes?"

From this observation, Ash's expectation that social workers would have the same level of passion as him has been disappointed. Ash's experience of the two learning spaces don't align. He feels a strong connection to the ideas espoused in the classroom as realistic practices. However, his change of pronoun use here could be indicative of a sense of powerlessness, where he feels he has no agency, when he says "I've learned a lot of good stuff…" followed by "you go into practice and then you think are people living this stuff…. Are they just ticking boxes?" It is here that we might consider he isn't owning his question; he is putting it out there as rhetorical, almost questioning himself and the system.

He uses a strong word 'bullshit' which means untrue or deceptive. When he is observing the 'ticking boxes' he feels that this isn't the core of the job, that social workers are being deceived in some way. It could be he feels that he has been deceived by the teaching in the classroom? His disappointment and doubt are difficult to hear, but despite his observations, he has built good relationships with the team around him as it becomes clear that he feels safe to challenge. Something not all participants felt.

His observation which initially he describes as disheartening doesn't stop him from taking a stance to challenge what he sees. He sees the bigger picture, of austerity and staff shortages caused by political decision and little investment into services. He doesn't interpret the worry about challenging as an internal problem for himself, he sees it as a professional duty. He begins the following statement using the second person pronoun but then takes ownership by proudly reverting to the first-person

pronoun, almost as a signifier that he hasn't let this feeling defeat his commitment to his developing professional identity.

> **Ash:** "Do you know, on placements, it's quite difficult, especially as a student, you're quite restricted in your ability to challenge as well, but I have challenged even on placement..."

Although this feeling of powerlessness is a recurring aspect in some of the discussions, Jen ascribes this feeling of powerlessness to her own internal sense of not wanting to be a "burden" and doesn't question the system or why she thinks the social workers might feel disrupted:

> **Jen:** "..you just want to fit in, and you just want to, you don't want to be a burden, cause you already feel a bit like one when you are asking people questions and sometimes having to ask it a couple of times 'cause you can't remember , and you don't want to add to that….I don't want to disrupt the team really. I just want to keep the peace…"

This feeling of being a burden might have disrupted the pedagogical relationship that is designed to support Jen's learning and professional development. Although it appears to be self-imposed. It has caused her to remain quiet and to not risk asking "again" if the information she receives hasn't embedded cognitively. She also mentions concerns about communication coming from placement not always being as fully informed as it could have been. Maybe there is an unrealistic expectation that as a student Jen will have all this knowledge from university, something that is clearly in the remit of the practice placement.

For Jen, there is an element of self-censorship. Jen shared that when a worker from a different team allocated a visit to Jen, she found out later that there was risk attached

to this home and she probably shouldn't have gone alone. When she shared her concern with her PE they asked for the name of the worker and Jen declined to pass this over:

> **Jen:** "I said, like, can I just check some of the details before you pass it on and then I didn't actually mention it again, because I thought, I don't know if I'm going to be working in that team in the future…"

Jen felt the need to protect her future, and that challenging this issue could cause harm to relationships. A precarious position to be in and not one where she felt she could challenge. She is perhaps initially viewing challenging as something that spoils relationships rather than seeing it as a duty. However, like Ash, Jen gave an example of eventually having the courage to challenge a worker when she perceived a judgmental attitude. An experienced worker made a statement about a foster family 'only being in it for the money'.

> **Jen:** "…quite early on, I did go home, and I felt really deflated, cause I was thinking is this what I'm going to turn into, but I was then like, have I been foolish, have I, but then I felt, it made me feel really torn"

Jen spent her evening reflecting on what the worker had said. They had explained how they themselves had been fooled by people in the past and that Jen was naive. Jen could see that the social worker had become cynical. The emotional impact this had on Jen was clear, her use of the words deflated and torn exemplify the struggle she felt around her own values verses her inexperience. I asked the following prompt question:

Researcher: How did you reconcile that then, in the end?

Jen: " Well I had a conversation with another worker about it….a big part of when you're at like the assessment thing is people ask about money, about payment and I think a lot of the experienced social workers kind of saw it as, oh, they're in it for the money, they're trying to see how much they can get….but you need money, you need it, you can't consider something so huge like taking on a child or children without figuring out if you can financially…"

Through speaking this out loud and being listened to, Jen then felt able to express her position to the worker who had made the initial statement and found that the worker appreciated her challenge. The worker reflected that she hadn't thought of that and had seemed harsh. Jen was pleased that she had challenged but she also said she could only do this as they were in a car together, she felt she wouldn't be able to challenge in the open office. She respected that the experienced workers could get burnt out because of workloads and that having a student can be a two-way teaching and learning experience.

Both Sue and Joy diverge from feeling like a burden and shared positive experiences of their practice educator relationship. This positivity seemed based on having shared values or agreeing about specific topics and issue.

Sue: "I've been really lucky, 'cause I've got a really good practice educator, who I feel has got the same values as me…"

It is significant that the relational aspect of her experience with the PE is strengthened by shared values. Most notable is that Sue feels 'Lucky' and that somehow this might be an unusual experience. Interestingly, Joy articulates a similar perception of her relationship with her PE:

> **Joy**: "...I've been really lucky, and my practice educator is really good and we're very much on the same wavelength so when I 'haven't' had any conflicting values and especially things around thresholds is what I struggle with a lot, I've been able to discuss it openly with her and for the most part she's in agreement..."

Emphasising the relational again and the agreement factor expressed here in terms of on the same wavelength is important. A key positive seems to be that they can discuss issues openly. Joy also expresses gratitude for her placement using the word Lucky again to describe this:

> **Joy:** "Overall I feel like I've got lucky with my placement compared to a lot of other people…" *She mentions that if I interview others from the programme, I'll find out that they* "...haven't had great experiences, especially on some of the placements..." which strengthened Joys position that others had not been as lucky as her.

Both Joy and Sue, whilst expressing that they feel lucky, could be implying that they feel others haven't had a good PE or placement experience. It almost sets up an expectation that final placement will be difficult, in fact Joy is explicit with this position when suggesting I speak to others on the programme. It's as if they feel that you are lucky if you have a good experience? Ash makes a similar observation when he shares that he has been given the time and space for critical reflection whilst on placement, but he hears from others that they are 'lumbered' with heavy caseloads and reflection on theory and practice is almost forgotten. This position appears to be based on hearsay with other students, but the negative expectations that surrounds placement experience is something significant.

An interesting divergence from the theme of relationships with PE's and teams comes from Jim. As the researcher, I consider this to be another Gem (Smith, 2011). He provides an interesting perspective as an outlier who focuses more on his relationships with service users. He doesn't discuss 'being a student' but he does discuss power hierarchies in an NHS setting between the Local Authority social model approach and the Trusts medical model approach. Jim isn't experiencing the power hierarchy in the same way as the others. Reflecting on Jim's position it could be that he, as a white male with a lot of previous experience, feels that he already has the knowledge and skills to be a practitioner and doesn't appear to have doubts about his worth or the process of being 'assessed'. As mentioned earlier he uses the phrase 'boxed off' to indicate his placement is coming to an end.

Jims professional identity seems strong, as does his sense of rightful belonging to the profession, but I am drawn to reflect on what Jim is not saying and why Jim projects this persona in the interview. Jim is quite politically descriptive in his accounts and less willing than the other participants to self-reflect or access his emotions around 'being a student'. What was significant about Jim's interview was his commitment to social justice and to the service users he encounters. However, it is notable that he doesn't refer to his practice educator at any point during the interview which seems a poignant omission. It is also noted that this interview didn't go as well as the other interviews and it's clear that I, as interviewer, was struggling to keep to the semi-structured schedule. To try to explore this further I used a supplementary technique called poetic analysis (Amos, 2019). The resulting 'found poem' (see Appendix F) uses both Jim's words and my words and helped me to identify and magnify the feelings I was having about Jim's reluctance to see his identity as a student. The final 'poem' was the fourth

attempt at selecting key words and phrasing that I felt held some sort of hidden meaning. The 'poem' helped me to make the interpretations above.

4.4.2 Summary of the theme

The discussions here were focused on placement with the centrality of relationships. The relationship with their Practice Educator was the most significant. The focus was on the feelings of the participants as learners, discussing the space they took up, being supervised, and assessed. Some found these relationships tricky to navigate whilst others felt that they had good support. One participant felt that she was a burden, and this had meant she didn't speak up as much as she could.

A major concern that emerged here was regarding structural issues such as a lack of resources and the high workload demands that PEs were subject to. Two of the participants felt lucky to have a good relationship with their PE and both thought this was due to having shared values. They were comparing their experience to other students on their programmes who reported more difficult experiences. Participants appreciated their relationships and noted relationships with the wider team as contributing to their learning and professional identity formation.

4.5 Values: "The bigger picture"

This theme became the natural epicentre of the research, it was as if all the discussions were leading up to the bigger picture. The bigger picture includes more detailed interpretations of how values and aspirations emerge from the participants

experiences and understandings but continues to link to the idea of transitioning spaces that emerged in the previous themes.

The participants also examined blocks or challenges to praxis and how this had impacted upon them, the teams they were placed with and ultimately the people who require the service. The key findings here both demonstrate the participants aspirations for doing right, as they move from one learning space to another, and the challenges they experienced to doing right in the placement space.

4.5.1 Doing right for others

Ash has a lot to interrogate here; the passion that he developed from his own adverse childhood experiences is visible in his take on doing right for others, also his disappointment when this doesn't or can't happen. He draws upon his classroom-based learning again during this part of the conversation as he reiterates his commitment to fighting for the rights of the marginalised.

> **Ash:** "…that was something that really informed me of the importance of
>
> social justice and being able to fight for the more marginalised…"

His aspiration was that he would be able to do this on placement. Almost that it would be expected. He gives an example of this above and explores this in more detail in the subtheme below.

During Sue's interview it is apparent that she feels strongly about this and considers social justice and anti-oppressive practice are core value to her. She explains what this this means to her.

Sue: "…not working in a way which is, like blaming people for their problems and sort of being active in trying to find solutions within that context, do you know what I mean?"

Sue's action-based position is also informed by her observation of the limitations of resources in the placement context. She believes it is a social workers responsibility to advocate for people to enable them to receive what they are entitled to in a similar way to Jim. Her strength of feeling however seems undermined by use of the question, 'do you know what I mean?'; this might be based on a sense of uncertainty from some of her placement experiences, as at one point in the interview she reflects on my question:

Researcher: How do those social work values work in practice?

Sue: "I suppose it's just the day to day, making sure that you're kind of constantly reminding yourself of those values I think and reflecting on the way that you're working in, you know, your own practice."

This leads to a deeper reflection regarding her feelings about her placement experience and local authority statutory work. She reflects on her inexperience in the placement setting regarding a contradiction; where there is both 'a culture of closing cases and moving them on too quickly' and conversely, '…putting people through child protection procedures unnecessarily'.

Sue: "…but I suppose its complex, and I'm not experienced in being in that environment and you know, you don't always know what's the right thing"

Sue appears to have a good knowledge and understanding of social work practice and social justice and comes across as self-depreciating. The change of pronoun appears again and once more it could indicate a loss of agency, or here a loss of confidence.

There is a cross over with the theme of connecting present to future and the sub theme challenges to doing it right also at play here.

> **Sue:** "I've sort of wondered whether working within a statutory environment is necessarily for me, based on, I don't know whether it would clash with my own values too much, I suppose, because it sometimes seems like there's so much focus on the sort of administrative rushing through, not given enough time for families".

Engaging with this utterance drew out a grander message that was also apparent in Ash's commitment to doing right for others. That message is that the values of social justice appear superseded by bureaucracy which is explored in more detail below. The concept of time as a resource appears here again like Joy's experience (in 3 b) above. For Sue the phrase 'sort of wondering' is indicative of her misgivings about the enactment of values but also whether she will work in statutory provisions. She holds some hope that she might still be able to do the right thing for people and honour the core values at this point.

4.5.2 Challenges to doing it right

> **Sue:** "I think that I mean, I guess we're in an environment now where there's limited like resources and a lot of people are being impacted, you know, because of like benefits cuts and sanctions..."

Sue was able to critically reflect on the resource problem from both a macro- political and organisational perspective and a micro-individual level for those who use the services. Jen takes a pessimistic position regarding what can be done to support people under these conditions:

Jen: "...you're not there to change the world, just do what's in your kind of remit and so you are kind of belittling your skills and belittling your abilities before you even go in…"

Here Jen is making sense of a contradiction. She downplays the level of change that she thinks is achievable for service users, she takes a practical stance in using the term 'remit' but then argues that by doing this you are belittling the skills knowledge and values that are central to good social work practice. This contradiction and diminishing view of what could be achievable in doing right for others can be interpreted as a shrinking of her ambitions, she goes on to describe how this apathy is also apparent in experienced social workers who have also been impacted by these challenges.

Jen: "I think maybe, I don't know, but because it isn't the most rewarding career and you don't, it's not that you don't see, like happy endings, but progress is slow… I think maybe they (social workers) just kind of lose hope for big change and so those kind of high hopes and ideal scenarios do just dwindle over time…"

Jen's use of the word 'dwindle' here implies a slow onset of diminishing hope and idealism in individual workers.

Ash takes a political and systemic approach to the challenges he observes.

Ash: "In the economic uncertainty we're in and all kinds of stuff that's going on at the moment, where you know, everything is getting pulled, everyone's trying to, to me, everyone is trying to cut money everywhere, so it's very important as a social worker to be able to challenge".

His understanding of the systemic difficulties promotes a solution-focused collective approach to challenging these decisions. He believes social workers need to act and challenge these injustices. He sees social workers as the ones in the position to collectively challenge. He is calling for action in the practice space. However, Jen's observation of apathy due to a loss of hope is something that might make it more difficult to promote the need to fight the systemic issues. Ash remains optimistic, motivated, and hopeful that change is possible.

Joy however takes a more cautiously individualistic and localised stance.

> **Joy:** "I think a lot of the on-the-spot decisions are coming from the managers that are in the office, but you know, I guess the stuff that's to do with money and cutting budgets and encouraging people to get places by themselves is maybe coming from higher up..."

Joy has a lot to say on this topic and gives a couple of strong examples regarding the ethical dilemmas she experienced due to power hierarchies within the placement space. The first example is of her having to use public transport to collect a parent. She thinks that it is reasonable to expect a parent to use public transport but feels it's a waste of a social workers valuable time to also use public transport with the service user and was concerned about the stress this would put on the parent. She explains that the parent had been perceived as difficult in a car on a previous occasion, but she interpreted the decision as more of a cost cutting exercise than a risk management one, she states that:

> **Joy:** "it's about resources as well again and having conflicted values on what you want as a student or as a social worker and then what the management

want you to…get someone else to do and I think, you know, pulling the rug from under people quickly is not good…"

Here Joy is weighing up what in her opinion is withdrawing support (resources) too soon, seeing that there was a conflict; for the parent using public transport would cause additional stress and for her escorting the parent would take twice as long. Her metaphor, 'pulling the rug from under people' demonstrates how she feels a concern for the wellbeing and safety of service users. From her transcript I am unable to assess whether the risk did indeed present a danger for a car driver, but her example highlights where her concerns reside. The lack of available funding and resources.

Jim also discusses his experiences of cuts to funding and resources and the impacts this might have on service users.

> **Jim:** "I've experienced that on my two placements…people maybe finding difficulty accessing mental health services…there may be a two-year waiting list to get CBT, you know, there's no sort of like really easy way into getting access to mental health services at primary level and the same with social support as well really"

Jim is concerned about the impact on service users, although all participants do offer a case example of how resource challenges have impacted service users, Jim is most articulate here. He expresses concern regarding the dominance of the medical model in his mental health placement and argues that the multi-billion-pound business behind medication production challenges his own values. He notes that a lot of health implications caused by long term medication use could be responsible for deaths, rather than the current focus on suicide. His proposed solution, on a micro level is:

> **Jim:** "Well I think with me it's all about application, it's about giving that person at the centre the opportunity to have a voice really."

Jim feels more choices need to be given to the people who use services, but he realises that other resources are scare. Similarly, Sue proposes advocating for people to access what they are entitled to.

Other participants note that a significant resource is **time**. Time available to build relationships with service users and to have the reflective time to think about how best to intervene and support solutions and change. Sue can see this from her perspective as a student without the challenge of a large caseload:

> **Sue:** " I am able to give a lot of time to the families that I'm working with, which I feel Lucky to be able to do…..I've been really lucky, 'cause I've got a really good practice educator, who I feel has the same values as me, and she is sort of told via management that she goes above and beyond sometimes, which she's not supposed to…."

This prompted me as researcher to ask **"What's going above and beyond, what does that mean?**

> **Sue:** "I guess maybe it wouldn't even be considered above and beyond for yourself, but it might be considered above and beyond by management, where you know, you're visiting somebody too much or giving somebody too much time…"

It is interesting that Sue uses the caveat that it wouldn't be considered going above and beyond by 'yourself'. She could be referring to me as the researcher, or herself as a student, or to social workers with 'good' values; what is clear is that management

are the ones who do see it as going above and beyond, and she perceives that they hold the power to veto what they consider outside the remit.

Sue acknowledges that she is in a privileged position as she is on placement and therefore not subject to the same level of stress as the other social workers on the team. She notes that she can offer more time to her case load as she has less responsibilities.

> **Sue:"** …there seems to be a little bit of a culture of just wanting to close cases really quickly, but then you see them coming back in and you think, maybe if that hadn't been closed so quickly and they'd be given a bit more time, would it necessarily have come back in?"

I will use the words of Joy to conclude this section. Joy jokingly proposes a solution to the challenge of restricted resources.

> **Joy:** "Yeah, I think the way forward is just to fail Ofsted and then they give you loads of money. [Laughs]."

4.5.3 Summary of the theme

The discussions here were focused on placement experiences. Overall, this theme explores how the participants are keen to support vulnerable service users and feel that they have been equipped to do this by both classroom teaching and their understanding of social work values. However, the experiences of the practice placement challenge some of their preconceived ideas about how social justice can be enacted. Most participants felt that there were some contradictions from the 'idealistic' teaching from the classroom into the real-world experience of placements.

Concerns about the challenges faced in practice around lack of resources and high thresholds for support were articulated, along with some concerns about their status as 'inexperienced' and even 'naïve'.

Of particular interest in this section was the discussions regarding time being a valuable and scarce resource. If workers made additional visits to service users, management saw this as 'going above and beyond'. As students, some of the participants were aware that they had the privilege to offer what was considered above and beyond in their work with service users. At no point do the participants hold individual social workers responsible for the culture of bureaucracy, but some do hold management and those above them as being complicit with practices that mean the vulnerable bear the brunt of austerity politics.

4.6 Connecting present to future

4.6.1 Witnessing feelings of deflation/feeling deflated

This Group experiential theme appeared in each interview at various points. Most participants expressed some concern about their own future careers and the professions future. This was illustrated by a range of perspectives that had one thing in common; a recognition of the difficult times we are living in.

> **Sue**: "I think that it is difficult times we're in and I think, I suppose if
>
> social workers are under more pressure, it can take away from being
>
> able to do the job that they want to do, which is a sad thing really"

Sue has observed the team she was on placement with struggle with resources and she has been wrangling with where her future career might lay.

> **Sue:** "I've sort of wondered whether working within a statutory environment is necessarily for me, based on, I don't know whether it would clash with my own values too much,

Sue's use of language in the first extract suggests that she feels a disconnect from her developing professional identity. Her present as a student is separated from her future as a social worker. The transitioning space feels disrupted. Her transitioning from a student into practitioner is problematised. Here again there is an example of the change of pronoun use which illustrates her feelings of separation from the career she wants and the career she has observed. The way she uses 'I' as she starts the thought but quickly moves to 'they' as she describes social workers not being able to do the job that they want to. The second extract consolidates this interpretation as Sue is conflicted about where her own future position as a social worker might lay.

Similarly, Jen noticed that the team she was on placement with had lost some hope and optimism for being able to make positive changes and support people as best they could:

> **Jen:** "I think maybe they just kind of lose hope for big change…"

Jen is clear that it is 'they', the social workers, who have lost hope over time. Spending 6 months with a team and observing hope dwindling over time concerned her deeply. She expressed that early on in her placement she became worried that she would also lose hope. The extract here has been used previously above but it serves to illustrates her feelings here:

> **Jen:** "…that was a point, quite early on, I did go home and felt really deflated, 'cause I was thinking, like, is that what I am going to turn into and I really don't want to."

Jen's concern that social workers could no longer hope for 'big change' and had become cynical had triggered a sense of deflation. It is an interesting choice of word which is taken in this context to mean 'letting the air out' or letting the hope out, or feeling defeated, however this word also means economically reduced, which is what Jen goes on to blame for this loss of hope. She ascribes the years of austerity as the culprit that has removed the reality of change. She describes that when putting plans in place for families, the long waiting times and lack of appointments and being seen by temporary (agency) staff means that they don't get the best service that they should.

> **Jen:** "I think that definitely directly impacts kind of the progress that
> family is going to make and then the kind of enthusiasm the worker is
> going to have, it's definitely going to have a ripple effect."

Ash had observed a similar sense of deflation which he describes as a loss of passion.

> **Ash:** "...I listen to people, and you don't hear the passion in people's
> voices anymore about social work, it's almost become just a chore to
> do the work that you are trying to do, and that's because more of the
> values getting lost in paperwork, the values getting lost in risk…"

Ash's perspective resonates with his own feelings of passion for his career choice. The observation that its *almost* become just a chore, does still hold onto hope however, but his reflection that the loss of values is due to the amount of paperwork and risk averse practice is based on his observations and experience working in the team he was placed. Apathy had unintentionally become a part of his transitioning space.

Joy's theorising connects with the ideas of individual deflation discussed above, but she furthers this position by suggesting that the current recruitment and retention crisis is fuelled by people choosing to leave the profession.

> **Joy:** "Maybe that's because we're crying out for social workers so much, 'cause people do leave the profession so quickly, maybe that's almost hidden a little bit, because they don't want to put people off straight away, 'cause they need us."

Joys musings appear to segregate them and us (and we). She doesn't stipulate who the 'them' is specifically but goes on to explore her perception of the recruitment problem. There is a significant message here from Joy about how 'we' are crying out for social workers, but 'they' don't want to put people off. This separation suggests that for Joy, her observations that people leave the profession quickly is concerning and that there might be some concealment (hidden thing) occurring at the recruitment stage. Hiding the realities of the struggles social workers face through restricted resources and high caseloads? This understanding resonates with Jen's observation that placements can be seen as a privileged space; caseloads are protected, and the scarce resource of time is more available to students.

Jim once again diverges from the group sub theme by choosing not to focus on his student experience or the social worker experience. His concerns, framed by his 2 placement opportunities, focus outwards on the service users experience.

His focus for the feelings of deflation is similar to above but by looking at the service users' feelings of deflation he is providing an holistic perspective. By analysing his perspective, we gain an insight that the end user of social services is the ultimate

victim of the funding cuts, the loss of staff morale and the recruitment difficulties. Not surprisingly then it is the service user that feels most loss of hope in Jims's opinion.

4.6.2 Feeling optimistic (ready for the fight)?

The above examples of observing and feeling deflation amongst the participants could present as a threat for future recruitment into the profession; however, it was reassuring to complete the interviews by finding a sense of fight and dedication within the participants. The transitioning space which helps to shape the student into a practitioner had been successful. In concluding the Group Experiential Theme linking present to future, the participants strength and commitment to the profession was wonderful and presented here through the following extracts.

Sue does demonstrate a caution whilst sharing her optimism:

> **Sue**: "...I'm quite optimistic, so I just don't like to think that things are
>
> going to get worse, but you just don't know do you?"

Sue shares that from her understanding it is probable that most social workers go into the job to support vulnerable people and to make a difference, but she considers the environment as central to being able to achieve this. We see her change of pronoun use to indicate lack of agency. She explores this in more detail in the following extract:

> **Sue:** "I suppose. I mean, you would think that most people would go
>
> into social work because they want to support vulnerable people or
>
> support all different types of people and to make a difference, but then
>
> you need to be certainly in an environment to be able to do that."

Researcher: What's the environment that you need to be in to do that?

> **Sue:** "I think you need to have the time, you need to have, you know, management have got to have the same values as you, you would hope, you need the resources and the opportunities to do that work."

During the conversation Sue does refer to the fact that her student status gives her more time to consider how best to work her cases, but she worries that this won't be the case once she goes into full time practice. Sue is making sense of the idea that the environment is responsible for practice barriers and conversely it is also the environment that can empower practitioners to provide best practice. It is interesting that she includes values as an important factor here, by suggesting shared values as an environmental provision, she is consolidating the ideas discussed in her interview and making a strong values statement.

She concludes the interview by sharing how much of a difference she feels in herself, from starting her training to now and how she is aware of her transition. She expresses that she has grown into a much more confident and stronger person. This strength is exemplified by her disclosing that she left a toxic relationship during the course as she says:

> **Sue** "…I think you become stronger as a person and you know how, you know what's acceptable and what's not acceptable in terms of friendships and relationships…"

Sue concludes by saying that the whole experience for her had helped her grow as a person and increased her confidence.

Jen predicts that her future is hopeful, but this is not without caveats.

Jen: "...I know I'm not going to change everything, but, and it gives me hope to be like, you know I said, like I don't want to be like that, I kind of really, really, really want to try and not be like that and not be cynical…"

Although this statement appears as positive it is laced with concern for the future, Jen "…really really really…" hopes that she won't become cynical or lose hope as she mentions in the subtheme 'feeling deflated'.

Jen also projects into the future after sharing a story about a social worker who had a bad experience in practice and how this might have changed the social workers value base and removed hope.

Jen: "...I kind of really hope that doesn't happen to me, but then it probably will. I'm not saying it probably will but, like, if it's happened to everyone else then."

There is uncertainty in this utterance but also in the way she expresses it. Her presentation and wording is a kind of will-it won't-it inner argument out loud.

One thing that diverges from the other participants is that Jen had a good experience with managers in the team, observing them as 'optimistic' and 'on your side'. Because of this and because of her desire not to become cynical she mentions in her concluding statements that this has given her more of a drive and she states that:

Jen: "…it's definitely not put me off and it made me think, like, I want to be in this field because I want to do well."

Ash was also positive about his whole experience, including his placement with the LA, but he is considering a non-standard job role going forward.

Ash: "I've loved the experience of the LA eventually, but honestly, I can't believe how much I am dead against privatisation, yet find myself actually quite attracted to a private company because their values of being child focussed..."

His use of the term 'eventually' forefronts some of the issues he spoke about in detail in his interview, and it is of no surprise that he might consider values as the most principled feature of the work he would want to do.

Joy takes a slightly different perspective from her experience and her observations (and interpretations) of a team member's struggles. There's something both optimistic and pessimistic in this extract. This maybe reflects Joy's ambivalence.

Joy: about a social worker in a team "..she was coming in at half six in the morning and logging in at 6pm, she was working 15 hours, just to make sure that she looked good, which I might end up doing (when I get the job in this team) because you do want people to think that you are good at your job"

Joy is concerned with how she might be perceived by others, although her professional identity isn't yet fully formed; It feels that this statement comes at the end of a time where she has felt under scrutiny as she is being assessed to ultimately pass or fail her placement. The essence of the pressure's students might experience is somehow present in this statement. Another way of interpreting the worker logging in at 6am, might be to consider it could be because there isn't enough time for her to complete all the tasks required of her.

Interestingly at the start of the interview Joy did inform me that she had a job interview the following day and that doing the interview with me would be 'good practice'. This provides a positive conclusion to her journey.

4.6.3 Summary of the theme

Overall, the students have both enjoyed placement and struggled with issues that the literature has been describing for decades. Placements appear to be a site where surprises and challenges are to be expected. The participants were able to share their understandings of how social workers and teams work hard but that they all detected a 'loss of hope' and a certain amount of 'deflation' due to high caseloads, staff shortages and the burdens placed on practice educators and teams.

This concludes the narrative arc and provides a positive ending to their stories. They all maintained their motivations and career aspirations through the struggles and challenges. One had been interviewed successfully for a job in the LA they were placed with, another was confident that they would be employed. Two of the participants, however, were considering going into non-standard practice settings, which could make a link to the statistics regarding SWE registrants and the recruitment and retention crisis in statutory settings.

Final note:

Constructing a narrative arc of the participants experiences and understanding is considered a quality of IPA.

"The analysis tells a persuasive and coherent story. The narrative is built cumulatively through an unfolding analytic dialogue between carefully selected and interpreted extracts from participants" (Nizza et al., 2021 no pp).

Having completed this central aspect of the thesis I will now move on to discuss the implications of these findings.

Chapter 5. Discussion and Learning

5.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to examine the research results within the context of existing knowledge and to reflect on practical, and pedagogical learnings. It engages with existing literature and guidance documents pertaining to these subjects with a spotlight on social work values, but it also draws upon wider topics that emerged from the findings. I explore how these findings can shed light on prior research and how the existing body of literature can contribute to the comprehension of these findings. As is the convention of IPA, due to the unexpected findings from the individual interviews, additional relevant literature and subheadings will be introduced. I will finish with a discussion on the limitations of the work and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

5.2 Summary of the study and findings

This research was carried out to provide a distinctive insight into the educational experiences of final year social work students. The three key elements of exploration in this study were motivations to become social workers, the experience and understanding of values in both the classroom and in practice, and the overall personal experiences of social work practice education. There were five participants, two males and three females, involved in the research. None of the participants disclosed their cultural backgrounds, gender identities, sexual orientations, or disabilities.

IPA was the research approach which offers comprehensive insights into the context, the participants' personal and professional experiences, and the sense-making they

employ to understand the phenomena of practice education (Smith, 2010; Smith et al., 2022; Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Attention is focused on statements of 'fact', the use of language and the explicit or implicit emotions and meanings shared during the interviews (Smith and Nizza, 2022). In this research the individual data analysis identified a range of Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) then the cross-case analysis identified five Group Experiential Themes (GETs).

The findings revealed that the main motivator for a career in social work was altruism, with personal experience a close second. The participants had different understandings of how to define values, but all had an awareness of what social justice means. They found that teaching and learning this concept was idealistic in the classroom and lost its potency in placement. This, they observed, was through pressures on workers, limited available resources and a lack of managerial support. All of which created a bigger picture that the barriers for 'doing good for others' was a systemic problem. Despite these observations, all participants were motivated to continue with their careers in social work, though not all wanted employment in statutory services.

5.3 Discussion

These findings add to our pedagogical knowledge regarding social work education in the classroom and during field placement (Asakura et al., 2018; Roulston, 2018; Flanagan and Wilson, 2018; Fenton, 2016a; 2019; Papouli, 2016; Todd and Schwartz, 2009). However, as this work brings a highly personal and exclusive look into the lived experience of five unique students, it is not considered generalisable. However, it does

offer reflections upon the successes and difficulties associated with current pedagogical processes, which could lead to improved learning experiences for students. This in turn could lead to improvements in the recruitment and retention of future social workers.

All participants expressed how significant their final placement was, in consolidating their theoretical knowledge in practice, which includes understanding how values influence social work interventions. The research also highlights how this transitioning space can have an impact on professional identity formation. There has been consensus in the literature that highlights the importance of the placement or fieldwork in social work education (Papouli, 2016; Gulalia, 2014; Todd and Schwartz, 2009). Some researchers argue that the placement is social works signature pedagogy (Asakura et al., 2018; Craig et al., 2014; Holden et al., 2010). I will make further connections to literature from the findings of this study below.

I will begin the discussion with the Group Experiential Theme (GET), connecting past to present.

5.4 Connecting past to present: Motivations

Research into the motivations of students who choose social work, as a value based moral profession, is an important topic. The career choices people make is a significant personal decision (Toros and Medar, 2015; Stevens et al., 2012). According to Petersen (2022), student motivations can demonstrate how social work's values and its core mission are perceived, indicating how they perceive social problems and solutions. This can contribute to the shape of social work in future practice (Flanagan and Wilson, 2018; Liedgren and Elvhage, 2015). This topic is pertinent as the

profession is currently experiencing a crisis of recruitment and retention. Looking at the motivations of students can influence future recruitment to the profession, job satisfaction and ultimately retention (Stevens et al., 2012).

A recent report published by Social Work England (2023) entitled *Social work in England: State of the nation 2023* brought together reflections and learnings from the previous interim reports in 2021 and 2022. They note that there are a concerning number of vacancies across both children and adult social care services in England, with 20% of posts unfilled in children and families' services and 10.7% unfilled in adult social care (Department for Education, 2022).

They also note with some curiosity, that they have experienced an increase in the number of registrants to date, suggesting that social workers are not necessarily leaving the profession, but perhaps practicing in other non-standard services. They do not have data yet to explain this gap, but plan to carry out further research in 2023/4. During their interviews in this research, Ash and Sue were grappling with the prospect of pursuing a career in statutory social work. They conveyed their concerns about insufficient investment in services, which resulted in limited resources and shared that this was a challenge to their professional values. Also, the observations of staff burn-out were concerning (Ravalier et al., 2021). However, this had not dashed their aspirations to applying for social work roles in non-standard settings.

It seems that people are still motivated to go into social work. According to a report from Skills for Care (2023 p 1) who gathered statistics from HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency), postgraduate enrolments (making up 46% of enrolments) increased by 6% in 2021/22, although undergraduate enrolment decreased by 8% in the same period. Overall, there has been a 2% drop in all social work enrolments from

2020/21 to 2021/22. It is notable that there has been an increase in international applications to postgraduate social work courses. Also of note are figures cited by Skills for Care (p 17) that "…social work enrolments had a greater proportion of people from Black, Asian and Minority ethnic background (35%) than the average across all higher education (26%)".

There now follows a discussion of specific findings under three headings:

5.4.1 Personal Influences: Childhood, early life, family, and friends

Recent research found that 50-60% of social work students reported having experienced trauma in their own lives (Petersen, 2022). The findings from Petersen's (ibid) research did not locate such high figures, but she noticed that around 1/3 of the respondents had lived experience of social work intervention or involvement but that not all of these were linked to trauma; some of these experiences had been positive. Certainly, from the findings of this research Ash's experience stands out with his negative complex early traumas culminating in a passionate drive to become a social worker. This finding, backed up with previous evidence, is something that requires attention in both the classroom and placement. Research has shown that trauma sensitive teaching increases achievement and lowers student attrition. Universities are starting to promote an integrated approach to pedagogy and well-being (Wheater, 2022).

Ash also had positive experiences of social work when he was referred into a drugs and alcohol service. Other participants had positive experiences where a friend or family member was in the profession or had used services in the past. This recurring motivational theme in the literature was found in this research (Petersen, 2022; Butler-

Warke and Bolger, 2021). Interestingly, Ash, Jen and Joy had family members who were social workers or had been involved with services.

Overall, the participants might "...understand their motives as socially appropriate, because they have empirical 'evidence' in their friends and relatives or in other social workers they have met" (Petersen, 2022 no pp). This could be based on both positive and negative previous experiences. However, some of the participants took a more practical stance around how they understood their motivations.

5.4.2 Practical motivations

Some of the participants felt that they were already doing a similar job and therefore had transferable skills such as Sue and Jim. An interesting aspect of this practical approach was the idea that they would be good at the job. There is a noted lack of literature that explores personal attributes as motivators. For example, people who may feel that they have specific skills or qualities that would make them good social workers (Toros and Medar, 2015; Petersen, 2022). This research was able to locate personal attributes as motivators in some of the participants. Jen shared that she felt she has always been a 'people person' therefore describing what she perceives as an important quality in a social worker. This resonates with Jim and Sue's expressed motivations for choosing the career. Sue felt that through her previous experience she had developed strengths that would work well in social work and Jim had experience in the field and felt social work was 'more him'. Social work programme providers could utilise this knowledge when advertising courses, for example targeting care staff in PVI sector settings and promoting social mobility Iyer et al. (2023)

Jims's points regarding his own awareness and knowledge through significant experience, also take a stance regarding the sociological determinants that might

impact people's mental health. It was also evident that Jim, Sue and Ash had strong political beliefs and motivations from the start, that they felt were important qualities for social workers.

5.4.3 Ideological motivations and altruism

Linking to another motivator identified in the literature, is that of political ideology. Although it is noted that this motivator has become less in the fore over the past few years (Petersen, 2022; Stevens et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2007). Stevens et al. (2012) argue that social justice as a motivator is on the decline. They used a survey to explore student motivations to apply for an undergraduate degree in the UK and found that this ranked 4th on their list of 13 key motivators.

Fenton (2019 p13) identified a concerning trend amongst younger social workers and students who she observed as having "internalised" some of the neoliberal narratives discussed in the introduction chapter. From her findings she posits that those born post 1995, were more in favour of harsher sentencing for criminals and for decreasing social welfare provision. She calls out a concern that a more individualised approach to social problems may now dominate previous perspectives that forefront structural or political causes of personal difficulties. She proposes that this is a move away from social justice focused social work.

Disagreeing with Fenton's (ibid.) position Liedgren et al. (2015) gathered data from 243 Swedish social work students to find out about their motivations. They proposed that altruism remains the most dominant motivator and that this included "a dedication to social justice" (p.3). Matching the findings described here, all the participants in this research held views on how they had been motivated by wanting to make positive

changes to various degrees (Stevens et al., 2012; Bozek et al., 2017; Butler-Warke and Bolger, 2021).

A recent survey carried out by London Innovation & Improvement Alliance (LIIA) in collaboration with the South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP) in 2023 also found that 88% of respondents, which included social workers, managers and students, agreed or strongly agreed that they could make a difference through their work. This also aligned with other research finding that once more highlights altruism as the dominating motivator for people choosing to go into social work (Butler-Warke and Bolger, 2021; Stevens et al., 2012). They add to their narratives with words such as Sue's 'rewarding' and 'beneficial'. This begins to connect to ideas of social justice and human rights.

A criticism of this work resonates with the above study as Petersen (ibid.) does note that although the questionnaires used were anonymous, she was concerned that participants might still be inclined to provide socially desirable answers. Whereas the interviews in this study were face to face. It is here that I might consider my insider position as interviewer as a factor that could influence participants to conform to standard 'cultural' expectations in their discussions, or a social desirability bias (Brockmann and Garrett, 2022). However, at no point did the participants allude to career aspirations, becoming a manager, or other aspects of material motivation. Toros and Medar (2015) posit that further exploration of specific external factors such as salary would advance our understanding of motivations.

5.5 Values development and transitioning spaces

This theme and sub-themes here was developed from discussions around the prompt question, "How do you understand social work values, particularly around social justice?" Students gave various definitions of what this meant to them which is presented in more detail in the findings chapter. However, this part of the discussions with the participants provided an insight into the variety of individual understandings of values. This confirmed the findings from the literature; values are a contested concept understood and interpreted differently by different people in different times (Fenton, 2016; Beckett et al., 2017; Kuhlmann, 2023).

Of the two sub-themes the first was unexpected. The significance of the topic is worth exploring to reflect upon what we might learn from the idea that values should already being ingrained in prospective candidates. Both Jim and Joy articulate this as important.

The second sub-theme looks at the students experience of the teaching and learning of values in the classroom, with some participants questioning whether you can be taught values. This theme also grapples with the idea of how values might transition from classroom to placement.

5.5.1 Values, shouldn't they already be there?

All English qualifying educational and training routes into social work are governed by Social Work England. They provide the standards that HEI's are expected to meet in providing qualifying programmes (SWE 2021). Standard 1 looks at admissions onto qualifying programmes. This was a surprising element that the participants explored in their interviews.

Some of participants expressed the opinion that social work values needed to be part of an applicant's personal value base. Sue felt strongly that a commitment to social justice, social change and self-determination should be a pre-requisite for wanting to become a social worker. Joy and Jim held opinions that candidates should only be offered a place on a course if they already ascribe to the 'correct' values.

> **Jim** states: "...you don't get drawn to social work without having underpinning values of wanting to ensure that people are offered the opportunity to have social justice and rights…"

Joy described social work values as "...something that comes naturally… stuff that is common sense". This has some resonance with the concerns about the rise of neoliberalism and the dominant discourse from government regarding the teaching of values, as discussed in the introduction and literature review chapters (Fenton, 2019; Monbiot, 2016; Henley, 2021; Neary, 2014).

This is also interesting considering the report above, because standard 1 (SWE, 2021 no pp) does not explicitly refer to values in its four main points, it does however suggest that values such as "compassion, empathy, integrity or working collaboratively" could be explored during the interview process during admissions. This exemplifies the fluidity of understanding what 'values' are. Their focus is quite rightly on spotting potential, and they state that "...social work courses recruit students who have the capability and potential to meet the professional standards".

Croisdale-Appleby (2014) asked that consideration be given to utilising values-based selection procedures when recruiting students onto qualifying programmes. Within this report there isn't much detail as to what these value-based criteria might be. He proposed that HEIs take prior experience as a proxy for values. SWE (2021) also

recommends prior experience to be considered during selection processes in HEIs, particularly prior experience that might have helped develop relevant knowledge and skills to be able to meet the educational standards. It is interesting that it is the students that are arguing for social justice knowledge to be an essential criterion.

This leads onto the second sub-theme which is posed as a question due to the divergences of opinion here.

5.5.2 Can you teach values?

Joy discusses her classroom experience around the teaching of values. Although she states that:

> **Joy:** "It's not like we've ever been sat down, and they've said were doing a lecture on values today, it's just something that's like woven through it "

Joy found that for her, she understood and learned about values in classroom-based discussions, which was also where disagreements occurred. She shares that people once left the classroom 'in a huff' after a particularly controversial topic was debated (Fenton, 2022; Fenton, 2019). This was considered problematic and used as evidence that people in her cohort had differing values. This may have also contributed to her feelings that interviewees for social work programmes should have a strong and appropriate value base. Rodger and Stewart-Lord's (2020) research looked at debate as a pedagogical tool to enhance learning. They advise that debates help students to engage with topics and to develop higher-order cognitive skills. Other research that mapped activities that enhance values development also found that intergroup dialogue and groupwork could help produce social justice-oriented practitioners (Lee

et al., 2022). However, Fenton (2022) has some concerns about the willingness and ability of students to engage freely in debate in universities.

Fenton (2022) advocates the importance of social justice in social work education and argues that there has been a generational erosion of this core value. Her key arguments could be considered controversial. She proposes that the introduction of critical theories teaching, Critical Race Theory (CRT) for example, although designed to develop an understanding of the oppressions faced by certain groups in society, might have unintended consequences. She posits that the erosion of a collective 'common humanity' (p 1066) comes from downgrading ideas of universality, during a time when unfettered neoliberalism is left unchallenged.

Fenton suggests that according to CRT, liberal values are inadequate in challenging oppressions due to their universality. CRT proposes that intersectionality, developed by black feminist activist Crenshaw (1989) is required to truly understand the multiple oppressions certain groups might experience, all of which provides good knowledge development for students. However, according to Fenton's (ibid.), the dominance of group identity over universalism could be seen as mirroring the very power structures that need to be challenged. Where HEIs pride themselves on freedom of debate and critical thinking, this is undermined by the certainty of individual lived experience over research informed knowledge (Fenton and Smith, 2019).

Though some may disagree with her position, this article is important in informing educators about engagement with ideas of social justice in the classroom. By encouraging safe open debate and by teaching radical social work ideas focusing on material inequalities and collective struggles, we can also teach critical theories (CRT for example), because of their important role in educating students about racism, racist

policies, institutional racism and how to work with global majority communities. Rather than turn this into a curriculum battle (Teitelbaum, 2022) it's important for parity of perspectives and requirements.

HEIs teach both practical skills and encourage critical thinking, reflexivity, and reflection (Rogers and Allen, 2023).This is particularly important with more theoretical concepts such as how political ideologies might influence approaches to practice, and promoting a deeper connection to values such as social justice (Roscoe, 2023; Fenton, 2016) Connecting practice to values is a thinking enterprise (Beesley et al., 2023) however, Woodward and Makay (2012) found that students had difficulty articulating how values might guide practice.

This resonates with threshold concept theory (Meyer and Land, 2003; Vidal et al., 2015), where troublesome concepts, such as values, can be seen as stumbling blocks for students. Vidal et al. (2015 no pp) carried out research that looked at the integration of concepts when teaching ethics in business. Their findings call for greater pedagogical support for students to integrate separate concepts into a web of 'threshold conceptions'. This work is helpful in viewing how values and practice might form a web of threshold conceptions in social work guiding students to 'see things in a new way' (Meyer and Land, 2003, p1).

The importance of consolidating a web of threshold conceptions could be illustrated by drawing on the voices of those with lived experience. Ash was articulate in how his commitment to social justice was improved by having a range of expertise in the classroom, including service users. Although he was the only participant who discussed this, as a strong divergence I believe it is an important inclusion for our collective learning in social work education.

5.5.3 Service user and carer involvement in the classroom.

Whilst the participants in this research noted a variety of approaches to the teaching of social justice in the classroom, all master's programmes expect student to engage critically with research informed ideas.

Research informed teaching and evidence-based practice is considered a gold standard approach to social work education (Regehr et al., 2007; Drake et al., 2013; Kumah et al., 2022) This approach is designed to increase effective knowledge, skills and behaviours, which will improve service delivery when these students gain employment. According to Kumah et al. (2022 no pp) who focused on health and social care education, "The two main concepts that are linked to the application of evidence into practice are "evidence-based practice" and "evidence-informed practice." Evidence based practice uses research that proves certain practices to work well in each discipline. Evidence Informed practice takes a collaborative approach, with multiple stakeholder input, (Coldwell et al., 2017). It can therefore be argued that the voices of experts by experience hold equal value to all other stakeholders.

Within the field of social work education, one aspect of this approach is the inclusion of experts by experience in classroom-based teaching. This was first introduced as good practice in 2002. Stanley and Webber (2022) published a review of the literature produced over the previous decade to establish what impacts service user and carer involvement (SUC) in education, had had for social work practice.

They noted a lack of evaluations from education providers regarding outcomes of SUC involvement in classroom spaces, similar to an earlier review carried out by Wallcraft et al., 2012. However, all the studies reviewed did gain student feedback. Students'

reported benefits to their understanding of lived experience. It was noted that opportunities to listen and interact with service users and carers, was a powerful tool for students to develop a deeper understanding of social justice issues, motivating them to act to address inequality (Lee et al., 2022; Duffy and Hayes, 2012). However, some researchers note that there is still a lack of diversity in SUC participants involved in HEI's (Sayuri Li et al., 2022). Others would argue that involvement is still ad hoc and inconsistent, with a complex mix of contested understandings from all stakeholders (Schon, 2016).

An interesting finding from this research was that it was only Ash who mentioned that the SUC involvement had been a strength in his education. He was also one of the most articulate and committed to social justice.

5.5.4 Values from Classroom to Practice (Transitioning spaces)

There were reported challenges experienced by participants when transitioning from the classroom teaching spaces then observing their placement organisational norms in practice. For the participants, their relationships with Practice Educators and team members are seen as central for both modelling values in action and critically reflecting on social work values in practice. Values and aspirations seemed incongruent whilst observing organisational culture and practice Ash disclosed, however this does not mean that individual social workers do not aspire to core values.

On the contrary, the systemic resource management approach imposed on many local authorities makes it difficult to enact these values in behaviours and interventions. The perceived dominant ideologies espoused by "…those above management level" as Joy shared, could appear punitive and dislocated from social justice and anti-

oppressive practice (Moth, 2023; Brockman and Garrett, 2022; Hanley, 2022; Fenton, 2016 p 37; Singh, 2019; Rogowski, 2011). This transitioning space was a site of change, challenge, and tension for some of the participants.

There is a sense from the participants that although core values remain important to social work teaching there might be a dilution of these core beliefs, and an anti-intellectualism in placement practices (Brockman and Garrett, 2022; Shah, 2017). Three of the participants were able to clearly articulate what social justice meant to them in practice but two participants were less clear as to what social justice and values were, for example they discussed attachment theory and described values as 'feelings' or 'common sense' (Butler-Warke and Bolger, 2021; Harris, 2021). However, through their placement observations, they understood how a lack of available resources made it difficult to provide social justice-based interventions. This contributed to the interpretation that values, although understood from different perspectives, were not considered as important in the practice setting as they are in the classroom. One participant saw the classroom teaching as "idealistic "and debated the need for more competency-based sessions.

Lee et al. (2022 no pp) argue that competency-based teaching can lead to 'neoliberal workers' rather than 'social justice-oriented workers'. Although they look at NASW competencies, this could equally apply to SWE's PCFs. The PCFs do include a domain that explicitly mentions social justice and human rights, but Lee et al. (ibid.) would argue that the internalisation of these competence-based values means that injustice is recognised in individual practice, but to challenge systemic injustice is not seen as a duty. The practitioners that the participants were observing may have been forced to take a more procedural approach due to occupational restrictions.

However, other research found that although the study of values is complex because values are abstract ideas open to multiple interpretation, they do become "...core concepts which take on concrete meanings and are activated by/in the world of social work practice" (Papouli, 2016 p 68). In their qualitative research study, they explored how social work students develop an understanding of values in action during their final placement.

One of her key findings highlighted the significance of the field educator (practice educator) and how they model collaboration with service users and students to support positive outcomes. She proposes that the transmission of social work values to students is paramount, noting that students appreciated their PEs demonstrating ethics and values by 'modelling them through example' (p 6). She also noted that students recognise the importance of ethical leaders to promote an ethical team culture rather than a culture of managerialism (Rogowski, 2011).

Amplifying the need for students to have a positive role model in their practice educator, Roulston et al. (2018) concurred with these findings in their research into the student placement experience. They found that students valued regular supervision with their practice educator, including constructive feedback on performance. Students also valued being able to observe practitioners carrying out and modelling the role in agreement with Papouili (2016).

Roulston et al. (ibid.) noted that organisational cutbacks might impact on quality and availability of supervision and restrict the development of student's professional identity. Within the findings of this research the participants didn't talk about supervision directly, but it was clear that their relationship with their PE was central to their learning, and having shared values was articulated as most important.

Interestingly the participants noted that their PE's were busy, and one student felt like a 'burden' through this observation. This will be discussed in a separate section in more detail below.

Taking a different position, Casperson and Smeby (2021 p 2650) direct our attention to programme cohesion in their paper which examines the links between classroom preparation for placement, and placement experience in student learning outcomes. They suggest "… there might be a tendency to overestimate the importance of practice in education, consequently ignoring the significance of abstract knowledge and formal learning". They examined two perspectives, one on placement learning and one on classroom-based learning using a student survey. They conclude that the emphasis on the value of practicum learning is only made effective if the overall programme cohesion, including preparation to practice, is robust. This work aligns with some of the recommendations made by Roulston et al. (2018).

Students' preparedness for placement was a feature that one participant discussed, and this is noted as important in supporting placement success (Flanagan and Wilson, 2018; Tompset et al., 2017). This informs the idea of the transitioning spaces, where educators may need to pay more attention and offer more support to students as they pass through troublesome thresholds of understanding (Foote, 2013; Meyer and Land, 2006). Once more it is useful to consider providing a web of threshold conceptions to draw together troublesome classroom concepts and real-world practice (Vidal et al., 2015).

Flanagan and Wilson (2018) found, 1 in 10 of their survey respondents said that they were less prepared for placement than anticipated. They proposed that bringing different year cohorts together to share experiences could benefit student

preparedness for placement. Tompsett et al. (2017) reported that both undergraduate and postgraduate students benefited from constructive feedback in preparation for their practice placement.

Implications from the findings of this research give insight into consolidating some of the previous ideas into preparation for practice sessions including, threshold concept theory, bringing both SUC and current students and student alumni together. As part of their current consultation, SWE are considering making changes to their 'Readiness for Practice' guidance, which could have implications for HEI's and other training providers in social work. The results and decisions from this consultation will be published in 2024.The findings from this theme consolidate the ideas above, although only one of the participants in this study referred to feeling under prepared for placement, this figure resonates with Flannagan and Wilson (2018) and the importance of this remains paramount.

5.6 Feeling like a burden: Navigating Relationships on placement

The findings that led to the theme 'feeling like a burden' were focused on navigating relationships whilst on placement. There was only one of the participants that expressed feeling like a burden, however I chose to forefront this as the title as this provides more impact and has great significance for students on placement who need to navigate a range of relationships. The findings revealed that the relationship with the practice educator was uppermost for all the participants except one. Jim didn't refer to his PE at all during his interview. This finding is significant as it adds to ideas about professional identity and belonging. There were some interesting positions, with some participants stating that they felt 'lucky' to have a good relationship with their PE.

5.6.1 Relationships with Practice Educators

Practice Educators (PEs) play a pivotal role in the education of social work students, holding an importance on par with the academic classroom. However, their role is complicated by the need to balance their own transitioning space where their role as practitioners transition into the role of practitioner-educator (Burton, 2020; Yeung et al., 2019). Their primary function as Practice Educators involves instructing, educating, and evaluating students' progress within their practice environment. In addition, they serve as role models and mentors who determine students' readiness for entry into the social work profession. In 2007, Barretti proposed that the idea of the field educator as a role model in social work practice learning was relatively unexplored. She carried out a literature review and suggested more empirical research was required looking at this important aspect that supports the student's sense of belonging and professional identity formation.

The participants of this research identified their relationship with their Practice Educators as important to their professional development. Most of the participants appreciated their relationships and some of them described feeling 'lucky'. One participant diverged from the others as he didn't mention his practice educator at all during the interview. This omission was interesting and led to the interpretation that he had a well-developed sense of belonging to the profession already. This participant, Jim, focused outwardly onto the service users he worked with as the most significant relationships he navigated and presented as a practitioner rather than a student.

Research has found that student satisfaction and learning were strongly correlated with how helpful they reported their practice educators had been. Drawing on good practice recommendations, based on survey results from a cohort of placement

completers, Flanagan and Wilson (2018) observed that there is little focus in the literature, on students' perceptions of what or who supports their learning. So, by focusing on that voice in their research, they found that placement learning success could be described by student satisfaction ratings regarding their relationship with their PEs. So how might Pes view their roles and relationships?

Burton (2020) identified important issues from the findings of one-to-one interviews with PEs. Applying a strength-based approach she found that the relationship between PE and student was also central for PEs, but she identified that more support and recognition for the complexity of their role was needed to support the teaching and assessment process. This amplified previous research findings and calls for more recognition of practice education (MacDermott and Harkin-MacDermott, 2021; Bellinger and Ford, 2016; Jasper, 2014).

Furthering these findings through research with students and PEs, both MacDermott et al. (2021) and Yeung et al. (2022) make a strong call for practice educators to be supported to invest time in forging relationships with students, whilst noting the challenges associated with managing competing role complexities and organisational bureaucracy. Something that one of the participants in this research experienced as 'feeling like a burden'. Jen perceived this as limited resources; the PEs appeared to have little available time for the student as excessive workload demands took priority. Also there seemed a lack of managerial support (Ravalier, 2018; Ravalier et al., 2021).

Similarly, the findings of this research recognised this important relationship, but the participants also perceived the PEs as burdened by heavy workloads. This corroborates much of the literature, which raises concerns regarding the increasing pressures on practitioners (Ferguson, 2017; Hill and Laredo, 2020; Morris et al., 2018).

A solution to perceived dual challenges of uplifting PE status and the need for practice educators to have protected time and organisational support, could be, in part resolved by increasing the numbers of practice educators within teams. This could help to share the load and increase understanding and knowledge regarding the tasks involved. Teaching Partnerships, discussed below, were tasked with improving access to quality practice placements nationally. They have worked with placement providers and HEIs to increase the numbers of practice educators by increasing training provision for PEs. They have also introduced PE mentors in line with the PEPS guidance (BASW, 2022) to support trainees, which goes some way to recognise some of the research findings; however, the recognition of the importance of the PE role remains in need of improvement.

As Jasper (2014) also calls for heightened recognition, she suggests that the role of the PE is seen more in terms of assessment of student capabilities than the actual education of students. She also notes that these PEs are "…operating in situations of resource and operational constraints..." (no pp). So, what changes have been implemented to increase PE role recognition?

5.6.2 The role of Teaching Partnerships in PE development

The introduction of Teaching Partnerships (TPs) in England in 2015, was a response to the many reforms that had taken place to 'improve' social work education (Cavener et al., 2020). A motivator for this partnership approach was to support HEIs in securing good quality practice placements, which were becoming difficult to find. A recent review by Hamilton et al. (2023) looking at a North Eastern TP, mentioned practice learning provision as having improved and that a successful continuing professional

development programme for Practice Educators was a positive and sustainable outcome, but they made no further mention of the significant role of PEs.

Similarly, an evaluation undertaken in 2020 by the government, found that TPs had helped to increase the number of placements available by increasing the training available for PEs. Although this report celebrates the additional training and PE conferences etc, there is no mention of increased recognition of the role, nor the requirements for protected time to carry this out. In fact, the report gives an example of one of the challenges they found as:

> Time taken to engage, train, refresh and retain PEs (particularly in adult services) and ensure management support for release for training and time needed whilst a student is on placement with them. (DfE, 2020 p 37)

Acknowledging the need to improve employer recognition of the PE role, BASW carried out a refresh of the Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) in 2022. The results were intended to raise the profile of practice education and provide clearer expectations for both organisations and Practice Educator trainees. The refreshed standards which came out in 2022, included some valuable improvements and introduced a mentoring scheme to help support PEs in their training. The report recognises the importance of the settings alongside the PEs and aims to promote valuing practice education within organisations.

Although little research has been generated around these new guidelines, some authors have noted some of the ongoing challenges still associated with Practice Education. Beesley and Taplin (2023) note that the wider contextual issues in social care are negatively affected by austerity, imposed reforms and post-pandemic challenges.

5.7 Values, the bigger picture

All students expressed their motivation to do right for others under the theme of the bigger picture, but what stood out during these discussions were the exploration of challenges to doing right. Joy, Ash, Jim, and Sue were explicit about how they experienced or witnessed these challenges. They explained that the difficulties experienced by service users and carers relating to their own restricted resources, and the resource management role imposed on individual workers, added to these challenges. Of particular interest was the expressed limits of the resource of 'time' (Banks, 2004b). In the interview with Sue, she explained how she felt that she had the privilege of time, whereas her PE didn't have the same access to this scarce resource. The phrase 'above and beyond' was used to describe how management perceived some uses of time.

When asked what above and beyond meant to her, she said it was being able to do more and longer visits with families. This finding implies that there are constraints placed on workers regarding the number (and length) of visits they can make. Forrester et al. (2019) carried out research looking at the relationship between social workers skills and the outcomes for service users of children and families' services. One of the skills they observed was that of relationship building. A key finding from their research was that when social workers were able to visit families more often, the link between skills and outcomes grew stronger. They note that this is a complex area to draw generalisable conclusions, but this link between spending time with service users and stronger outcomes was significant (Ingram and Smith, 2018). Interestingly in 2014, Unison and Community Care online carried out a survey and found that:

"Social workers are taking paperwork home, working late and forgoing lunch breaks, in order to fit in face-to-face time with service users, our survey of more than 1,000 professionals reveals" (McGregor, 2014, no pp).

5.7.1 A culture shift?

When considering the implications of these findings, it is important to examine the impacts of socio-political policy decisions and the impact of 40 years of neoliberalism as outlined in the introduction and revisited in the literature review. With the dominance of managerialism, bureaucracy, and metrics it's not surprising that the time to spend with service users has been reduced, but what about the impact on attitudes? There are concerns that neoliberalism has transformed the profession and that the world views of social workers must also have been changed to reflect some of these key ideological positions (Brockman and Garrett, 2022; Fenton, 2022; Lee et al., 2022; Rogowski, 2011; Nye, 2010).

Brockman and Garrett (2022) carried out a small-scale qualitative study exploring 6 senior social workers perceptions of social work dilemmas provided through vignettes. Their findings revealed that the practitioners tended to individualise 'social problems' and to resort to a 'moral underclass discourse' (p 890). By casting judgment on what they perceived as moral failings in service users and their families, they are replicating the dominant discourses prevalent in neoliberal narratives and creating a culture of mistrust. Supporting this perspective of an underclass discourse Morris et al. (2018 p 371) state that it is almost inevitable that social workers have been exposed to:

> …the ascendency of a highly competitive and individualised social and
>
> political context, with its normative influences, and so it may be reasonable to
>
> hypothesise that, as individuals, social workers are not immune from

absorbing the strong discourses and imagery that pervade the representations of poor communities and families.

Similarly, Hill and Laredo (2020) express concern for the managerialism and marketisation that dominates social work organisations (Rogowski, 2011) promoting a culture which shifts the priority of the service from human need to resource management, as observed by some of the participants in this research. However, like the findings of this research. where individual social workers were seen to try to promote a social justice approach, they found the following:

> We observed a more nuanced practice, which we reframed as resistant to this ideology. Despite witnessing a service that has become fragmented, silo-based and reduced to an individualised model of risk management and behaviour modification, we found a practice concerned with the promotion of social justice, social solidarity, and kindness (Hill and Laredo, 2020 p 979).

Of course, there is a still a micro focus on thresholds vs risk management. Social workers are preoccupied with case management and bureaucracy leaving little time for relationship building and therapeutic support. Both Sue and Ash explicitly discussed their struggles with the bureaucratic statutory and resource constrained side of social work. Sue concluded that:

> **Sue:** "Yeah, maybe I struggle a little bit with the constraints of the statutory sector"

When asked about the tensions she is describing in her interview, she noted that:

> **Sue:** "…we can't change the world and that the lack of remit and resources belittles our teaching and learning."

However, reflecting the optimistic findings of Hill and Laredo (2020), the participants did observe a commitment to doing right for service users, and the participants themselves carried this commitment from the classroom into placement.

This concurs with the idea discussed above about the perceived gap between what is espoused in the classroom and what is enacted in practice and raises a legitimate tension in the transitioning space.

5.8 Connecting present to future

"Most importantly, practice educators take pride in nurturing students and helping them develop their practice. This is something which will positively help shape their careers and potentially inspire them to become practice educators themselves later in their career." (SWE report, 2023 no pp).

Although this final discussion is the shortest, it is also concluding the work with a positive outlook. This finding provides hope that social work students are keen to fulfil their motivations to become social workers and to make a positive impact in the lives of others. The quote above resonates with my own request to students as they qualify. I ask that they all consider becoming PEs in the future. The theme starts on a gloomy note but has a hopeful conclusion.

5.8.1 Feelings of deflation

Participants who discussed witnessing feelings of deflation, were clear that this was not something directed at individual practitioners. There will always be instances where there might be a difficult relationship between a student and a PE, and this is

something that needs to be addressed in terms of placement breakdown. However, breakdowns and fails are topics of much research and literature (Finch and Taylor, 2012; Finch and Poletti, 2013; Tedam and Mano, 2022; Roulston et al., 2022; Finch and Tedam, 2023). This topic will not be included in this work as all the participants went on to pass their placements.

Most of the participants had observed the tensions experienced by their practice educators and the teams they were placed with. Jen describes this as a 'loss of hope' and Ash, a 'loss of passion'. What they describe fits with current ideas around burn-out. In 2022, Unison reported that stress and low morale through excessive workloads, staff shortages and long hours were causing social workers to leave the profession.

Ravalier, (2019) explored working conditions and stress in UK based social workers and found that high demands, low levels of control and poor managerial support was implicated in the development of social worker stress. There are many reports detailing high rates of burnout in health and social care services both current and historically (Bolic, 2019; Lloyd et al., 2002). The increase in work related stress is contributing to the current recruitment and retention crisis.

A Government White Paper entitled "Workforce Burnout and Resilience in the NHS and Social Care" (House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2021-22 p.6) produced post-pandemic, recognised that concerns about the wellbeing of the NHS and adult social care workforce predates the pressures experienced during the pandemic. The report specifically asks:

> What further measures will be required to tackle and mitigate the causes of workforce stress and burnout, and what should be put in place to achieve parity for the social care workforce?

There was clear evidence indicating that the issue of staff burnout resulted from staff shortages, persistent high workload, numerous reconfigurations, and the intensity of demands. The report highlighted the necessity of addressing both individual wellbeing and systemic pressures. Their recommendations proposed that these issues be tackled as a priority in the form of investment.

Recent news reports from The Guardian and Community Care on-line have raised concerns that promises made to support the development of adult social care including wellbeing services for care staff are to be axed. For Community Care, Mithran, (2023 no pp) states that:

> The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) revealed last week that it was reducing planned additional spending on workforce development in adults' services from £500m from 2022-25 to £250m from 2023-25.

For the Guardian, Booth (2023) reports that Ministers have halved the promised investment in adult social care whilst noting that there are 165,000 vacancies in the sector. Within the social work sector specifically, BASW (2023 no pp) carried out an annual survey of its members and advised that the cost-of-living crisis, worsening levels of poverty and need was adding to workforce demands. Similarly, increased bureaucratic burdens, a culture of blame and a loss of autonomy also contributed to empathy fatigue and burnout with individuals leaving the profession (Gibson, 2016; Baginsky, 2013). Despite this bleak picture, hope does remain for the participants of this research.

5.8.2 Ready for the fight

Aligning with other research and SWE own statistics regarding the high number of Local authority vacancies, contrasted with the higher number of registrants still paying their annual subscriptions and renewing their CPD profiles, the findings from this small-scale study might have connotations. Two of the participants felt that they might not seek employment in statutory agencies but might prefer to practice in PVI agencies. However, notwithstanding the pressures that the participants observed, it was a pleasure to discover that all the participants were still eager to pursue a career in social work.

Despite the challenges they maintained their motivations. Looking at transitioning from student to practitioner is something that both PEs and tutors need to support. Tham and Lynch (2019) found that after four months in practice, newly qualified social workers felt unprepared, unorganised, uncertain, and vulnerable. This is something that employers also need to note, to support smooth transitions.

Unison also reported that due to the increase in the numbers of families needing help, social work staff are having to firefight. They call for investment into early help services to alleviate some of these burdens. SWE (2023 no pp) also states that:

> There is an unprecedented demand for Social Workers, with recruitment and retention now the biggest pressures on the profession.

The findings of this research offer an optimistic outlook for the future of the profession. It appears that classroom pedagogies are advancing social justice approaches, but the disconnect becomes apparent once students transition into placement. By examining the tensions within statutory service provision and how neoliberal ideologies might be distancing perspectives from these principles, it becomes evident

that structural changes are necessary. To prevent burn-out and premature departure from the job, as indicated by the alarming number of vacancies in both children's and adult services, it seems investment into the profession is essential.

I will now present the conclusions and recommendations derived from the findings of this research

5.9 Conclusion Limitations and Recommendations

The research succeeded in exploring the motivations of the participants to join vocational educational programmes. It gained insight into their practice placement experiences, including their understanding of values in practice. A key strength of this research is the novel application of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with the student cohort. To expand our knowledge of social work education we need to both explore specific individual experiences in detail and gather broader data to understand these experiences more generally.

Previous research looking into these topics, tended to use questionnaires and surveys. There is a small range of creative approaches used in the field, such as photo elicitation or the analysis of a student's reflective journal, but in-depth qualitative interviews with students are less prevalent. Overall, the implementation of IPA has successfully examined the detailed and subjective perspectives of this significant life experience with the participants. They have shared with us their journeys from their initial motivations through to their classroom and placement experience of values acquisition, and most significantly, the importance of good relationships in developing a sense of belonging to the profession. They conclude their narratives by exploring their continued motivation to become social workers.

5.9.1 Motivations

Understanding the motivations of people choosing to go into different careers is an important aspect of knowledge development regarding recruitment and retention (Flanagan and Wilson, 2018; Liedgren and Elvhage, 2015). Key findings from this research demonstrated that participants tended to have an altruistic rationale for choosing to enter the profession. All participants mentioned a wish to help to make a difference for society and in the lives of the vulnerable. Personal lived experience of social work involvement, or traumatic life events were featured motivators for some participants. Also having family or friends as role models added to this desire. Some participants felt that they had the right attributes for a social work career, such as empathy and being 'a people person'.

There were no discussions, as found in the literature looking at other related health professions, of social status or cultural prestige as a significant motivator (Nikolouvka et al., 2020; Griffin and Hu, 2019; Rashid et al., 2013). Social work doesn't appear to be perceived as a profession with a high social status, high pay, or good promotional routes. However, feelings of being underpaid and undervalued did emerge from those who were working in similar 'social care related roles without the qualification.

5.9.2 Professional Identity construction

To support student's professional identity formation in the transitioning space of final placement, there needs to be a range of learning opportunities made available. These tasks need to be assessed by the practice educator, in line with professional frameworks such as PCFs (BASW), the professional standards (SWE); there also needs to be evidence of the pragmatic application of social work theories and methods

in practice with an overarching conceptual commitment to social work values. This broad range of expectations for practice learning on placement is a complex task that puts significant demands on educators and students alike. However, the findings of this research, demonstrated that the relationship between the PE and student is one of the most significant factors that supports the positive construction of professional identities. This also acts as a continuing motivation to enter the job market. Therefore, one of the main enablers of professional identity development is the relationship between student and practice educator (Levy et al., 2014; McCulloch, 2021; Vassos et al., 2018; Gulalia, 2014; Roulston et al., 2016; Pithouse and Roscoe, 2018).

5.9.3 Navigating placement relationships

This research corroborates previous research and literature that found the PE and student relationship to be one of the most significant aspects of practice learning for both PE's and students (Beesley, 2022; Yeung et al., 2021; Scragg, 2019; Roulston, 2018). So, we need to examine how students learn on placement and what processes support that alongside the centrality of good relationships. There also needs to be a much-needed improvement and recognition of the importance of practice educators within the statutory sector.

The role of the practice educator appears to be undervalued in the profession, often seen as an add-on to an individual practitioners' main responsibilities, as explored in previous chapters. It was also found, through participant conversations, that practice educators seem burdened with heavy workloads and sometimes a lack recognition from management who might not support a culture of learning during these difficult times (Fearnley, 2022; Williams and Rutter, 2019). These findings show a disconnect

within the profession from education to practice. This disconnect is observed by the participants from classroom pedagogies to practice expectations. This is where the theme of transitioning spaces becomes significant.

5.9.4 Transitioning spaces and values development

The lessons that we can learn from this discussion point us to recognise that there might be a difference in perspectives on the importance of values (and theory) from classroom to practice. This might be exacerbated by the dominant ideologies of managerialism, risk averse practices, the lack of available resources and adequate staffing in services.

To best prepare students for their placements it is important to have robust preparation and readiness for practice sessions which should include reference to professional standards and values. By drawing upon the ideas of Vidal et al. (2015) pedagogues could provide support around threshold concepts by forming a web of conceptions. Teaching in HEIs needs to continue to develop SUC involvement in readiness and other core modules. Students need to be encouraged to engage with difficult and controversial debates as a pedagogical tool, and to have a deeper awareness of radical social work values alongside critical theories.

Values, as explored in previous chapters, can be understood in terms of being a threshold concept which is 'troublesome'. Moving from theoretical classroom concepts to practical application can lead to a perceived dilution of values with diminished importance for some participants. Some participants found ideas of social justice to be a motivator to do good for others, alternatively, others interpreted this transition as a

move from idealistic classroom notions to the realism encountered in practical situations. Compounding this is the troublesome definition of what these values are.

Through analysing the participants experiences it became clear that criticality and values development sit central to classroom pedagogies, whereas practice culture seems more governed by the dominant political processes, agency structures and managerial remits. Disciplinary knowledge may move its focus from theoretical principles to navigating the extensive difficulties of the day to day, impacted by neoliberal discourses, funding cutbacks and the current recruitment and retention crisis (Hall, 2023).

5.9.5 Threshold concept theory

In considering the ideas inherent to threshold concept theory, we can see that student's professional identity construction and development, which requires a transformation of understanding (Meyer and Land, 2006). We can understand that this will be incremental and dependent on the process of transitioning from classroom to practice which will be different for all students. However, in their practice placements they will need to move from simply 'mimicking' the language and behaviours of their practice educator and move through their own liminal space into authenticity and confidence (White et al., 2016 p 53). Appreciating also that this will not be consistent with a set timeline, we can recognise the idea of troublesome characteristics, as proposed by Meyer and Land (2003).

5.9.6 Values: The bigger picture

Here the barriers in practice were discussed and the participants perspectives on the lack of available resources formed part of the bigger picture. There was a sense of deflation from the idealistic teaching in the classroom and the reality of the desecrated practice space. Ultimately this resource restriction harms the end user and therefore the participants felt their values could be compromised.

Hyslop (2018 p 21) argues that as an act of resistance, social work, due to the nature of its concerns and everyday practices could become a 'more powerful voice for social justice'. Acting as a reminder of social works mission, this is something that social work educators could embed into both classroom and practice teaching, in preparation for placements and in PEPS teaching; Perhaps a way to prepare students for the tricky transition, could be through more involvement from service users, carers and practitioners. Also, capitalising on the idea that bringing different year groups together to share experiences, could minimise hearsay about negative placement experiences.

5.9.5 The future

Finally, the bigger picture revealed that although the participants each discussed their observation of barriers in the workplace, such as high workloads and resource restrictions, particularly the resource of time, they all continued to want to pursue a social work career, though not necessarily in statutory services. They observed what was seen as 'deflation' or a 'loss of hope' in some of the workers they encountered, this observation could be interpreted as burn-out in the workforce (Ravalier, 2019; Unison, 2022). The systemic pressures causing low morale were noted and even the Government acknowledge this in 2021 (House of Commons Health and Social Care

Committee, 2021-22). However, the participants language, such as 'ready for the fight' may demonstrate their trepidatious commitment. Some had applied for jobs within their final placement setting, which indicates a commitment to the social work that they had observed and experienced. Two participants were considering applying to work in non-standard settings.

5.10 Limitations of the research

It is not possible for me as a practitioner-researcher to remove my personal preconceptions fully, however I have aimed to set aside any preconceptions during initial analysis and be as reflective and reflexive as possible throughout the data analysis stage (Moustakas,1994). It is considered desirable to bracket off pre-conceptions in qualitative research in general. However, IPA expects that the researcher will play an important role in interpreting the data. I have provided a positionality statement in the introduction chapter to mitigate and declare any potential bias. I have also declared my insider position in one of the HEI's included in the research. For trustworthiness, I have presented many verbatim extracts from the data to back up my interpretations in the findings (Smith et al., 2009; 2022). I have attempted to deliver contextualisation's, with samples of the analysis from transcripts, but this might not always be apparent to the reader. Therefore, it is possible that another researcher might interpret these findings differently (Gyollai, 2020; Alase, 2017; Pringle et al., 2011).

The sample for IPA is purposefully selected and is required to be homogenous. The participants were all studying on MA programmes across the North West of England. They were drawn from four local HEIs. Through the findings it became clear that

although the homogeny of experience existed, there were differences in subjective experiences and understandings. This offered a variety of perspectives, with convergences and divergences, even in a small sample (Tuffour, 2017). However, the sample were self-selecting, and it is possible that because of this the participants were more motivated students. Although it is difficult to mitigate for this, the future research recommendations below could help to broaden the range of participants.

The sample size is small, to comply with IPA conventions. This work involved five participants which is considered within correct range for IPA used in an EdD (Noon, 2018). This means that the findings are not generalisable or predictive. However, learning from the personal narratives and lived experience of others is valued in social work education and practice. I would therefore place value on the impact that this research might have for the future learning of students, educators, and practice educators. The five experiences shared here could help the reader to reflect on their own experiences to develop their own skills, knowledge, and values implicit for good social work practice and education. However, a limitation of the research could be the lack of representativeness in this small sample.

The participants did not declare any identity differences other than male and female and differences in age groupings. No participants openly identified as coming from different ethnic backgrounds. No participants disclosed any specific learning support needs or disabilities. Neither did they discuss their sexual and or gender identities. This lack of diversity could be viewed as problematic. However, this could have been an oversite in the interview schedule, as the questions focused on the research problem and not on gaining specific demographic information. IPA seeks to produce in depth data from a small sample which can offer detailed analysis about the particular, rather than be generalisable (Brocki and Wearden, 2006).

Due to the nature of small-scale research projects, it is beyond their scope to explore a larger range of phenomenon and variables, however the interviews took place prior to the pandemic, which has impacted on student mental health and identity development (Sonuga-Barke and Fearon, 2021; Soria and Horgos, 2021). This was also prior to the increase in international applications nationally. As social work student numbers and identities should reflect the communities within which they work (SWE Report, 2023) future research could consider changing the focus of demographics for participant selection to specifically explore these experiences within diverse groups.

The final section will conclude with recommendations.

5.11 Recommendations for policy

5.11.1 Commitment to invest in the profession

When considering the implications of the findings from this study, all participants discussed their concerns around the workloads of the teams they were placed with and the consequential impacts this had on them as learners. Feeling like a burden was something articulated by Jen. This was not seen in terms of individual workers but more as a systemic problem brought on by funding cuts and staff shortages.

By significantly investing into these services there will be improved access to resource that can support and improve outcomes for those in need. This would also have a positive impact on the morale of the workforce, who the participants felt had lost both 'hope' and 'passion'. Burn-out could be reduced and recruitment and retention would hopefully improve. Finally, all of this could support practice educators to access the precious resource of time, to improve relationships and the quality of their teaching role, not just their assessment of capabilities. The importance of investment cannot be

underestimated as this links to all the key findings in the research, rather like walking through a building that has interconnected doors throughout. Although idealistic, it is an essential requirement to lessen ethic stress and burnout and to improve recruitment and retention, improve the observed limited resource of time and improve professional identity construction and enhance a sense of belonging for both social workers and students alike.

I feel that investment will be a major factor in improving all aspects of the social work experience from entry into training through to recruitment and retention and valuing the profession as an important part of societal needs. With regards to education, the current government have focused funding on some of the newer routes, including apprenticeships, which is a useful route for increasing participation. However, this could be to the detriment of students choosing traditional BA and MA routes into the profession which could cause issues for recruitment onto HE programmes.

5.11.2 Increased recognition and value for the role of Practice Educators

It is suggested through the findings of this research that the role of the PE continues to be undervalued. Both the recent PEPS refresh (BASW, 2022) and regional Teaching Partnerships have made efforts to enhance the status of the PE role. However, it appears that this improvement is not consistently reflected by employers. The individuals involved in this research speak of limited resources and heavy caseloads as persistent challenges for PEs. There needs to be recognition for the complexity of the Practice Educators own transitioning space, from a space that is their daily workplace to a space to include teaching and learning. One of the biggest

resources that the participants discussed in this research, was the resource of time. Practice Educators need to be given protected time to teach and support students.

The PE relationship is implicated throughout the findings of this research as the participants discuss this in detail. This leads to the recommendation that this role is valued and recognised more by HEI's and employers alike. I would also argue that this is central to the literature, the findings and the discussion.

5.11.3 A period of stability from unnecessary reforms

Over the past 15 years there have been many rounds of reviews and reforms to 'improve' social work education and practice (Hanley, 2019; 2022; Munro, 2011; Narey, 2014; Croisdale-Appleby, 2014). Some of these might have been needed, but I would argue that others have been unnecessary. However, it is interesting that the students in this research continue to describe similar experiences, difficulties, issues, and successes that have been identified in previous literature. The implication of this poses an important question. Why has nothing changed for the student practice learning experience? From this research I would like to add to these debates by proposing three points:

1.   That changes do not automatically make improvements and maybe the deficit discourse that has laid the blame for the difficulties in social work, reductively, at the perceived quality of student recruitment and education is not the full picture (reference?)

2.   Perhaps the focus on discussing these perceived deficits has diverted attention from what could genuinely bring about the necessary changes.

3.   Trauma informed approaches. Based on this research it is noted that personal lived experiences affecting mental health (and ND) are highly represented in the social work community, therefore it is a must to steer away from frequent and unnecessary changes and reforms to protect wellbeing and promote diversity and inclusion.

The ideas of ethical stress (Fenton, 2019b) and its impact on professional identity construction reveals a tension within current pedagogical practice. Chen et al (2021) carried out research that looked at work place reforms and resistance to new tasks. They propose a 4-stage model, that concludes, professionals initially rebel against imposed change until they have to adjust and re-construct their identities to match their new understandings of the adapted role.

5.12 Recommendations for Social Work Educators

5.12.1 Application of trauma sensitive pedagogy in classroom and placement environments

When considering the motivations that people have for entering the profession we must draw upon Ash's important story regarding his traumatic childhood and youth. From this research and from the literature, we can understand that there is a high proportion of candidates entering social work programmes who might have had traumatic and difficult past experiences. According to Henshaw (2022) there has been a global increase in traumatic events recently and cites the pandemic and the rise of racial violence as examples. She proposes that HEIs need to recognise how power dynamics are usually associated with trauma and that educators need to be aware of this reality and mitigate these inherent power structures sensitively. Universities are starting to make developments in understanding the need to provide awareness of

trauma sensitive practice and this needs to be a priority in social work programmes (Wheater, 2022). This is something that we need to include in Practice Educator training too. The participants in this research were aware of their power-less positions during placement and found this created a tension.

5.12.2 Considering the significance of transitioning spaces

For both students and Practice Educators, the need to navigate transitioning spaces is a major aspect of the educational process. This can be emphasised by developing the ideas of threshold concept theory in education and practice. Threshold concept theory in education can mean providing scaffolded support for students encountering difficult or unsettling processes, allowing them to pass through their liminal stages into new understanding without pressure, shame, or judgement (Vidal et al., 2015; Wimhurst, 2011; Foote, 2013). Educators need to support joined up preparation for practice learning. As good pedagogical practice, educators can identify troublesome concepts alongside individual learners and support to navigate the liminal spaces that precede stepping over a threshold.

Although only one participant felt under prepared for placement, it is noted as a theme in the literature. It's important to understand the significance of the transition from classroom to placement, from student to practitioner and for Practice Educators the transition of their working space into a teaching and learning space. It is not possible for HEIs to teach specifically to every potential placement setting and all the different approaches to practice in different PVI, Local Authority and health care settings, and

with the various service user groups. However, there are some things that could be considered in support of preparation.

Service user involvement in teaching has been addressed in the discussion chapter, but this was noted as an important conduit for conceptual connections to values. A way to support these troublesome threshold concepts, a joined-up preparation could incorporate webs of conceptions (Vidal et al., 2015). By including service users and carers in readiness to practice session and other skills development session, we can also help develop student knowledge regarding values, confidence, and communication skills.

Encouraging classroom debates can support the development of both communication skills and a deeper more joined up appreciation of values. For example, employing controversial topics we can "… engage individuals in a type of conversation that exposes dominant discourses within social work and what these represent" (Roscoe, 2023 no pp; Fenton, 2022; Fenton, 2019; Rodger and Stewart-Lord, 2020).

Due to this perceived disconnect between classroom and placement, and students concern about challenging on placement or 'feeling like a burden', I would argue for the inclusion of a radical candour framework in both classroom skills teaching and into Practice Educator training (Scott, 2017). This model, which encourages sincere, kind, and honest conversations in the workplace, could enhance the abilities of both PEs and students to enter honest and open dialogue. This could be developed using role plays which prepare students for hypothetical conversations with PEs during placement. Additionally, this could be included in PEPS programmes to support PEs to have courage in facing difficult conversations with their students. The intention being to help students overcome barriers to learning based on their fear of making mistakes.

Having the skills and courage to engage in awkward, difficult, or challenging conversations with kindness, rather than avoid them, is crucial for professional development (Ball, 2012; Scott, 2017).

Overall these recommendations have been developed from engagement with the full content of this work including the findings and the relevant literature: from personal and ideological motivations to go into social work; to ensuring values are developed from entry onto the course throughout the classroom experience; embedding the ideological teaching of values into all programmes; valuing service user involvement; supporting transitions from classroom to placement; support for PEs and enhancement of the recognition for this valuable role and finally supporting the recruitment of newly qualified social workers into the workforce. Overall, a key requirement for all of this, is improved dedicated investment into the profession.

5.13 Recommendations for Future Research

I would recommend the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Research (IPA) in future social work and education research (Noon, 2018). Its idiographic approach aligns with social work values and the approach centres the voice of participants in a meaningful way. Although the approach is time consuming and detailed, it respects the time given by the participants by fully engaging in their words. The choice of research topic is important when using IPA and I feel it would be well suited to research with service users, carers, students, and educators alike.

I would recommend a change of population to advance on this research and broaden the knowledge regarding student experience. It would also triangulate findings with

other key stakeholders such as Practice Educators who hold an important role in the education of social work students. The list provided here is not exhaustive.

1. Repeating this work using IPA with practice educators.

2. Repeating this IPA with struggling and/or failing students

3. Looking at different and specific demographics, eg. Students with disabilities including hidden disabilities such as mental health and neurodivergence, global majority and international students, students identifying as LGBTQ+

4. Looking at researching the attitudes of social work employers regarding the role of practice educators and supporting the training and development of students.

5. A longitudinal approach to the research problem, for example comparing first and second placement experience of the same participants, or revisiting participants a year after qualifying.

The participants in this study went on to pass their placements. It would be interesting to do further research using IPA to explore the experiences of struggling and failing students to enhance our knowledge of this small but important cohort of trainees (Finch and Taylor, 2012; Roulson et al., 2022).

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Appendices:

Appendix A

Interview Questions.

1.   Could you share with me your motivations for going into social work?

2.   What attracted you to the particular programme you chose?

3.   How do you understand social work values, particularly around social justice?

4.   Thinking about your professional education, how did the teaching and learning develop your understandings? (prompt..can you give an example of something that stood out for you?

5. In what ways did these understandings develop or change whilst you neared the end of your practice placement work? (prompt how did they translate into the workplace? Can you give me any examples of this?)

Appendix B

Information and consent sheet example.

LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Title of research project: Are Social Work Values Valued? An Exploration of pre and post qualifying social work students understanding of social work values. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of how understandings are shaped by educational experiences and enacted in practice during troubled times.

Name of researcher: Nicki Blundell

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet
for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes | No

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes | No

I agree to take part in this research project and for the anonymised
data to be used as the researcher sees fit, including publication.

Yes | No

Name of participant:

Signature:

Date:

interview will appear in the research findings. You can telephone or email the researcher to withdraw.

How will you ensure that my contribution is anonymous?
You will be assigned a pseudonym throughout the research. You will not be identified to specific education establishments as you will just be identified as MA or Alternative route student. All data will be stored on password protected devices. Your confidentiality will be assured

Please note that your confidentiality and anonymity cannot be assured if, during the research, it comes to light that you are involved in illegal or harmful behaviours that I may need to disclose to the appropriate authorities.

LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

Outline of the research This research will explore values with pre and post qualifying social work students during troubled times using an IPA methodology.

Who is the researcher?

Name: Nicki Blundell

Institution: Liverpool Hope University

Researcher's University email address: blunden@hope.ac.uk

What will my participation in the research involve?

You will be interviewed in a one to one situation. During the interview, which will last about 40 minutes, there will be an opportunity to discuss your experiences of choosing to go into social work, your educational experiences around values and your experiences in practice.

Will there be any benefits to me to taking part?
You will have contributed to a research project that may have significance for your profession as the findings will be shared with practitioners, managers, educational leaders, lecturers and service users. As SW is a reflexive and challenging profession, you can use the time to reflect on professional issues that can enhance your personal and professional development and understanding of social work values.

Will there be any risks to me in taking part?
There should be minimal risk of you taking part.

What happens if I decide that I don't want to take part during the actual research study, or decide that the information given should not be used?
If you decide you no longer wish to take part you can withdraw at any time without prejudice. If you do not wish your interview content to be used in the research this can also be withdrawn and deleted at any time at your request and none of the

Appendix C Data analysis

Finding Personal Experiential Themes

The image shows a photographed page of interview transcript analysis with three columns: left margin notes (emergent themes), centre numbered transcript lines (19-41), and right margin notes (exploratory comments). Readable content includes:

Left margin notes:
- Beneficial impact for society and people
- Interview process influenced choice. Generic route.

Centre transcript (lines 19-41):

19 'cause I think I saw it as something that I felt I would have been
20 good at and would be rewarding and would have a sort of
21 beneficial impact.
22 Yeah, so beneficial for...?
23 Oh, beneficial for, in terms of society and working with people, I
24 think that I felt, because as much as I was happy doing the
25 administrative role, I felt like I wanted to challenge myself more in
26 a way that I was working more directly and building relationships
27 with people, rather than being office based.
28 Okay, that's brilliant, so leading on from that, what was it that
29 attracted you to the particular route that you chose, obviously
30 it was a Masters course at XXX, so...?
31 Well, I think I knew that I wanted to stay in Liverpool because
32 that's, you know, where I'd sort of settled and I applied for John
33 Moores and Hope and I guess it was from going to the interviews
34 at both universities, I got a sense [inaudible 0:02:46] at Hope, the
35 way the interview process was done I thought was really good and
36 the focus on social justice was apparent at Hope and then I guess
37 in comparison, I had considered the Step Up To Social Work route
38 as well, but I think for me, I didn't necessarily at that time want to
39 restrict myself to children and families social work, which Step Up
40 seemed to do, like, the others I felt like, one of the appeals of
41 social work was the versatility and the fact that you could go down

Right margin notes:
- Challenge self by working directly with people and building relationships.
- Not wanting to be office based any more.
- Belonging in North west... settled.
- Applied for 2 local HEI's
- Interview process influenced her decision.
- Rejected step-up as this limits to children and families.
- Liked the versatility of the generic masters.

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Values development   *Values allignment*   *Values in Action*
'formation'   ①   *ASH*

Participant 1. ASH Emerging themes.	Potential master themes? Superordinate	Sub themes Subordinate	Evidence from the data.
1. Childhood experiences	Values development *Early Years*	Abuse Single parent family Working class, living in poverty	"..my own childhood experiences relating to, there was abuse when I was younger, there was also, my Dad had left which had a significant effect on my life and my blueprint for life was all distorted from a young age" (Pg1 para1.) "..although I love my Mum to bits, she did the best she can, she was a single parent at the time, through the Thatcher years, so we were literally poor, impoverished"(ibid) "...of us feeling less than, and not good enough....they were beliefs that I took on and they became part of my identity" P1 Pa1
2. Life experiences	Values development *early years adult years*	Experience of addiction and criminal justice system. 30's I had an awakening Accessed rehab Reservations leading to relapse and prison.	"my life took a chaotic turn, where I went to addiction for many years" (P1 pa1) "it didn't have to be that way, so fast forward kind of, to the age of 30, when my life was virtually destroyed and everything fell apart, I knew when I had sort of an awakening" (P1Pa2) " I'd become hidden, I was ashamed of who I was.......my identity got lost at age10,11 years...so recovery for me is about unpicking all that stuff and trying to find out who I am..." (p2-3) "It was, we describe it in recovery as the jumping off point, so it was like suicide was the option, I wanted to die but I didn't want to die, but I didn't want to live, does that make sense and it was like kind of that pivotal moment where I can either sink or swim here, you know and do something" (P2 Pa4)

Interpretations of Ash's sense making. (hermeneutic cycle)

Timeline (connecting the past to the present)

Ash spoke at length about their childhood experience as a motivator as "the driving force that led me into social work, was kind of that need to help others". They made sense of their traumatic past by using the experience as a motivator for their SW career.

Later traumatic experiences are animatedly discussed as an important formative experience where they could have gone one way or another. Ash demonstrated a resilience and a drive to better themselves.

Ash uses lived experience (experiential and existential) to conclude that their motivation to become a social worker, to follow their value driven understandings of the world to want to help make changes for others.

Their statement about "less than..not good enough" seems implicit in the need to improve themselves, they use the term " awakening" as a "pivotal moment" that brings all this together.

Ash has self-awareness in their sense making around addiction and mental health. They externalise their addiction as 'other' "'cause see, my addiction was cunning and baffling in a sense..I worked...so that helped me with my denial of I'm not that bad, because I wasn't robbing, I wasn't going out stealing....so I functioned, but i functioned to a level that was, it was unsustainable" " my mental health was really significantly affected"

Ash journeys deeply into this time in their lives, as a learning experience

Values (The phenomena of interest)

From the start of the interview Ash is clear about their value position politically (person-in-the world...ref)

Ash makes connections via Class and poverty in the UK to make sense of their own childhood experiences.

Power (by turn powerlessness) is central to their understanding of self and others. Ash has 'lived' this theme, both in the past and in the present.

Ash states that they wanted to go into social work, but were informed that they wouldn't be able to with the criminal conviction at the time. "my life started to change...I wanted to go in for social work (no chance) I applied for psychology, more to gain an understanding of me and how we function as humans" without losing the focus to do social work and also enhancing their value position that "...we can change.."

Challenging power appears as a subtheme. Ash experienced a validation and a clarity of their values at Uni "what I got from Uni is I can fight for people, I can challenge stuff, do you know what I mean?" One module in particular "...that was really informative for me, because it was outside people giving their view of particular topics and dilemas

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that were going on in social work...I love it , I do love it... another event at uni "..that was something that really informed me of the importance of social justice and being able to fight for the more marginalised, do you know what I mean..."

Ash mentions learning about the dilemmas going on in society at Uni and says "...but one thing that's evident right the way through that is we (working class/social workers?)take the brunt of it and it's up to us to try and challenge that" Ash 's strong identification as a previous "service user" and as working class is strong.

Language

Throughout Ash's talking, they use phrases such as "do you know what I mean?" " If that makes sense?" " You know?"

Seeking affirmation/validation of their thoughts? A confidence on one level, but an uncertainty, a questioning of their own understanding on an other.

A sense of shame? Example.....

Ash uses words that reveal a need to be accepted "I'd become everything for everyone else, to like me, to love me, to want me, to need me, do you know what I mean..?"

The term, "by the age of 30" repeats

Transformative learning from teaching.	180 things like that, which I'd completely undervalued and just 181 thought, I don't know, like, I just thought she was heightening it, 182 when really she was probably experiencing it how many other 183 people did and I don't think I really appreciated how important 184 things like identity and a strong attachment and things like that 185 are. 186 I probably was a bit dismissive about that, so that's kind of, in 187 terms of values, I think recognising, even though I probably didn't 188 see it as important, again, 'cause I had it already and I think 189 understanding that, you can't just assume, like, everyone else 190 feels the same way about their own identity and that's something 191 I didn't really appreciate and it has come up quite a lot, obviously, 192 in terms of, like, you know, children in care, things like that and I 193 think that's the bit that really hit me and I was like, I hadn't really 194 thought about that too much before. 195 **That's really interesting, hearing about your Mum and being** 196 **adopted, has anything changed in your relationship from** 197 **your developed knowledge?** 198 I don't know. I think it is just more of a kind of, 'cause it is 199 something she speaks about quite a lot still and I think it's more 200 just I've had more time for it and I've been able to kind of ask more questions that maybe I probably hadn't even considered before, so I feel like I understand her a bit better. I don't think it's	Jen doesn't understand values and gives an example of a theory in social work explaining that she 'hasn't thought about it before' This begins to make sense as she goes on to then offer a really good example of how her values have developed due to the course and attachment theory....regarding her Mums experience of being adopted. More understanding of her mums position a gem ?

Page ② Green highlight strong aiste for
passion to help — Altruistic.

A prompt from researcher about resilience
suicide was an option. gave his addiction a separate personality
Called it 'cunning' + baffling.

Page ③ experience of SServices DAT team
Identity got lost
at age 10
a'd became
hidden because I
was ashamed of who
a was.

Values —
Page ⑧ — Worked as a SU advisor in Heath
did psychology
applied for SW — got rejected by a HEi
because previous
Page ⑨ → but one HEi had values
in what they were teaching
+ believed in change →
redemption

Education Quote on page ⑪
page ⑱ Quote enthusiastic about
The teaching / speaker
+ external discussin dilemmas.

Placement example of a challenge
serviceuser had broken down Ash Thinks he observed workers
a placement opting for the wrong STO
fostering as a cost saving excercise
because they'd get additional
I don't know if its just the support if not on a STO
pressure people are under
(SU's) everyone is in Their own struggle
and people forget what we're
(SU's) actually there
Trying to do —

Page ⑬ Quote

Appendix D

Cross Case Analysis examples

Negotiating power hierarchies.

loss of hope in SW reams

Challenging — fear (fail)
            — lack of confidence
            — could be wrong.
Bureaucratisation.
            — lack of resources. sve

→ Doing a good job for

Commitment to becoming a social worker
need to continue to work   Joy   sve   Ash
Money Concerns.
Bursaries

conflict d values.

All in
Power dilemmas.
    lack of experience is an issue
    confidence?   power?

Previous experience — own
Job (fulfilling Jen)   — family members.
Jim   Ash

International.
Jen   Sue

BURDEN

Connecting past to present   All —

Past
        Jen Money —
        considering the
Values   The Wider picture — sve
Jim — SW trainees should have SW values before going into
Joy — SW values should are common sense   education
                    should come naturally.   — shouldn't need to
                                                be taught?

Feeling naive/inexperienced
as a barrier Jen

Jen Thinks
    SW's "lose hope for big change"
                Students as teachers   Doing Right for others
                            Jen   1. Being good at the
Placement   job.

Connecting The present to   Jen feeling deflated about what she observed
The future.   and worried That was what she was going
                                                                to become

Theories might
oven up in The
discussion + relate
to The finding to.
That top down

Seeing Things
differently Through
different points of view.
(do we need to do Things
differently)

How safe is it for me
to sneak out? Jen

experience of an encounter with an
                        event

Sue

What influences her thinking + decisions

Challenge to person Centred values — trusting SU's. experienced SW don't always see it that way.

Inexperience pg 12

non-judgmental —

No space for reflection except at home.
"Can't just close the door + not think about it"

Good definition of Values pg 3-4

Bigger picture

Time constraints

Limited resources

acutured Closing Cases.

Sue makes links to being taught values (espoused) + how They should inform decision making. especially where There are conflicts.

part of The enacted Advocating for people to get what They are entitled to.

SW Admin

Specific about a specific topic (MI) its hard to know how you would practice, having never been on placement

— Sue feels that conflicted between The need to learn in The classroom but not fully understanding till placement. However she notes that "There's so much that you could still learn" its hard to fit it all in"

Impacted online world.

Present to future

Sue feels supported by a good PE who is criticised by Management for going above + beyond.

Able to go above + beyond

How students can see teaching as preparing for placement + not placement as 'core teaching' skill. (NB)

felt The priviledge that placement afforded her the time to engage — where The SW's had to rush through — not given enough time for families. Admin.

injustice

Humbled by the haves + have nots

Human Rights [box]

right to equality

Values [box]

Person Gabriel discipline [box] — Pg 14.

Experienced the dominance of the Medical Model

More Than others

Social justice [box]

Passion for ↗

"to have their rights met" pg 4

difficulty (long) accessing) waits

GP's giving Meds.

"You don't get drawn into SW without having underpinning values are offered the opportunity ensure that people are offered the opportunity to have social justice + rights — pg 3.

Advocating for people [box]

"everywhere is being squeezed" its political
Funding
CUTS. pg 13

Limited Resources [box]

Focus is on Meds.

PERSON CENTRED [box]

— Jim is service user led!

difficult — should have Them Anyone
Common sense — who said This?

Challenges
SW Values [box]

Brought up with Them — C

teaching values [box]

can be taught

how can be a SW but not values? pg 5.

Jim's views of values is mixed with ideas of "Good Manners"?

But he states respect as impacted.

He has learned about discrimination + oppression Though

Relatives leaving values
only happens when you start placement pg 7 would over recovery?

Labelling Theory [box]

Jim has concerns about how if labels become people identity — how push Them breakdown in The future

Has confidence [oval]

(new identity positives say negatives & U.s identity first not person first)

Jen Themes –

Valves   [Seeing The bigger Picture]

The environment
people exist in.

"not judging
people
by their choices.   – Putting it simply.
its perhaps
considering someones
environment as well
—

"different reasons why
people make certain choices
or certain decisions, and obviously
a lot comes with, to say non-judgemental
is a bit too simplistic."

SW is about
"not everyone has the
same opportunities in life, not
everyone has this and we're
doing what we can to hopefully
make opportunities as kind of
reachable as possible …"

Considering other factors.

observing Jens
Sense Making
develop +
expand from
"its simple"
to a more
nuanced
position
was
lovely.

"You realise kind of, not saying
that other people are 'blinded' to it
but 'cause you're so aware of it in
this role, I think just not seeing things
so simply is a big part of it, seeing the
bigger picture …"

Jen discusses how problems are
seen quite simplistically

Solutions to problems
What support networks are
available to individuals
Access finding [Money]
resources.

[Comparisons self + others]
She see's herself as 'independant'

Developed an awareness of
differences es regarding support
networks – not something
she relies on

"Something I didn't really value myself as much"

teaching Values is   idealistic + unrealistic once you
get to placement

It hasn't prepared you

However
(connection)

[Disconnect between
Teaching + placement
experience]

Jen makes sudden links to
How her relationship with a
family member improved, after
she had learned (in uni) about
a SW Theory – (page 9 –)

When she
shared it
became a
learning moment

Wants to be taught the practicalities
over the values.

JEN discusses differing
attitudes in the team + her
struggle to deal with what she
interpreted as judgmental.

[fear]

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Joy — LA

Children's permanence team

- Cost of uni was a problem
- Already a change maker in her clarity of job → motivation was personal development + to get job security + better pay.
- Joy had the most differences

Finds Values & Social justice difficult to define — it's subjective? Values &

- Aligns with literature about context
- She has little time for this & should be already anxious → Naive

Joy had concerns about selection due to the process & some class members (p.5)

- needs to be embedded — needs to be thought about it
- Can be developed through teaching
- I feel shouldn't need to be thought about it
- "It's woven through the course"

COMMON SENSE | It comes naturally for many people
- relying 5 we — people have fair disagreement
- Example of a classroom disagreement during a debate
- "people within a uni" "course site"

Budget cuts → Safekeeping
- Minimum of [welfare + children + sw] result in deaths

→ Personal experience
) from having a fall contact anything

Placement has been a good experience
Good support from PE who helps explain Thresholds + respects values

→ This
- Joy has strong emotional abuts this
- feels a sense of injustice

Lack of staff
- No support centred practical
- Withdrawing support too soon

- Joy discusses how she witnessed racism in a case where children were removed from an African family with a white family
- She understands that form of discipline is unacceptable but think education is the answer. Parenting courses
- Room for healthy challenge as a route to learning

when arriving on placement a crossover with previous student who didn't want to be

Present to future
- Conflict over what you [me sw wants and what Management want]

retention
- Caying at fw sw
- Burnout — shern high case load
- Consultancy to wait a social works

- applied for job with her placement team

- Connects lack of resources to this heavy headed approach

Placements — PE's — role Models who
Relationships. for ...

time (resources)   Burden   Bigger Picture

    Les Values
    ethics
    modules
Classroom
education
doing right
for others   Values — Managers/Senior

                  Barriers
                     |
                  Time/resources

handed things
                                                              Make a
people   difference
from
the field
Service   learn how   needing
User   debates   challenging
Seniors   Motivations — The support
                                                              I didn't
                                                              act

        equality of   Rewarding.
        access   Become a   to learn
                        SW   in SW
                         | I have
                      Committed.   The skills

Students said   was   All students
learning about Values ~~took~~ an Overt + Covert   =   experience
                                                     | Equality
                              ~~Specifically~~   Threaded
undisclosed in different   Across -   Through.
             ways   and specific
                               Modules

Placements — More focused on Relationships as a primary feature.

        - Secondary - The lack of resources. — inc staff
                      including Time.

withering
        - loss of hope / deflation.

~~Positive~~   Same issues over 15 years of research

                      reviews / reforms - Have they helped?
                                        - Have they been stuck to?
3/   332   61?
                                                       556
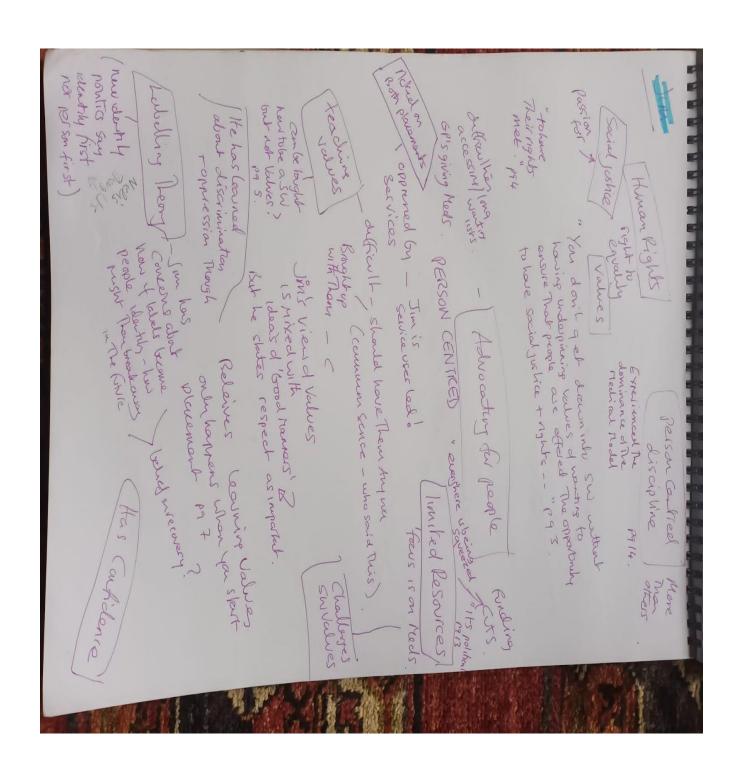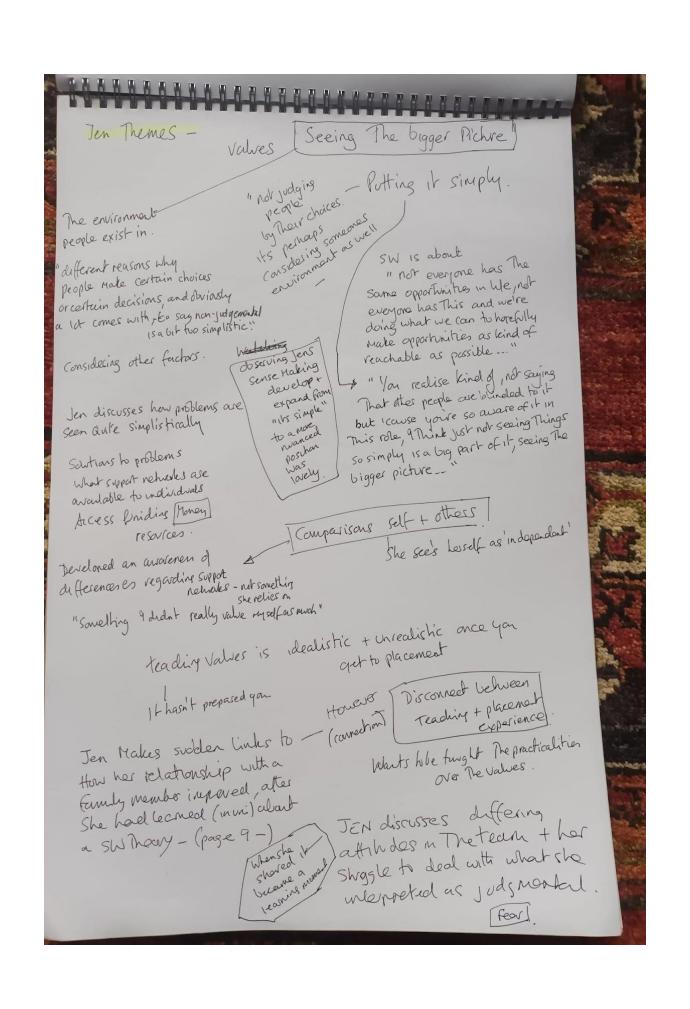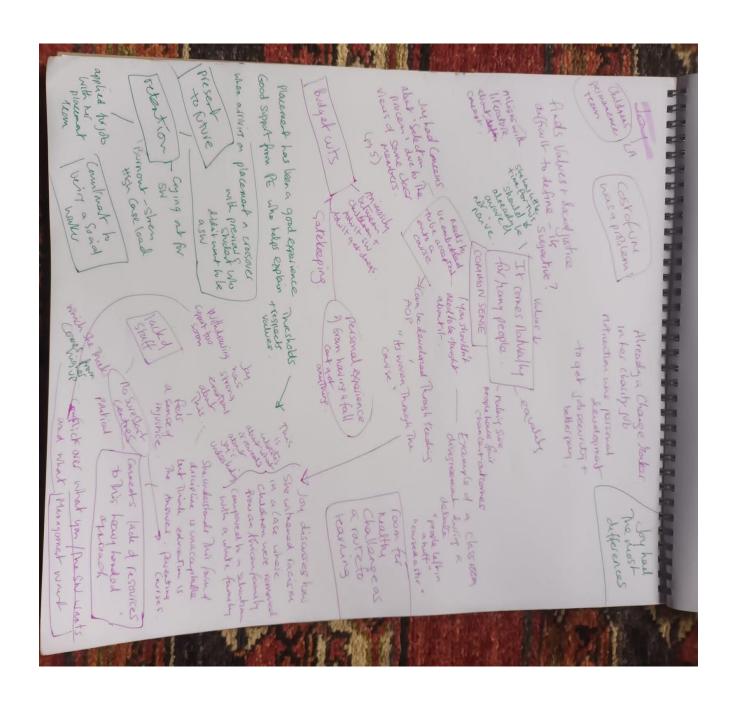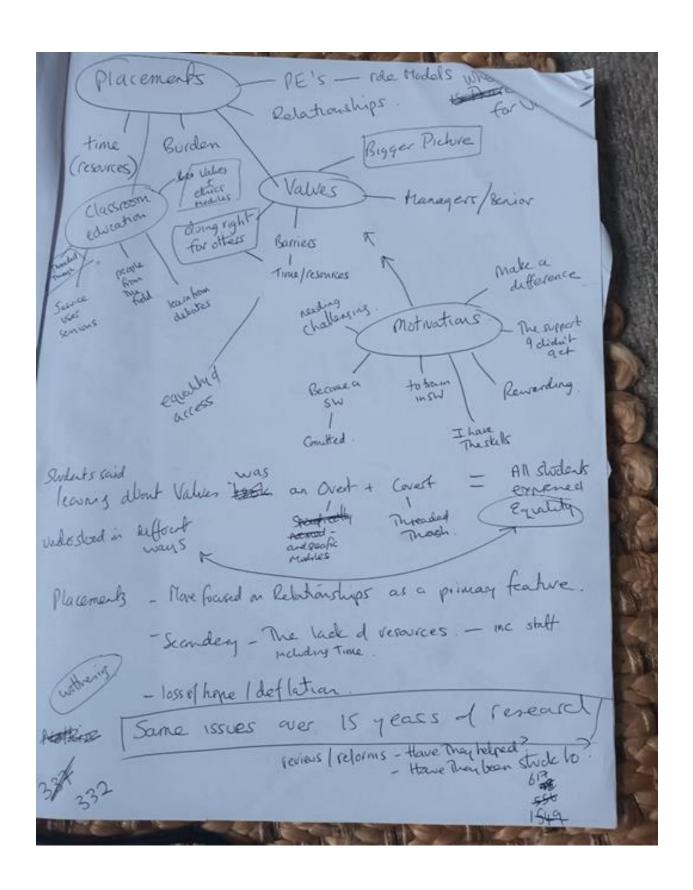   1549

Appendix E

The table below illustrates the Group Experiential Themes (GET's) based on the cross-case analysis of the Personal Experiential Themes (PET's) extracted from each idiographic hermeneutic cycle on a case by case basis. Evidence for each theme and the convergences and divergences therein are based on direct quotes from participants, forming 5 main themes.

Group Experiential Themes (GET's)

Group Experiential Themes (GET's)
GET 1. Connecting Past to Present
1.a. Childhood and family influences
Joy: "Again, I think I just seemed to be meeting people all along the way that all seemed to be social workers, it was like someone was holding a flashing sign up to me, like just go and do it!" **Ash:** "I had this realisation now, you know, my life could have been a lot different if there would have been a little bit more intervention or a little bit more support for me, maybe it wouldn't have, maybe it would have, I don't know but that was the driving force that led me into social work" **Jen:** "..I didn't mention it before, about why I got into it, but my Mums also adopted…."
1.b. Practical experiences and hidden passions for 'social worky roles'
Jen: "It wasn't a really a set thing. My previous job, it was kind of an analytical office job and it was something I'm quite good at, but it just wasn't fulfilling…" Sue: " I think my previous experience and what felt like were my strengths that I'd sort of developed up until that route fitted with the social work role, and that motivated me as well 'cause I think I saw it as something that I would have been good at and would be rewarding and would have a sort of beneficial impact". Jim: "..my previous experience working in various settings and working with that client group (disabilities), I felt that, you know, social work was more me really, a bit broader, a bit more looking at more of the , not just say the psychological aspects of someone but the sociological impact, can have on peoples mental health and well being"
GET 2. Values development in transitioning spaces
2a. Shouldn't values already be ingrained or I've always been a people person?

Joy: "I get that those feelings need to be developed through teaching and theory, but wanting everyone to be treated the same and working in an anti-oppressive way should be something that is already there for someone that wants to do a course like that.."

Sue: Social Work Values I suppose are, you know, there's a baseline of what are standard social work values, which is why people choose to go into social work, maybe like the values of social justice, social change, right to self-determination…"

Ash: "The honest truth is… I didn't know life, I couldn't deal with life, so that's in a nutshell, why I'm driven to help others, if you know what I mean, because of the impact my younger years had on me on the rest of my life".

Jim: "I think it's a very difficult thing to learn in an academic environment, I think its something that you're brought up with. I think you're influenced by significant others from childhood, and I think there's certain values that you get brought, that are in you are from your other experiences".

Jen: "I've always been a people person…"

2b. Values, can you teach that?

Jim: " Well I mean you can talk about the teaching of values but I think you bring the values yourself into this environment, you know, you don't get drawn to social work without having underpinning values of wanting to ensure that people are offered the opportunity to have social justice and rights…"

Ash: "One thing I love about Uni is it gives that ability to critically analyse and look at stuff, and not just take things as, for me, this is what I have taken a lot from the course, is don't just see things as given or evaluated, critically analyse it."

Jen: " I do think the teaching is very idealistic and I don't think that's bad though…but when you're in placement, your obviously like, you know, that's not really how it should be, that's how its not taught and a few people have commented on how, like, yeah, its not realistic, it hasn't prepared you for it.."

Joy: " You shouldn't need to be taught about it in my opinion." " ..I think for a lot of people, its not necessarily something that you think about, its just something that comes naturally and a lot of it is just stuff that is common sense.."

Sue: " I felt like the modules that we were taking, there was an emphasis on values and I know that one of the ones I chose last year was about social work ethics which tied into values….as well and the kind of, looking at values and the conflicts that can exist, you know, when were having to sort of make decisions, I guess"

GET 3: Values: The bigger Picture. Doing right for others

Sue: " So I guess what it means for me is I think that its considering the wider picture and the environment people are in, not seeing it as individual problems as always, but as wider social problems.."

Ash: " what I got from Uni is I can fight for people, I can challenge stuff.." "..that was something that really informed me of the importance of social justice and being able to fight for the more marginalised.."

Jen: ".. I think just not seeing things so simply is a big part of it, seeing the bigger picture, thinking about the environmental factors, thinking about the different reasons why people make certain choices, certain decisions…"

Jim: " Well I think with me its all about application, its about giving that person at the centre an opportunity to have a voice really".

Joy: " So yeah, I mean, I suppose to me social justice is equality and making sure that people have the same chances and are treated fairly…"

3b. Challenges to doing it right.

Sue: "I think that I mean, I guess we're in an environment now where there's limited like resources and a lot of people are being impacted, you know, because of like benefits cuts and sanctions.."

Jen: "..your not there to change the world, just do what's in your kind of remit and so you are kind of belittling your skills and belittling your abilities before you even go in…"

Ash: " In the economic uncertainty we're in and all kinds of stuff that's going on at the moment, where you know, everything is getting pulled, everyone's trying to, to me, everyone is trying to cut money everywhere, so its very important as a social worker to be able to challenge".

Jim: " yeah, there's a slight conflict between some of the nurses…..they are slightly resentful towards the way that social workers maybe don't take on the same responsibilities as nurses…"

Joy: "..its about resources as well again and having conflicted values on what you want as a student or as a social worker and then what the management want you to, trying to be, get someone else to do and I think, you know, pulling the rug from under people quickly is not good."

Joy: "Yeah, I think the way forward is just to fail Ofsted and then they give you loads of money. [Laughs]."

GET 4: Feeling like a burden: Navigating Relationships.

4a. How safe is it for me to challenge?

Jen: "..you just want to fit in, and you just want to, you don't want to be a burden, cause you already feel a bit like one when you are asking people questions and sometimes having to ask it a couple of times 'cause you can't remember , and you don't want to add to that….I don't want to disrupt the team really. I just want to keep the peace…"

Ash: "Do you know, on placements, its quite difficult, especially as a student, you're quite restricted in your ability to challenge as well, but I have challenged even on placement.."

Sue: "I've been really lucky, 'cause I've got a really good practice educator, who I feel has got the same values as me…"

Jim: Outlier as he doesn't discuss 'being a student' he discusses power hierarchies in an NHS setting between LA social model and medical model.

Joy: "..I've been really lucky and practice educator is really good and we're on the same wavelength so when I 'haven't' had any conflicting values and especially things around thresholds is what I struggle with a lot, I've been able to discuss it openly with her for the most part..."

GET 5: Connecting present to the future
5a. Witnessing feelings of deflation/feeling deflated.

Jen: " I think maybe they just kind of lose hope for big change and those kind of high hopes and ideal scenarios do just dwindle over time 'cause the reality of them is so slim, I think just lose hope I suppose." "..That was a point, quite early on , I did go home and felt really deflated, 'cause I was thinking, like, is that what I am going to turn into and I really don't want to.."

Sue: " I think that it is difficult times we're in and I think, I suppose if social workers are under more pressure, it can take away from being able to do the job that they want to do, which is a sad thing really"

Ash: "..I listen to people and you don't hear the passion in peoples voices anymore about social work, its almost become just a chore to do the work that you are trying to do, and that's because more of the values getting lost in paperwork, the values getting lost in risk…"

Joy: "Maybe that's because we're crying out for social workers so much, 'cause people do leave the profession so quickly, maybe that's almost hidden a little bit, because they don't want to put people off straight away, 'cause they need us."

Jim: "I've experienced that on my two placements…people maybe finding difficulty accessing mental health services…there may be a two years waiting list to get CBT, you know, there's no sort of like really easy way into getting access to mental health services at primary level and the same with social support as well really".

5b. Feeling optimistic (ready for the fight)?

Sue: "..I'm quite optimistic, so I just don't like to think that things are going to get worse, but you just don't know do you?"

Jim: "So, I found that I was able to advocate for people and to provide them with a platform on which they could move on with their own lives and Ive done the same as well in the place(ment) I am now.."

Ash: " Ive loved the experience of the LA eventually, but honestly, I can't believe how much I am dead against privatisation, yet find myself actually quite attracted to a private company because their values of being child focussed.."

Jen: "..I know I'm not going to change everything, but, and it gives me hope to be like, you know I said, like I don't want to be like that, I kind of really, really, really want to try and not be like that and not be cynical…"

Joy: about a social worker in a team "..she was coming in at half six in the morning and logging in at 6pm, she was working 15 hours, just to make sure that she looked good, which I might end up doing (*when I get the job in this team*) because you do want people to think that you are good at your job"

Appendix F

'Found Poem' about Jim

"How have you experienced the teaching and learning around values?"

Social work for me is a bit of a magpie

Because I've brought ALL that experience!

I've worked in adults, children inpatient units

           And you know……

"Your personal experience of the teaching and learning, how do you see that?"

Four weeks from boxing off that final portfolio

Then I'll PASS as qualified.

The clue is in the title.. social worker

           And you know…….

"How do you feel you were taught about values?"

I have learned about social justice.

In the classroom…I think I've learned

Some of that stuff

           And you know……..

"How do you feel you learned about values?"

 It gets frustrating the amount of labels

Labelling mentality

They're stuck with them

And you know…….

"Obviously you are in there, working, but you're also observing...?"

I walk into a placement and the first thing I think

What do YOU call the people WE support?

These are people, they're a person you support

AND YOU KNOW….

Appendix G

Confirmation of permission from Hanley.

Joe.Hanley <joe.hanley@open.ac.uk>

Mon, 2 Oct 2023, 11:39

to me

Hi Nicki,

Great to hear from you. Apologies for the delayed response, I have been on leave.

You can definitely use that adapted table with credit given. Great to hear it has been useful.

I hope the EdD is going well, I have just recently submitted my own EdD thesis, Viva defence next month!

Best of luck with it

Joe