

Student Supervision in Social Work  
Practice Placements – content and  
experiences

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Student Supervision in Social Work  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the content and activities of student social work placement supervision, complemented by student and Practice Educator (PE) views and experiences of placement supervision. Whilst the pedagogical importance of student placement supervision is consistently promoted within the practice learning literature, the focus on the fine detail and content of supervision is an underresearched area of practice. Data was gathered using ethnographic methods (audio recording of supervision sessions) and via semi structured interviews, and some documentary data (supervision records) was also collected and analysed. Eleven student and PE dyads submitted audio recordings of 30 supervision sessions undertaken during 100 day final student placements (2 or 3 audio recordings from each dyad), equating to 30 hours of audio recorded supervision time, and each audio recorded session was fully transcribed. A qualitative approach to analysing the supervision audio recordings was taken, using Ethnographic Content Analysis (Altheide, 1987). A bespoke Coding Frame was developed to code topic coverage and the content and activities of supervision. After placement completion, semi structured interviews were undertaken with students and PEs from the same dyads, to explore student and PE experiences of their placement supervision.

Whilst findings indicated that discussion of 'case work' (the student's direct work with service users) framed supervision sessions and could thus suggest the 'managerial capture' of supervision, the analysis within the thesis promotes the construct and possibility of 'case work' as 'gateway' for wider dialogue, theoretical deliberations and discussion. Analysis of student and PE interviews complement these findings and indicate that the quality of the student and PE relationship is pivotal for the promotion of such dialogue, and a key contributor to student learning. The thesis concludes that to enact and facilitate this 'gateway', the educative repurposing of student placement supervision is required; the PE role in the facilitation of student learning has to be actively promoted and the enabling and facilitative function of the PE

role be purposefully aligned with the content and process of student supervision. Specific suggestions and considerations for future PE training are made regarding this required enhanced pedagogical focus within student supervision.

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction and rationale for the study**

### 1.1 The Research question and objectives

This study considers student supervision in social work practice placements - both the content of supervision and student and Practice Educator experiences of supervision. The original research question and objectives are:

What are the characteristics and contribution of supervision to student learning within the social work practice placement?

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. to identify the elements of the content and activities of supervision between student and Practice Educator (PE) during the student final placement (full time placement of 100 day, approximately 6 months' duration).
2. to explore student and PE views and experiences of supervision and the supervisory process within the placement in relation to the effectiveness of supervision in facilitating student learning within the practice placement.

The initial objectives included two further objectives: to evaluate the contribution of supervision to the practice assessment of social work students on placement, from the perspectives of the PE and the student, and also to evaluate the contribution of supervision to student perception of preparedness for qualified practice after degree completion. Whilst these further research objectives facilitated a wide foray into the research and knowledge base of practice education, as the study progressed it became apparent that a narrowing of focus was required if the original impetus for the study was to be maintained. The contribution of supervision to the assessment of the student and a question about preparedness for qualified practice remained within the student and PE interview schedules, but the

focus on the content of supervision and exploring supervisory experiences and learning (encapsulated within the title of this thesis) was reasserted as the main focus of the thesis.

## 1.2 My journey

The study was undertaken on a part time basis and began in January 2015, during which time I worked as a full time Senior Lecturer in Social Work, initially with some responsibility for student placements and the training and support of Practice Educators.

Prior to starting this PhD, I had been a Lecturer /Senior Lecturer since 2006, initially on a part time basis. I qualified as a social worker in 1993 (CQSW) and held social worker posts in children and families social work, mainly working with adolescents and care leavers, for 11 years before taking up a post as a Training and Development Officer in 2004. Whilst practicing as a social worker, I completed the Child Care Award (2004) and the Practice Teacher Award (2001) and was a Practice Educator for a number of students. My first post in academia in 2006 was part time and for 2.5 years I also held a part time post as Practice Learning Development Manager for a national voluntary agency, sourcing, developing and supporting student placements, alongside a nationwide developmental role. Prior to starting the PhD I undertook a part time Masters in Research (2011- 2013), completing a dissertation entitled 'Practice Educators and the facilitation of student learning on placement'. That study explored how Practice Educators (PEs) of social work students understood their role in the facilitation of student learning on placement and how they conceptualised the 'teaching' element of their role. This was a small study involving 13 PEs and as the method of data collection, I held three homogeneous focus groups each comprising of PEs with similar levels of experience in the role.

The impetus for this PhD came from a number of sources, not least my role and experiences as a Practice Educator and supporting students on placement. Whilst I was a PE in a statutory setting (in a Leaving Care team)



working with careleavers aged 16-25 amidst the more formalised (and planned, regulated and tallied) support into independence required by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, a placement within the team still allowed for indepth, long term work that required and incorporated relationship building skills. Working with many vulnerable young people, often living in insecure, risky situations and facing numerous and often acute challenges, the work allowed students to experience the worth and necessity of building boundaried but trusting, reliable relationships over a period of time, whilst using essential social work skills of assessment, analysis and risk management and attending to safeguarding issues. Whilst there were 'targets' and 'assessments' (forms) to be achieved or completed (the Quality Protects Programme initiated in 1998 in particular comes to mind) being a PE in this setting required, and allowed, theoretical discussions of marginalisation, isolation, poverty, discrimination, stereotyping, abuse, substance misuse, and the impact of psycho social issues and personal social histories on the lives of young people and those leaving care. Indeed, in this era, the development of the Practice Teacher Award (CCETSW,1989; 1996) and new requirements for PE training required this, incorporating a focus on the teaching element of the role as well as robust assessment measures. This prompted England (1998) to herald the 'coming of age' of practice teaching and the CCETSW requirements a 'genuinely positive affirmation of the practice teacher' (p. 266).

However, as the years have progressed since I left direct social work practice, much has changed. This has entailed what Higgins refers to as a 'struggle for the soul of social work' (Higgins, 2015, p.13) and within which an increasingly narrow 'paradigm of statutory social work wrestles with a broader conception of the profession' (p.13). Munro (2011b) has also commented on the realities of contemporary social work, particularly childrens and families social work, as being dominated by a 'compliance culture and not a learning culture' (p.7).

A limited or declining learning culture and a narrowing of understanding as to the role and remit of social workers has important implications for practice learning and the 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) within which social work students participate whilst on placement. Against this backdrop, there have been policy, practice and regulatory developments in social work, social work education and training (to be discussed further in Chapter 2) , as well as within the organisation and function of practice learning and placements. However, working as an off site PE, as a tutor visiting and supporting students in placement, training and supporting PEs and more recently, teaching and supporting Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) and Practice Supervisors as part of their ongoing professional development, it has become apparent that the narrowing of focus and the compliance culture still dominates. Working with NQSWs in particular alerted me to the impact of time constraints, austerity, cuts to services and increasing workloads on social work practice, and these issues are well documented within the professional literature (Jones, 2017; Fenton, 2019). In addition, many NQSWs I taught, particularly in the early years after the inauguration of the employer Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme in 2012, spoke of their supervision in practice as limited in time, availability and scope, with a case management focus and little reflection. As a social work educator with a keen interest and stake in practice education this prompted my thinking about the differences between student supervision and how this manifested in practice, particularly in the content and focus of supervision. To my (then) knowledge, the only study considering the content of student supervision was the Brodie and Williams (2013) study. My 2013 small scale study into PEs conceptualisation of the 'teaching ' element of the PE role (Jasper, 2013) had indicated that PEs considered that teaching and the facilitation of student learning permeated the role. However, the study acknowledged that this element of the role had been omitted or ignored within the literature, confirming the conclusion of Bell and Webb (1992) that 'teaching for practice is an invisible art' (p.28). A theme of hiddenness swirled, allied to a growing awareness of a similar pattern of omission relating to the finer detail of the content and activity within

social work student supervision on placement, and a desire to 'lift the lid' further (Brodie and Williams, 2013) was born.

### 1.3 'Lifting the lid'

The impetus for this study was further bolstered by a broader and contemporaneous patterning of research within social work, particularly children and families social work practice, that used ethnographic approaches and naturalistic data collection methods to 'get close' to social work practice and illuminate processes and activities hitherto hidden. Such 'practice near' research into social work practice (Froggett and Briggs, 2012) is illustrated in Ferguson's work (2016a; 2016b; 2018b) where he shadowed, observed, and recorded child protection social workers during home visits; and the evaluation by Forrester et al., (2013) of systemic units, which used naturalistic observational data collection methods, including 6 observed supervision sessions (although the detail and content of these sessions was not included in the evaluation). Ferguson (2016b) has suggested that such 'practice ethnographies' are rare within child and family social work, although they do sit within a well-known tradition in social work of 'institutional ethnographies' set in social work teams and offices and which have attended to social work occupational culture and decision making (e.g., Pithouse, 1998; Broadhurst et. al., 2010) or have detailed the experiences of qualified social workers and managers (Marsh and Treseliotis, 1996) or the experiences of student social workers (Syson and Baginsky, 1981; Secker, 2003).

The professional context of practice education; the wider and established 'orthodoxy' of supervision (Jones, 2007, p.12) within which student supervision is located is discussed in the following chapter. However, the paucity of research into the 'fine detail of what actually goes on in social work supervision' (Doel, 2010, p.108) is acknowledged as a further rationale for this study. There may be many reasons for the underresearched nature of this area, one of which may be the way social work supervision (certainly in the practice context of England) is viewed as a 'semi private activity' (Lawler and Bilson, 2010). Thus, the supervision session between supervisee and

supervisor is arranged by agreement and expected to be within a private space and for an uninterrupted period of time. Indeed, this opportunity for 'the door to be shut, the noise to be reduced and a quiet space for satisfying professional conversation' (Davys and Beddoe, 2010, p.82) is lauded as a positive feature and aspect of social work supervision. Caspi and Reid (2002) acknowledge that this situation is replicated within student placements, commenting that 'field instruction largely goes on behind closed doors' (p.56).

However, as well as leaving supervision and this area of professional practice unexplored, the 'semi private' nature of this activity may also have contributed to a perception of supervision as an uncomplicated arena of practice (Noble and Irwin, 2009), and it is only recently that studies exploring the detail of what takes place within supervision and the supervisory dyad have emerged. The work of Wilkins and colleagues (Wilkins, 2017c; Wilkins et al., 2017; Wilkins and Jones, 2018) in relation to supervision of children and family social workers has been key to this and this work has been truly inspirational in its contribution to this PhD.

A further reason for the underresearched nature of social work student supervision and its nature and content, may be social work education's enduring concern with the assessment of students in practice (Jasper, 2014). In 1990, with the introduction of the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW), Evans (1990) noted the increased focus on practice competence and the 'paramount emphasis on assessment in the DipSW' (p.13). This focus on the assessment function of the PE role continued with the inauguration of the social work degree in 2003, with the title of Practice Assessor replacing that of Practice Teacher (although Practice Assessor is a term now no longer in general use in relation to student placements). The development of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) in 2012 as the standards and assessment framework for students and social workers at all stages of their career, was accompanied by a raft of documentation on the holistic assessment of social work students on placement (TCSW/ BASW, 2012).

Whilst the attention paid to assessment has had clear and continuing benefits overall for the profession - for example, the 'major emphasis on anti-discrimination within the content of assessment' (Evans, 1990, p.123) and the focus on holistic capability rather than narrowly defined (and more simplistic) competencies to be achieved and assessed - this may have been to the detriment of focus on other processes and aspects of placement and the PE role.

#### 1.4 Definition of key terms

Within the UK, the current terms used in relation to practice based social work education are 'practice learning' or 'practice education' (Wilson et al., 2008; Burton, 2020) and these terms are used interchangeably within this study. The term 'Practice Educator' (PE) is currently used for those social workers who are responsible for the teaching, supervision and assessment of social work students on placement within England. This is encapsulated in the current framework relating to the training, expectations and role of the PE in England, the Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) (BASW, 2019) and is the term also used by the regulator, Social Work England (SWE, 2019d).

The term 'student supervisor' was replaced by the term Practice Teacher (PT) signifying an enhanced focus on the educational purpose of the role designated within the requirements of the Practice Teacher Award (PTA)(CCETSW, 1989). Later, the term Practice Assessor was introduced with the Social Work Degree (DoH, 2002). This was an unpopular term, most PTs at the time considering that their role was more than to assess a student, and the term is now out of use, replaced by the term PE used in the PEPS (BASW, 2013; BASW, 2019) and since.

Within the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, practice based social work education is termed 'fieldwork education' or 'field placement' and the terms 'Fieldwork Supervisors'; 'Fieldwork Educators' (FE) or 'Fieldwork Instructors' (FI) are commonly used (Bogo, 2006).

Further, students undertaking professional social work qualifications in the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia are either undertaking Masters in Social Work (MSW) or Bachelors degree in Social Work (BSW). In the UK, students undertake these same routes (along with other routes, discussed in Chapter 2) and the placement requirements for each are the same - 200 days in practice, usually separated into 30 days skills days, 70 days on first placement and 100 days on final placement.

### 1.5 Coronavirus (Covid -19) and lockdown in England March 2020

The data collection period of this study was 2016-2018, and the data collected and the analysis that informs the study relates to student and PE placements and practice pertaining to that period. However, some of the writing up and analysis took place during the Covid 19 pandemic and during the national lockdown in England that began in March 2020 (some restrictions still remaining in place at the time of the submission of this PhD in July 21). Social work placements have been severely disrupted during this period; initially many placements were suspended, or alternative and reasonable adjustments put in place in order to enable students to meet requirements. During the academic year 20-21, many student placements have been effectively 'virtual' placements, with students working from home and having limited face to face contact with either PEs or service users. The regulator Social Work England (SWE) (SWE, 2019e) continues to support students, universities and placement providers providing guidance and encouraging universities and local providers of practice learning to help students meet placement and PCF standards requirements using alternative and reasonable adjustments. Disrupted and virtual placements have inevitably had consequences for student supervision on placement. Discussion of these consequences and the impact on student supervision and recommendations going forward will be discussed in the final chapter.

## 1.6 Thesis outline

The thesis is presented as follows:

**Chapter 1** - Introduction and rationale for the study

**Chapter 2** - The wider professional context

This chapter discusses the place of supervision within social work; the history and role of practice learning and the contemporary context of practice learning in England.

**Chapter 3** - Review of the literature

This chapter includes the search strategy and the narrative review of the literature. This includes studies indicating the content and activities of placement and / or student supervision; studies including audio recording of student supervision and studies that have researched student and PE experiences of supervision.

**Chapter 4** – Methodology

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework of subtle realism that underpins the study. Research design, choice of methods, ethical considerations, reflexivity and rigour of the research are addressed in this chapter.

**Chapter 5** – Methods and frameworks used for analysis

This chapter discusses the methods, including audio recording of supervision sessions; qualitative interviewing and documentary data (supervision records), used within this study. The frameworks for the analysis of data - Ethnographic Content Analysis (Altheide, 1987) for audio recorded data and Template Analysis (King, 2012) to analyse the student and PE interviews – are also discussed in this chapter.

**Chapter 6** – Findings from the audio recorded supervision sessions: Part 1: Topic Coverage.

This chapter presents the findings from the coded Topic Coverage within the audio recorded supervision sessions.

**Chapter 7** – Findings from the audio recorded supervision sessions: Part 2: Analytical coding of PE and student activities

This chapter presents the findings from the more detailed coded PE and

student activities within the audio recorded supervision sessions.

**Chapter 8** – Analysis of the findings from the coded supervision sessions.

This chapter analyses the findings from the coded supervision sessions and also includes analysis of the supervision records provided. The analysis confirms the case work framing of supervision but contends that such framing can be a 'gateway' to learning for professional practice. The educative repurposing of student supervision is proposed, based on a refocusing on the application of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984; 2015) within supervision.

**Chapter 9** – the Student Interviews

This chapter outlines the themes arising from the student interviews and analyses the student perspective of placement supervision.

**Chapter 10** – the Practice Educator Interviews

This chapter outlines the themes arising from PE interviews and analyses the PE perspective of placement supervision.

**Chapter 11** – Themes, anomalies and dissonances

This chapter offers concluding thoughts and analysis arising from the findings from the audio recorded supervision sessions (Chapters 6 and 7) and their analysis (Chapter 8); from the interviews with PEs and students (Chapters 9 and 10) and the review of the literature (Chapter 3). The centrality of the PE and student relationship and the predominance of case work discussion as the frame for student supervision as the two main themes arising within the thesis are addressed. Within these themes, and alongside them, dissonances and anomalies are discussed.

**Chapter 12** – Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis by considering the strengths and limitations of the study, its dissemination and its impact. Proposals are made regarding the educative repurposing of student supervision and links are made to the PEPS (BASW, 2019) and the future for practice education.



## **Chapter 2 The wider professional context**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter considers the wider professional context in England within which practice learning is located and the policy, practice and regulatory developments that impact upon it. As many of the elements and expectations of student supervision are drawn from social work supervision more broadly, this chapter will initially consider the place of supervision within social work practice and discourse.

### **2.2 The place of supervision in social work**

Jones (2007) refers to the 'orthodoxy' of supervision (2007, p.12) that has evolved, citing the work of Kadushin (1976) in identifying the nature of supervision as consisting of educative, supportive, and managerial functions. These remain the typical functions alluded to in relation to supervision (Tsui, 2005), although more recent scholars have identified a fourth function, that of mediation (Morrison, 2005) and the role of supervision in mediating between the agency / employer and the individual.

The importance of professional supervision within social work has long been recognised (Tsui, 2005) and its centrality to effective practice and professional development remains uncontested by scholars and commentators within UK and international contexts. Although forms and models of supervision differ, supervision is expected to provide a forum for case work discussion and analysis; reflection on practice; continuing professional development and learning and to fulfil accountability purposes in relation to work with service users and the designated functions social workers are carrying out on behalf of their employers. The functions of supervision are considered to be overlapping and interconnected and, within UK social work practice, occur within a one-to-one relationship, usually manager and supervisee, in private and 'behind closed doors' within the employment setting. Supervision for social work students on placement replicates these functions but with an enhanced focus on the educative and

learning process. Within the practice placement, a key additional role for PEs is the holistic assessment of student competence on placement (Doel, 2010), in accordance with the requirements of the Professional Capability Framework (PCF) (BASW, 2012) and the requirements of the regulator, SWE (2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

The undiminished significance of professional social work supervision has been demonstrated through numerous policy and practice changes and reviews, journal articles, practice texts, documents, and manuals (Scottish Executive, 2006; Morrison, 2005; Laming, 2009; Morrison and Wonnacott, 2010; Carpenter et al., 2012; Carpenter et al., 2013; Munro 2011a; 2011b; Croisdale - Appleby, 2014; Johnson et al., 2020; MacAlister, 2021). The contention of Munro's (2011b) significant review into practice with children and families - that supervision had become process oriented and overly focused on case management, with limited opportunities for reflection or consideration of professional development - has been reinforced by more recent studies and reports (Johnson et al., 2020; MacAlister, 2021). These latter publications suggest that, whilst Munro's (2011b) critiques lead to a refocus on reflective social work supervision within social work and the publication of Post-Qualifying Standards for Social Work Practice Supervisors in both adult care (DHSC, 2018) and children and families practice (DfE 2018), the promise of professional social work supervision with an enhanced reflective focus has yet to be fulfilled.

This renewed focus on professional social work supervision is shared internationally (O'Donoghue and Tsui, 2011) and has been the focus of a Delphi Study of Supervision in Social Work (Beddoe et al., 2016).

However, amidst this renewed focus for supervision, a number of paradoxes are evident, and these will be briefly discussed here.

### 2.2.1 The evidence base for supervision within national and international contexts

Despite being considered a core activity within the profession, the empirical base and evidential support for supervision is considered weak (Carpenter et al., 2012; Carpenter et al., 2013; O'Donoghue and Tsui, 2015), particularly with regard to the relationship between supervision and outcomes for service users. This is a concern that is shared internationally (Beddoe and Davys, 2016; Manthorpe et al., 2015). The Carpenter et al., (2013) review considered 50 studies into supervision published in peer-reviewed journals between 2000-2012 and found that the focus of most studies to be the importance of supervision to outcomes for workers, identifying a gap in evidence in relation to the impact of supervision on outcomes for service users. Carpenter et al., (2012) concluded that 'supervision works best when it pays attention to task assistance, social and emotional support and a positive interpersonal relationship between supervisors and supervisees' (p.16). Of particular relevance to this thesis, they noted that few of the 50 studies reviewed provided information about the 'nature' or 'quality' of supervision (p.5). Similarly, the review of supervision research published in peer reviewed social work journals from 1970-2010 and carried out by O'Donoghue and Tsui (2015) concluded that the 'current state of supervision research is foundational' (p.626), although again noting the importance of emotional support and a trusting relationship between supervisee and supervisor as contributing to positive worker outcomes.

### 2.2.2 Contested conceptualisation(s) of supervision

Within the field of UK professional social work, 'supervision' is a widely used term and both a 'concept' and a 'practice' with which social workers are familiar and would be able to describe or explain in some way. However, the term and the familiarity belie a diversity of understandings, expectations, assumptions, and numerous areas of complexity in relation to 'supervision' as a concept and as an area of professional activity. There is a vast range of definitions of the term 'supervision'. Each definition suggests, states, or implicitly privileges particular tasks, functions and remit of supervision.

For example, Tsui (2005) presents supervision as a 'dynamic, multi-party, and interactional relationship within a specific organisational setting in a greater cultural context' (p.xiv) and as 'an indirect but vital, enabling social work process' (p.xiii). Here, the influence of context on supervision is noted and language such as dynamic, interactional relationship, and enabling suggests a view of supervision related to, and foregrounding, personal development and growth. Historical and therapeutic antecedents of supervision practice within social work are implicitly referenced within this view of supervision. In contrast, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSCC) describes supervision as:

a process which aims to support, assure and develop the knowledge, skills and values of the person being supervised (supervisee)... It provides accountability for both the supervisor and supervisee in exploring practice and performance. It also enhances and provides evidence for annual performance review or appraisal (SSSC, no date, p.1).

This definition of supervision foregrounds the issue of accountability and standards of practice and performance. Further scholarly writing and research from New Zealand authors (Hair and O'Donoghue, 2009) consider supervision to be a forum for promoting social justice, although this has not been a particular focus of writing or consideration for social work supervision in the UK.

In reference to such contested and differing conceptions, Manthorpe et al., (2015) contended that a binary approach has been adopted in relation to discussion of supervision, 'seeing supervision as largely introspective (a therapeutic model) or its antithesis, depicting it as instrumental – a tool for surveillance and the soft exercise of power and authority' (p. 54). Rather than taking a binary approach, Beddoe (2015) prefers to pose the issue as 'one supervision or many?' and her further assertion that 'one supervision' might be an impossible construct, given the political and cultural complexity of locations for social work practice' (p.152) helpfully focuses both upon

important influences of internal and external contexts, and upon the cluster or practices that take place within supervision.

### 2.2.3 The construction of supervision – rhetoric and reality

The difficulty of definition is not presented here simply as an esoteric issue. Rather, the discussion of definition serves to illustrate the 'taken for granted' nature of supervision but situated within a context of many and competing definitions available. Beddoe (2015) has commented on supervision as a 'universal artefact of social work...the meaning of its practice is assumed in a conversation about supervision' (p.150).

Indeed, the impact of such 'taken for given' framings of supervision practice can result in the term 'supervision' not being defined at all. For example, Laming's government commissioned report (2003) into the death of Victoria Climbié is known for its seminal discussion on intra and inter agency working and the phrase 'supervision is the cornerstone of good social work practice' (p.12) is often used to assert the importance of supervision. The report mentions the term 'supervision' 195 times within its 405 pages and includes a specific recommendation regarding supervision. However, the report does not provide a definition of 'supervision' or what its features should be, although from the reported concerns regarding supervision, it can be construed that 'supervision' should have a case monitoring and recording emphasis, along with offering some 'support' to the social worker. The report's recommendation (Recommendation 45, p.376) confirms this focus, suggesting, 'Directors of social services must ensure that the work of staff working directly with children is regularly supervised. This must include the supervisor reading, reviewing and signing the case file at regular intervals' (p.376). A later report (2009), also authored by Lord Laming and considering wider dimensions regarding social work practice with children and families, widens the remit of supervision suggesting that 'high quality supervision' should be 'focused on case planning, constructive challenge and professional development' (p.32). This is more akin to the more recent approaches and models promoted since Munro (Munro, 2011a; 2011b;

Davys and Beddoe, 2010) and the type of reflective but authoritative supervision promoted by the Chief Social Workers in England and within the Post Qualifying Standards for Social Work Practice Supervisors (DHSC, 2018; DfE, 2018b) and ensuing development programmes for supervisors (RIP, no date; RIP/DHSC, no date).

However, as discussed in Chapter 1, there remain issues regarding the 'rhetoric' of reflective supervision and the reality for many social workers who experience supervision as process driven and a forum for managerial oversight (Bartoli and Kennedy, 2015; Bourn and Hafford- Letchfield, 2011; Hafford-Letchfield and Engelbrecht, 2018; Wilkins et al., 2017; Wilkins et al., 2018b; MacAlister, 2021). Wilkins (2017a) suggests that reflective supervision is besieged by 'definitional complexities' that renders it hard to achieve. The recent DfE sponsored longitudinal study (Wave 2) of child and family social workers (Johnson et al., 2020) provide a helpful definition of reflective supervision as:

a learning process that allows the practitioner to explore the factors influencing their practice, including emotions, assumptions and power relationships; develop an understanding of the knowledge base informing their practice and its limits; and, to identify next steps (p.67).

Wilkins (2017a) earlier contention that a 'sizeable proportion of local authority child and family social workers in England do not receive reflective supervision and many never have' (p.166) is borne out by the Johnson et al., (2020) study, and the finding that one in four social workers (23%) received reflective supervision less frequently than every six weeks. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter 8.

### 2.3 Approaches to practice learning - history and role

Whilst supervision within the social work practice placement is impacted by considerations of practitioner supervision and discourse, it is also located within the wider context of practice learning and education. There have been

policy, practice and regulatory developments in social work and social work training that have directly influenced practice learning.

Currently, there are a number of routes of qualification in social work: the degree route (BA undergraduate 3-year route or MA, post graduate 2-year route); 'fast track' graduate entry programmes (the Frontline programme and the Step up to Social Work (SUSW) programme, both with a focus on children and family social work, and the Think Ahead programme, a mental health focussed social work programme); and the Social Work Degree Apprenticeship (SWDA) route. All these programmes involve practice learning and assessed placements of some nature and design and supervision is embedded within these periods of practice learning. Trainees on the Frontline and Think Ahead programmes are taught and supported during placement in groups of four and by a Consultant Social Worker (the role being akin to that of a PE). Trainees on the SUSW programme undertake placements of 70/100 days in the same fashion as students on BA and MA routes to qualification, the latter routes being the main route to qualification in England (SfC, 2019). A brief discussion of approaches to the role and the history of practice learning will be outlined here, followed by a discussion of the contemporary context of practice learning.

As a number of scholars have noted, assessed periods of experience of learning in the field are an integral element of the social work training landscape, both in the UK and internationally (Parker, 2007; Finch, 2017; Shardlow and Doel, 1996) and have been so since the earliest inception of formalised social work training during the second half of the 20th century. The aim of these practice placements is to provide students with the opportunity to apply their learning in practice (Evans, 1999; Clapton et al., 2008); to assist in their continuing skill development and the acquisition and application of experiential and further theoretical knowledge.

As social work education has developed, so too has the expected role of the placement; the approach taken to the assessment of the student and the

role/name given to the person supervising and assessing the student during periods of field learning. Keen et al., (2010) comment that ' terminology associated with practice education in the UK has been fraught with contest and change' (p.63) and consideration of this terminology provides a useful platform to discuss pertinent historical moments in relation to practice learning, which will be discussed here.

### 2.3.1 The apprenticeship model and the role of the student supervisor

Earlier texts on social work student placements referred to the role of the 'supervisor' (Young, 1967), an 'experienced social worker' who would supervise the work of the student on 'an apprenticeship' basis (p.13). Such a model of learning involved supervisory role modelling; regular discussion of 'cases', allied to supervisory instruction; discussion of student records (Young, 1967) and their detailed 'process recording' of their work with individual service users (Shardlow and Doel, 1996). Shardlow and Doel (1996) refer to this as 'learning by a kind of osmosis' (p.40). Gardiner (1989) also notes the 'concept leakage' (p.16) inherent in this 'classical model' of supervision, leakage coming from (therapeutic) social casework practice and an emphasis on the personal growth of the student. He also berates this model for its promotion of a hierarchy between supervisor as teacher / instructor and student as learner. The Certificate in Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) (1975-1991) and the Certificate in Social Services (CSS) (1977-1995) were the routes for social work qualification prior to the introduction of the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) (1989-2011) in the UK by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work in 1989 (CCETSW, 1989). The introduction of the DipSW also heralded the competency model of practice learning.

### 2.3.2 The competency model of practice learning and the role of the Practice Teacher

The CCETSW requirements for DipSW training were revised in 1995 (CCETSW, 1995). These requirements outlined a range of knowledge, values and skills to be achieved by the end of a student's social work



training. Formulated as competencies and behavioural objectives, underpinned by evidence or performance indicators, this established a competency model of practice learning within social work education.

The Practice Teacher Award (PTA) was launched in 1989 as the 'sibling' of the DipSW (Slater, 2007, p.749) and as part of CCETSW's post qualifying programme for social work. The launch of the PTA as the essential post qualifying award for those providing supervision and assessment of students in the placement setting was buoyed by the popularisation of concepts of 'andragogy' and theories of adult learning (Knowles, 1970) during this period. The focus on the importance of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice within social work and the DipSW further impacted on the requirements within the PTA, and the need for a corresponding consideration of issues in relation to the learning environment and the fair assessment of students (Evans, 1990).

The (accredited) name of Practice Teacher (PT) encapsulated in the PTA confirmed the focus on the student practice placement as an arena of learning and teaching. Alongside the elevation and acceptance of the learning and 'educational task' (Davis, 1986), Sawdon and Sawdon (1987), along with others (Doel, 1987; Shardlow and Doel, 1996) promoted the idea of a 'practice curriculum' within each agency setting, led by the PT and outlining the learning and teaching activities to be undertaken. Such learning activities were to be discussed in regular 'practice tutorials' (Shardlow and Doel, 1996, p.19), the latter term specifically used to 'avoid the connotations of supervision' (p.19) as managerial oversight.

### 2.3.3 The competency model, the Social Work Degree and the role of the Practice Assessor

The competency model has pertained to much of the history of contemporary practice learning, developing further in 2003 with the introduction of the Social Work Degree as the single route to qualification in the UK (DoH, 2002). This was accompanied by the requirement that students in the UK

were assessed against the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Social Work (TOPSS, 2002), configured into six Key Roles and corresponding evidence indicators. The introduction of the Social Work Degree also heralded an increase in the amount of time students spent on placement (increasing from 130 days to 200 days, usually in the form of two separate placement periods of 100 days each). The centrality of practice learning to the social work degree was accompanied by the rebranding of the PT as 'Practice Assessor'. This term was explained by Kearney (2003) 'to mean any individual in a workplace who offers a practice-learning opportunity to a social work student. The term, therefore, relates to activity and responsibility, rather than any particular qualification. 'Practice Teacher' is used specifically to mean holders of the practice teacher award (PTA)' (p.3). As Slater (2007) notes however, the role of the Practice Assessor specifically still included a focus on teaching and learning provision and he further noted that the Practice Learning Taskforce (PLTF) (2003-2005), set up to explore practice learning issues and approaches and expand the provision of practice learning placements, continued to use the term 'practice assessor/teacher'. Many within the profession continued to use the term Practice Teacher. Further, whilst the PTA was withdrawn in 2008 as a standalone post qualifying award and replaced with a revised Post Qualifying Framework (GSCC, 2005) that included 'enabling others', the focus within the latter remained on the provision of teaching and learning of social work students, as well as assessing them.

The competency approach to the assessment of practice has been critiqued by several authors and on several grounds. It has been argued that it simplifies complex skills and knowledge into discrete tasks, and this can encourage a reductionist approach to learning and assessment (McNay et al., 2009); it promotes the collection of 'evidence' and an outcomes focus to the placement, rather than reflection and analysis of practice and learning (McNay et al., 2009; Cowburn et. al 2000) and overall, can encourage a 'tick box' approach to the assessment task (Finch, 2017). Moreover, critics such as Bellinger (2010a) considered that the renaming of Practice Assessor

served not only to move ‘the function from enabling the process of learning to measuring the outcome’ (p.608) but also lessened the previously acknowledged ‘pedagogical purpose’ (p.599) of practice learning. This is a contention that will be referred to and discussed in later chapters.

#### 2.3.4 The holistic assessment of students and the role of the Practice Educator

The competency approach to practice learning pertained from 2003 - 2012 and until the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (BASW, 2012) was introduced in 2012, as the overarching framework of standards and professional development for social workers at all stages of their career, including students during their training. Focusing on capability rather than competence, the PCF also requires that students on placement are assessed holistically, rather than with a ‘micro focus on competence’ (TCSW/BASW, 2012, p. 4).

At the time, the College of Social Work (TCSW) (who developed the PCF but which was disbanded in 2015) suggested that holistic assessment encouraged a focus on the development of student overall capability; allowed greater scope for PEs’ judgements about the quality of student practice and provided clearer national standards about levels of capability expected of students at different points in their training (TCSW/BASW, 2012). The name and role of the Practice Educator was given prominence throughout the myriad of documentation that accompanied this pivotal move to the development of capabilities and the holistic assessment of social work students.

#### 2.4 The contemporary context of practice learning in England

At the time of submission of this thesis, the PCF and the holistic assessment of social work students on practice placements remains. In England, the term ‘Practice Educator’ (PE) is used for those social workers who are responsible for the teaching, supervision and assessment of social work students undertaking BA; MA or SUSW accredited qualification routes, whilst they are

on placement. The role of the PE is endorsed and referenced by the social work regulator Social Work England (SWE, 2020e).

The current framework outlining the role, expectations and training requirements for PEs in England are the Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) (BASW, 2019), a 'refresh' of the original PEPS launched in 2013.

#### 2.4.1 The Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS)

The PEPS (BASW, 2019) is the first standalone post qualifying set of standards relating to practice education since the demise of the PTA in 2008. The PEPS refer to the role of the PE in 'facilitating, supporting and assessing the learning of social work practice and professional development of students in practice' (BASW, 2019, p.5). The PEPS (BASW, 2019) lay out the stages of PE qualification (Stage 1 and Stage 2) and domains of practice and standards to be achieved; pathways to training; the expected content of PE training programmes and requirements for mentoring, observation and assessment of PE trainees. To undertake PE training, a social worker must be registered and qualified for 2 years. A PE cannot undertake the independent assessment of a final year student until they are Stage 2 qualified, although they can undertake this assessment whilst being Stage 1 or whilst undertaking training for Stage 2 if their practice and final assessment decision is overseen and ratified by a Stage 2 PE. PEs are expected to maintain their currency by taking social work students on placement every 2 years or by completing other tasks or supporting other learners.

The PEPS (BASW, 2019) set out values and standards in relation to practice education, the latter split into four domains for PEs: Domain A: working with others to organise an effective learning environment; Domain B: teaching, facilitating and supporting learning and professional development in practice; Domain C: Manage the fair and transparent assessment of students in

practice and Domain D: developing knowledge and continuing performance as a practice educator. These standards are underpinned by a statement of values which promote anti oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice, a focus on fair assessment and an acknowledgement of the power and authority in the PE and student assessment relationship. There is a clear focus in the PEPS (BASW, 2019) on the provision of reflective supervision; an understanding of supervisory models and theories and the role of the PE in 'teaching, facilitating and supporting learning' (Domain B).

At the time of data collection for this thesis, the PEPS 2013 applied to those PEs participating in the study. The PEPS (BASW, 2013) required the same domains and values to be applied and met. However, the significant difference was that a PE 'in training' (and thus 'working towards' Stage 1 or Stage 2) could take responsibility for a final year student on placement (whilst being supported by a Stage 2 PE) (BASW, 2013, p.13) Under PEPS 2019, this is no longer possible as PEs have to be Stage 2 qualified before undertaking the assessment of a final year placement student. Of the 9 PEs participating in this study, all with final year students on placement, 7 of them were PEs 'in training' and thus meeting this 2013 criteria.

#### 2.4.2 Social Work England and the role of the regulator

In December 2019, Social Work England (SWE) replaced the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), who had been the social work regulator since 2012. As part of their responsibility as regulator in England, SWE regulates social work education, including practice placements. Other nations within the UK have their own regulator.

Whilst 200 days in placement remain a requirement (still usually two placements, of 70 and 100 days), 30 of these days can be 'skills days' undertaken within the university, and one placement must involve clearly defined 'statutory tasks'. These requirements are set out in several guidance documents - Qualifying Education and Training Guidance (SWE, 2020c); Guidance on the Assessment of Social Work Students (SWE,2020d) and

Guidance on practice placements (SWE, 2020e). Within the latter, the PEPS (BASW, 2019) are clearly referenced and the role of the PE in providing 'appropriate' supervision and overseeing the 'the learning and development of each student on a placement' (SWE, 2020e, p.14) is noted.

#### 2.4.3 The role of Social Work Teaching Partnerships

Whilst SWE regulates social work education in England (as delivered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)) and lays out expectations for practice placements, the SWE guidance also clearly acknowledges that placement providers and the provision of placement settings lay outside of HEIs direct control. Within social work education and the practice learning landscape, the provision of placements and developing placement capacity has been an enduring issue and there have been many initiatives, local and national (such as the Practice Learning Taskforce 2003-2005) to address this.

Since 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) have funded a number of Teaching Partnerships (TPs) in England in order to encourage greater collaboration between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and service and placement providers, and to look at areas for improvement within social work education. The recent DfE evaluation of TPs (DfE, 2020) notes that TPs have considered and improved a number of areas of practice: for example, entry standards into social work and initial assessment of applicant capabilities; funding of joint posts spanning academia and practice; Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements and facilitating joint academic and practitioner learning hubs. The evaluation also notes that much of the work of the TPs (locally and nationally) has been on supporting and developing practice placements. This has involved working with employers to enhance placement capacity through the development and nurturing of new placement settings alongside providing increased training and developmental opportunities for PEs (DfE, 2020).

## 2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has considered the professional context for contemporary practice learning. The wider context, discourse and complexities of social work supervision within which student supervision is located has been discussed, alongside the policy, practice and regulatory developments in social work and social work education that has influenced the development and remit of the PE role. The enduring educative focus as a feature of the social work student placement has been discussed.

## Chapter 3 Review of the literature

### 3.1 Introduction

The date range for the review of the literature for this study is between 2000 and 2021, with some important exceptions, detailed later in this chapter. The focus of this literature review will be on student and PE experiences of *supervision* on placement, including content and activities undertaken within supervision. The hidden nature of what takes place within student placement supervision is one of the main impetus for this study, and thus the limited range of studies in relation to the content of supervision was not a surprise. However, in addition to these studies, there are several studies that have examined the content and activities within the wider overall *placement* (where the provision of supervision is mentioned as a particular activity within the placement). These studies are included as they seek to uncover the range of activities within the placement that can contribute to or inform supervision content.

However, a new and more difficult challenge quickly became apparent during the literature search and the reading of studies for relevance or inclusion relating to experiences of *supervision*. Thus, whilst there exists a wide range of research in relation to student and PE experiences of *placement* or of *practice learning* there are few studies specifically considering student or PE experiences of *supervision*. Within some studies of student experiences of placement, the particular impact of supervision and its use or usefulness on placement is clearly noted; within other studies, supervision and placement are terms that are used interchangeably by the author(s) to analyse and to discuss findings, and thus specific experiences of *supervision* remain buried and unknown. In other research, particularly smaller scale qualitative studies, student and PEs experiences of the practice placement are studied together as stakeholders in the placement (e.g., Yeung et al., 2019; Parker, 2007) and analysis or findings relating to either party is not always separated. In some studies, explicit experiences of *supervision* are unstated but implied



- for example, in the many studies detailing the impact on students of the activities, approaches and behaviours of PEs, such as the provision of PE emotional support, feedback and challenge. These are often defining features of the student experience of *placement*, but they are activities that would (usually or often) take place within the supervisory encounter, and as such, student experiences of *supervision* are implied within these studies and student responses. The navigation of this challenge and the rationale for inclusion and exclusion of studies in this literature review will be discussed later in this chapter.

### 3.2 The state of the literature - a history

I will initially consider the wider state of the empirical knowledge base for practice learning. There have been five key analyses / reviews (narrative and systematic) into practice learning since 2006 and these helpfully serve to bookend and scaffold the literature review for this study that follows. I will briefly consider these reviews, noting issues and findings that have particular relevance for this study.

Bogo's (2006) review of the field education research literature from 1994 - 2000 included 40 peer reviewed journal articles (mainly from North America), concluding that the empirical knowledge base of field education was 'emerging' (p.187). This review discussed the literature in relation to a number of themes, including consideration of student satisfaction with placement and the elements of the placement, including the learning and teaching activities and the elements of the Field Instructor (FI) and student relationship that contributed to this. Bogo (2006) noted that most of the studies included were quantitative studies that used a survey instrument as the method of data collection; many were concerned with outcome measures that relied solely on 'student satisfaction' and she noted that 'none of the studies investigated matched pairs of student and field instructor' (p.186). However, the enduring relevance of this review lies in Bogo's conclusions regarding the 'three dimensions' (p.178) of field

instruction that are valued by students. These are a supportive relationship with the FI where students can receive and use critical feedback; the provision of a range of learning activities, including observing and being observed and FIs providing opportunities for students to engage in conceptualisation of practice. To this day, and across all areas of the practice learning knowledge base, reference to and consideration of these three dimensions provide the mainstay for many subsequent studies.

Holden et al., (2011) carried out a systematic review to examine the evidence base for the designation of field instruction as the 'signature pedagogy' of social work (as designated by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) in the United States). After a vigorous search of quantitative studies in the US, the authors declared that none of the studies identified met the inclusion criteria. Holden et al., (2011) concluded that, whilst their inclusion bar was 'high' - i.e., quantitative studies including RCTs or experimental designs with two group, pretest–posttest, that further evidence building for the signature pedagogy claim was required.

Similarly, Shardlow's (2012) overview of empirical research published in English about practice learning identified only one meta - analysis of practice learning, the Holden et al., (2011) study referred to previously. Shardlow's (2012) conclusion that whilst there existed a body of knowledge and research that contributed to the development of 'informed approach' to practice education in social work, many studies had small samples, were single, issue-based projects or had methodological flaws, thus weakening generalisation.

In 2015, Bogo published a narrative analysis of the contemporary field education literature and concluded that the empirical base for field education was improving, although with similar caveats as highlighted previously by Shardlow (2012). In particular, she noted that there was a secure evidence

base indicating key elements that contributed to a 'quality field experience' (p.319) for students. These factors included: the presence of a strong and positive learning environment; the presence of a strong and collaborative relationship with a Field Educator (FE); opportunities for student learning that included direct practice with service users, opportunities for direct observation (students both observing the FE's practice and being observed in practice themselves) and opportunities for discussion and learning with FEs that included critical feedback and linking theory with practice.

Bogo et al., (2020) again has provided the most recent review of field instruction. This scoping review maps the research literature from 2013 to 2019, across all countries and builds on the previous reviews already outlined. This scoping review considered the range and extent of the literature, the nature of the literature, topics, design and methods and emerging best practices. From a final pool of 80 articles that met the inclusion criteria, the findings of the scoping review were wide ranging, including some key findings (and omissions) that are particularly relevant to this study and the literature review to follow. For example, the largest number of studies took place in the US (n=28), followed closely by Australia (n=25); the most common design was cross sectional mixed methods survey (although closely followed by qualitative inquiry using interviews). Regarding topic category, only 6 studies focused on learning activities, and whilst 19 examined participants experiences of placement (both PEs and students) only 7 of these studies 'were focused solely on aspects of what the authors labelled as supervision' (p. 18). Bogo also notes that only two qualitative studies (3%) used observational methods such as video recordings. Bogo noted emerging best practices relating to the behaviours and qualities pertaining to a positive FI and student relationship; the need for clear processes and structures for learning on placement, involving guidance and support and with a balance between supervisory oversight and encouragement of student autonomy.

The overall findings from these reviews and analyses thus suggest that the empirical literature knowledge and evidence base for practice learning across continents has developed significantly since 1994 and continues to do so. However, many of the studies relate to the US context, use quantitative survey-based research methods and thus are reliant on self-report mechanisms of data collection. Small-scale research studies using qualitative methods are also increasingly common. Much of the focus has been on student satisfaction with placement experiences and the nature of the student and PE/FI relationship that contributes to this. However, the detail of the content of supervision, or indeed, the range of activities undertaken on placement remains rare, and observational methods used to explore supervision experiences even rarer. The relative obscurity of the content and detail of supervision and the practice placement would suggest that the aim of this research study is thus timely and can contribute to an under researched area of practice.

### 3.3 Literature review - narrative or systematic?

Given the research question at the heart of this study and the focus of the content analysis of student supervision sessions and the supervisory experiences of students and PEs, the literature review will reflect this. Within this, a complementary search will also be undertaken into the content and audio recording of social work student supervision, as this is a significant feature of this study. This literature review is a narrative review (Bryman, 2008) and as such the literature reviewed will be 'illuminative rather than exhaustive or systematic' (Shaw and Norton, 2008, p.955). However, a narrative review can adopt many of the practices of a systematic review (Bryman, 2008) and to aid transparency, this review will do this, outlining the search strategy and the reasons for inclusion and exclusion of studies.

### 3.4 The Search strategy

The search strategy for this study included four main steps including:

- The search of relevant electronic databases
- Hand searching the indexes and articles within relevant UK, US, Australian and NZ peer reviewed journals
- Reference harvesting and tracking of relevant studies and articles, including those identified via Zetoc alert or direct contact with the author
- Searching the grey literature and the work of key authors known within the arena of practice learning within the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the US.

#### 3.4.1 The search of relevant electronic databases

The electronic databases searched were: ASSIA (Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts); Social Care Online; and SCOPUS. Within the ASSIA and SCOPUS databases, peer reviewed journals were selected, and the language was restricted to English, with no restriction regarding country of origin. The dates searched were 2000-2021, a period chosen to identify recent research but also reflected that the researcher was familiar with key research, texts and articles that predated this period. Database searches were carried out on 6 occasions over the course of the research study (between March 2015 and March 2021) and searches retained electronically. Initially, search terms used Boolean connectors including "social work" AND "student" AND "supervis\*" to narrow research results. However, a huge range of irrelevant material was then generated, the "student" search term seeming to be prioritised within the search and publications relating to student experiences across health and education settings; in academic and placement contexts or relating to PhD student supervision being generated. The search terms were then modified, "student" being omitted as a singular term and substituted with "field educat\*", "practice educat\*", "practice placement", "field placement" and "practice learning". These terms are predicated on the existence of students and moreover could identify non-UK studies through the inclusion of the term "field". The final search terms used and the results of the searches and those articles and literature excluded can be found in Table A. The abstracts of identified literature were read to see if

they were appropriate for inclusion and across the databases a total of 37 sources were selected for inclusion in this literature search.

#### 3.4.2 Hand searching of relevant UK peer reviewed journals

The UK peer reviewed journals that were hand searched, over the period 2000 – 2021 were: - British Journal of Social Work; Social Work Education: The International Journal: Practice: Social Work in Action; and the Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning. These journals were chosen as they include articles across a wide spectrum of research, learning and practice relevant to this literature review. Thus, the British Journal of Social Work and Social Work Education: The International Journal include research studies and international research. The journal Practice: Social Work in Action includes research and studies that have a practitioner focus and the Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning specifically focuses on areas of practice relevant to this study. Relevant abstracts were studied, and articles were read in full if considered appropriate. Hand searching of these journals yielded some relevant empirical studies and commentary articles which have been included in the final range of studies informing this literature review.

#### 3.4.3 Reference tracking of relevant studies and articles

Reference tracking (Greenhalgh and Peacock, 2005) of relevant studies yielded a significant number of relevant studies, in particular those from outside the UK. As a result, studies from the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were examined, from peer-reviewed journals in those countries such as the Journal of Social Work Education: The Clinical Supervisor; The Journal of Social Work and Australian Social Work. Establishing Zetoc alerts for the published articles from key international researchers (for example, such as Bogo and Cleak) and Scopus Search Alerts for key phrases, alongside regular searches of key journals for advance articles was also helpful. Overall, informal approaches such as 'browsing', along with reference harvesting and wider reading within the social work and practice

learning literature yielded significant returns and contributed a number of studies to this literature review.

#### 3.4.4 Grey literature and the work of key authors

Searching of the grey literature, such as government reports and policy documents, was undertaken on an on-going basis. These searches were helpful in illuminating the context for the study questions.

### 3.5 Searching – limitations

It is the case that any search strategy will have limitations, in relation to the databases selected; the search terms used, and the criteria imposed for inclusion and exclusion. Terminological differences regarding key personnel within the social work practice placement - such as Practice Educator, Field Instructor or Field Educator - have been explained previously and the widespread use of the latter terms within North America, Australia and New Zealand necessitated their inclusion within the search terms. However, search terms are plagued by other issues, such as non-uniformity in the use of key words and phrases and some journals (i.e., the US Journal of Social Work Education) include only abstracts and not key words.

A significant aspect of the researched literature was the predominance of studies that relied on student self-report and the use of questionnaire, survey instruments to collect data and quantitative analytical methods to analyse data. To mitigate any limitations this could impose on the literature search, a complementary search for audio recorded and more naturalistic methods of data collection was undertaken and is detailed separately in the literature review that follows.

#### 3.5.1 Inclusion and exclusion of studies

In relation to the focus of this study (the content and experiences of student *supervision* within the practice placement), the review of the

literature indicated that there are studies that detail, via use of audio recordings, the content of supervision within placement and thus meet the criteria for inclusion. There also exists a wide range of research examining student experiences of placement or the views of students in relation to what an 'effective ' placement entails, although the literature in relation to PEs views and experiences of placement and/ or supervision is sparser. However, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, this study does not focus on the content and experiences of the *placement* overall and to this end, some of the literature uncovered during the literature search is not relevant and will not be included. There are caveats to this as some studies uncovered during the literature search indicated hidden or implied experiences of supervision and these will be included. It might be considered that adopting these inclusion and exclusion criteria promotes a false dichotomy between *placement* and *supervisory* experiences, as to a degree they both influence each other. Indeed, many studies, and respondents, through the interchangeable use of the terms and concepts, infer this. However, it is my assertion that adopting these inclusion and exclusion criteria will enhance scrutiny, management and exploration of the relevant literature.

However, this is not to dismiss the importance of student and PE views and lived experiences of the placement and in particular, their understandings of what contributes to a positive practice learning experience. Acknowledging this, and to lay the foundations for discussion of relevant literature pertaining to the content and experiences of supervision that follows, the pivotal importance of the PE and student relationship and some key research relating to student satisfaction with placement experiences will be briefly considered.

### 3.6 The literature and the importance of relationship

The centrality of the PE and student relationship remains the conceptual bedrock of most studies within the literature base. Numerous empirical and



conceptual studies have noted that a supportive, collaborative, enabling and warm relationship with the PE that is based on trust, reciprocity, encouragement, and PE availability (affective and physical), is fundamental to student learning, enjoyment and successful completion of placement. Parker (2007) refers to both the relational and pedagogic aspects of practice learning and indeed many studies suggest that, within this 'warm encirclement' of relationship, other features and behaviours need to be present such as those outlined by Bogo (2006), where student autonomy, reflection and opportunities to engage in the conceptualisation of practice are encouraged and supported. The quality of supervision is also noted as a major feature of student satisfaction with placement (Kanno and Koeske, 2010; Bogo, 2015; Bogo et al., 2020), although as has been discussed the features or nature of supervision that underpins such 'quality' supervision often remains unexplored.

A range of studies that precede the date range of the literature search have considered the impact of PE behaviours on student placement experiences, and two studies in particular are foundational and their findings have often been replicated in other studies that follow. These are Collins et al., (1992) and Fernandez (1998) study.

The Collins et al., (1992) is a UK study that analysed 38 student questionnaire responses (post placement) in relation to their placement experiences and the rating of their PE's behaviours. The 'approachability' of PEs was highly valued along with the PEs ability to 'convey understanding' and to allow them responsibility and independence. The study concluded that the 'enabling aspects' (p.37) of the PE role were well displayed in their research. Fernandez (1998) conducted survey research with 247 BSW Australian students who completed a self-report questionnaire about their placement experiences (single placement) and their levels of satisfaction. Findings were similar to the Collins et al., (1992) study, students valuing the approachability of their Field Instructors (FIs); their supportiveness and the degree of autonomy given to them.

The importance of the availability and approachability of PEs is outlined in further research. For example, Knight's (2000) survey questionnaire of 196 MSW and 52 BSW students from one US university (at an early stage in their placement) noted that supervisor availability, both for formal supervision and contact outside of supervision was a highly rated and helpful supervisory skills. In the Coohy et al., (2017) US survey study that explored the views of 147 BSW and MSW students and found that FI lack of availability was noted by 11% of the student respondents as being a significant FI behaviour that 'got in the way of learning' (p.8). The Bailey-McHale et al., (2018) study is a small-scale UK study that further illuminates student perceptions of PE availability. In this study, 13 students drew an image of their relationship with their PE and the authors note the 'striking impression of a busy, distracted PE who had limited time for the student' (p.64). The authors suggest that such behaviours may affect student confidence to seek advice or help from PEs and may influence the quality of supervision.

The PE behaviours of availability, responsiveness and approachability provide both physical and emotional portals for dialogue and discussion, as noted in a recent US qualitative focus group study (40 MSW students) carried out by Archer - Kuhn et al., (2020). In this study, the authors stress the importance that dialogue plays within the PE and student relationship, as 'critical dialogue and critical reflection between field supervisors and students challenge students beyond the confines of their comfort zone and allow space to understand and add meaning to these experiences' (p. 15). The notion of 'space' encapsulated here has physical and metaphorical characteristics and both appear key to positive student experiences of placement.

Within numerous studies, students refer to the PEs provision of support and feelings of emotional safety as being central to their positive relationship with their PE and satisfaction with placement. For example, Lefevre's (2005) survey study into the placement experiences of MSW and DipSW students in a UK university reported on 71 student placement experiences. Incorporating

open questions and free text comments within the survey, findings indicated that almost half of the respondents used the word 'supportive' to describe their relationship with their PE. Lefevre (2005) also reports that other 'positive' words indicating a supportive relationship were present, such as 'warm', 'encouraging', 'approachable' and 'understanding'. The word supportive can have many meanings and connotations of course, and whilst Lefevre notes this is a 'positive' word, it is not problematised or interrogated further within the paper.

The centrality of PE accessibility, attunement and supportive behaviours as aids to student learning and positive experiences of placement are further illustrated in Dore's (2019) small-scale UK qualitative study. Dore interviewed 4 students (prior to qualification and after two placements had ended) seeking to explore how conversations about emotion are facilitated and enabled on placement. All the students commented on the 'accessibility' of the PE being key to the exploration of emotional content and three of the four students spoke of their PEs ability of 'attunement'. Dore comments that such PE approaches are highly facilitative in encouraging an 'accessible space'(p. 853) for students. He also discusses the 'discrete enabling actions' (p.849) of PEs, such actions including skilful responding by the PE to student cues or clues and thus giving 'permission' for discussion of emotions, a PE behaviour mentioned by three students.

Another aspect of a supportive PE and student relationship considered central within student experiences is the establishment and maintenance of a 'collaborative and trusting relationship' (Lefevre, 2005, p.573). Where this type of positive relationship is established, many studies refer to the security it provides for students in the management of difficult or 'emotionally charged events' (Litvack et al., 2010, p.231) on placement. Barlow and Hall's (2007) qualitative Canadian study audio taped and transcribed telephone interviews with 35 students and 35 FIs to explore such experiences on placement. The authors' analysis suggested that where students feel supported by their FIs (9 students in the study) and were involved in a positive relationship with

them, they sought advice and guidance on difficult situations. Where students were reluctant to do this, this was due to a number of reasons, including a strained relationship with FIs, as reported by 10 students in the study. Other reasons included student fears or perceptions about their competency, and for some students, difficulties that pertained to issues of power, control or oppression within the PE and student relationship itself. The later and smaller scale US study undertaken by Litvack et al., (2010) extends this theme. This study interviewed 12 MSW students about their challenges on placement and how they weathered them. Like previous studies, this study also noted the fundamental significance of the student and FI relationship but claimed that this could act 'both as a crucial risk factor and as a crucial protective factor' (p.233) for students. Where the relationship with the PE was emotionally supportive or strong, students would seek help from their FIs, assured of a welcoming, interested and constructive response. Whilst these authors acknowledge that all the students interviewed were 'acutely aware of the power dynamic' (p.233) and the FI role in evaluations of student competence, for some students, a particular 'sense of vulnerability emerged as a significant stressor when the relationship was not considered solid' (p.233).

The assertion that the PE and student relationship can be a 'risk factor' and a significant stressor has a particular bearing when considering the issue of power within the PE and student relationship. It is acknowledged within practice education that the PE holds power within the relationship by dint of their assessment and gatekeeping role (Finch, 2017). Kadushin (1976, p.98) suggests that this is the formal power of the PE, related to their role, authority and position, whereas there is also the functional power of the PE, which relates to the 'person of the supervisor' (p.99) and both the manner in which they carry out their task and how they are perceived by the supervisee or student. Many authors have written about the need for PEs to be aware of and address imbalances of power in the relationship and actively work to reduce these where possible (Lefevre, 1998; ILPS, 1993; Tedam, 2015; Power and Bogo, 2003) and as part of this, to acknowledge difference,

diversity and potential sources of differential power and the impact on the placement. In the UK context, particular concerns regarding power differentials and imbalances are apparent in the studies that consider the placement experiences of black and ethnic minority (BAME) students. These studies sit within a wider evidence base regarding the poorer progression and completion rates for BAME students within social work education (Hussein et al., 2008; Bernard et al., 2011). Although few in number in the UK, studies considering the placement experiences of BME students have indicated consistent findings and point, amongst other factors, to the lack of a trusting and supportive relationship with PEs and the pervasiveness of both indirect and direct racism. Thus, the Bartoli et al., (2008) focus group study involving 15 Black African female students from one UK University, reported students being subject to greater scrutiny than others and feeling stereotyped and mistrusted, amounting to what the authors conclude is 'institutional racism on several levels and experienced in various forms' (p.85). In a later UK focus group study Thomas (2011), 6 BAME students also reported feeling 'watched' (p.45); subject to assumption, allied to ignorance, about their ethnicity and cultural background and considered they had been subject to overt racism within the placement. Tedam's (2014) study of two Black African students (from different universities) detailed comparable experiences - including 'over-scrutiny, discrimination, low expectations and a general lack of support in relation to their practice learning opportunities' (p.141) and 'racism and racist behaviour evidenced by acts or omissions by their PEs' (p.142). These findings were replicated in Fairtlough et al's., (2014) larger study of the education and placement experiences of 66 BAME students across eight social work programmes. Within this qualitative study, 46 students participated in six focus groups and 20 students were interviewed. Findings included BAME students feeling excluded within placement; feeling they were subjected to higher expectations and higher levels of scrutiny than others; experiencing racial abuse on placements from service users that was not dealt with or challenged by PEs and overall, attributing many of their experiences 'bluntly to institutional racism within the practice-learning field' (p.616).

The centrality of the relationship is also reflected in studies of student experience that pertain to the degree of autonomy and responsibility they are given. Thus, where there is a trusting, supportive and collaborative relationship between PE and students allied to the PEs developmental understanding of the student's development, then it appears that the student's need for increasing autonomy can be met (Collins et al., 1992; Fernandez, 1998). Knight's two studies (Knight, 2000 and Knight, 2001) also confirms that student learning needs change and develop, over the course of their training and over the course of a placement. In the Knight (2001) survey study of 249 BSW and MSW students, findings indicated that during the later parts of a placement, students felt that FI skills and behaviours that had greatest impact on students were those that develop self-critical analysis, gain more autonomy and link theory with practice.

The developmental nature of students learning, the endeavour for increasing autonomy and a corresponding awareness and facilitation of this on the part of the PE is indicated in studies that are more recent. Within the Wilson and Flanagan (2019) UK study of tools that facilitate learning in placement, students rated responsibility and independence highly and this was similarly noted in the McSweeney and Williams (2018) interview study involving 17 Irish Social Care students. Whilst Social Care and Social Work training are differentiated in Ireland, they share commonalities of regulatory standards and required supervised placements. Within this study, the students reiterated the importance of autonomy and the need to 'do' as well as shadow and observe, but also stressed the necessity of 'getting the balance right' (p. 587). Negotiating the 'balance' entails responsibilities on both sides - the supervisor providing 'an appropriate balance between the level of autonomy and responsibility the student is given..., as well as students balancing taking initiative with standing back and observing' (p.587).

Finally, whilst it can argued that the student and PE relationship is central to student placement experiences, the nature and quality of the relationship is built upon a number of 'component variables' (Fernandez, 1998, p.194) and

PE facilitative and enabling capacities. It is the nature of these variables that is explored in the literature review of the content and experiences of supervision that follows.

### 3.7 The narrative review of the literature

This narrative review of the selected and relevant literature identified is presented within three main areas:

- Content and activities on placement and/or supervision - self report studies
- Content and activities within supervision - audio recording of student supervision
- Experiences of supervision on placement, both student experiences and PE experiences

#### 3.7.1 Content and activities on placement and / or supervision- self report studies

The literature and the self-report studies considering the content and activities within the placement, the methods and tools used on placement and the contribution of particular learning activities to student satisfaction will be outlined, followed by a discussion of relevant issues arising.

Maidment's research (Maidment, 2000) into methods of 'educational input' (p.147) used within New Zealand placements reported on pre and post placement surveys received from 78 first year social work students and 130 Field Educators (FEs). Pre placement, both sets of respondents were asked to comment on 14 methods and their perceived effectiveness - including providing orientation (induction); providing supervision; providing group supervision; discussing case notes; audio or videotaping student work with service users; using role play; having the student co work with the FE; having the FE observe the student; and post placement, both sets of respondents were asked to comment on how often each method was used during the placement. There was congruence between student and FE perceptions of

what learning methods were effective in learning, with similar ratings noted across all learning activities, except for reviewing video and audio tapes of student work, where students rated these as less effective. However, the post placement survey indicated a discrepancy between what FEs regarded as effective and what students actually reported happened in practice. Thus, students reported that being observed in practice or having their work audio taped and reviewed by the FE were less frequent activities, although rated as highly effective by FEs. Beyond the discord between beliefs and usage of learning methods within the field, Maidment also commented on the effect of this on student assessment and noted the predominance of learning methods that 'offer a 'once removed' view of the student's competence, such as the discussion of case notes' (p.150).

The issue of the range and frequency of learning activities in the practice placement has been the focus of a series of studies carried out by Cleak and colleagues (Smith et al., 2015; Cleak et al., 2016; and Roulston et al., 2018).

Smith et al., (2015) gathered data from 263 final year Australian social work students about the activities being undertaken on placement, the title of their article 'what are they really doing?' indicating the limited examination of field learning activities to date. Again, data was collected via a cross sectional retrospective survey (although quantitative and qualitative responses were required, the latter via free text comments) and students commented on the frequency of 14 learning activities on placement:

1. Assisted to understand agency mission
2. Oriented to agency service delivery protocols
3. Prepared and assisted to learn new skills
4. Observed practice of social workers in agency
5. Practice of student was observed
6. Reflected on practice skills
7. Given constructive feedback about progress



8. Discussed feelings
9. Reflected critically about role of social work
10. Reflect on own social work practice
11. Provided with weekly social work supervision
12. Given reading material
13. Linked practice to AASW Code of Ethics
14. Linked practice to theory

The learning activities that most students reported experiencing regularly were reflecting on practice skills and being provided with weekly supervision; other significantly frequent activities were discussing feelings and being given constructive feedback. As in Maidment's (2000) study, being observed in their practice was the learning activity experienced least regularly and 36% of students reported that their practice was observed either rarely or not at all. Of further significance was the fact that 'less than half of the students regularly experienced learning activities related to 'conceptualising' their practice: over 25% of the students reported that they rarely or never 'linked practice to the Code of Ethics' and 22% of students reported that they rarely or never 'linked practice to theory' (p. 523). Whilst this list of 14 activities also referenced the 'provision of weekly supervision' as a particular activity in itself, rather than the forum where other activities would be practiced, students did make qualitative comments on the centrality of formal supervision as key to the provision of such other learning activities such as reflecting on practice and the integration of theory and practice.

Building from this study, Cleak et al., (2016) sought to gather data from students regarding the provision and frequency of key learning activities on placement. The authors used a cross sectional survey to gather data from 396 students from both universities in Northern Ireland (NI) who had undertaken either their first or final placement. Sixteen named learning activities were identified, which were similar to the Smith et al., (2015) activities but included additional activities such as 'being provided with

reading material and theory'; 'linking tasks to practice foci and Key Roles' and 'linking practice to Codes of Practice' (p. 2041). Data was also gathered in relation to the type of placement setting and the model of practice learning experienced (e.g., with either on site or off-site PE). Findings indicated that whilst the majority of students regularly engaged with many of the learning activities, 13% did not receive regular social work supervision and 21% were not given constructive feedback about their progress. Like previous studies, only 58% of students were formally observed in their practice. Whilst this appears to be particularly significant, given the authors comment that formal observation of practice is required by the NI professional body, exploration of this was not pursued within the article. Only 64% of students regularly engaged with linking theory to practice and around 50% of students linked tasks to practice foci or key roles or Codes of Practice or were provided with reading materials or theory. The study also notes that 'frequency of learning activities varies according to different settings, year levels and who provided the learning' (p.2046) indicating that studies seeking data from a single population (i.e., all final year students with onsite and singleton Practice Educators, such as the sample used within this this PhD study) may fare better in providing clearer outcomes or findings.

As a follow-on study from the Cleak et al., (2016) study, Roulston et al's., study (2018) sought to identify learning activities that students found most useful in developing readiness for practice (practice competence) and those activities that were useful in developing their social work identity. Using the same 16 learning activities, the views of 396 social work students from two Northern Irish universities were gathered using a cross-sectional survey. Responses indicated that the most highly ranked learning activity was being given constructive feedback. Similarly, discussing feelings and values; observing PEs or staff and being provided with social work supervision were activities that were found to be very useful across both satisfaction measures. The authors note the low usefulness rating given to what they term 'knowledge for practice' activities such as linking practice to theory; Key Roles and Codes of Practice, perhaps not

surprising given their relatively low incidence within placement (about 50% of students experiencing these activities) in the previous Cleak et al., (2016) study.

Other studies have also considered the impact of the content and activities on placement on student learning, experience, and satisfaction, particularly in the US context. Fortune et al., (2000) carried out a longitudinal study into MSW students in an US university, and a sample of 64 students self-reported on range of learning activities on placement, during both first and second placements, and their impact on their learning and satisfaction. The authors divided 11 learning activities on placement into two types: 'observational - participatory activities that are the traditional social work "doing" activities, and conceptual-linkage activities that provide context and link specifics to principles' (p.112). Observational - participatory activities (n=4) thus included observing others in their work; co working; role play, or the student being observed in practice; conceptual - linkage activities (n=7) included explanations from the Field Instructor (FI); making connections to theory or academic learning; feedback on written work (process recordings); requesting the student to self-critique and making connections to theory. Overall, the data indicated that both types of learning activities are important to students although in the second placement some difference was noted for greater student desire for self-critique.

In a later study, Fortune and Kay (2003) returned to the theme of the impact of types of learning activities on placement and investigated both their impact on student self-evaluation and student satisfaction with placement. In this study, 118 US MSW students were surveyed about learning activities available - and for this study Fortune and Kay (2003) split these learning opportunities into 'educational learning activities' (receiving feedback, connecting theory to practice, seeing others model professional roles) and opportunities to engage in 'professional skills' activities (direct work with service users; using communication, assessment and intervention skills) (p.8). The findings indicated that both

types of learning activities were important to students (similarly to Fortune et al., 2000). The authors conclude that the opportunity to engage in 'real' skills is important for student learning, but this should be allied to field instruction that focuses 'on the educational aspects of what the student is doing...field instructors can provide the conceptual frameworks for what the student is doing' (p.26).

Lee and Fortune carried out two further studies in the US (Lee and Fortune, 2013a and Lee and Fortune 2013b) focusing on the types of learning activities available and returning to the concepts of 'observational - participatory activities' and 'conceptual-linkage activities'. The first study (Lee and Fortune 2013a) sought to examine whether learning activities differed over the course of a single placement. To this end, 56 first year MSW students were surveyed at three different points during their first placement. Findings indicated that 'conceptual-linkage activities' moderately increased over the course of the placement. However, 'observational' activities decreased, but 'participatory' activities, 'working independently and doing different things' (p.432) increased. In a further paper (Lee and Fortune, 2013b), the authors established a distinction between observational and participatory activities (although still both "doing" activities) and conceptual-linkage activities ("thinking" activities). In this 2013b study, and sourcing data from the same group of MSW students as in their previous paper, the authors considered what types of learning activities were associated with enhanced student (self-reported) learning and skills, and their satisfaction with placement. Findings indicated that both "doing" and "thinking" activities were important and impacted on student acquisition and self-evaluation of skills and reported satisfaction with placement. The authors concluded that 'field practicum should be sufficiently rich and complex to allow for doing and thinking activities' (p. 656).

The Wilson et al., (2009) study considered the placement experiences of 139 Northern Ireland MSW students and 58 Republic of Ireland students. Students were surveyed at the end of the placement and, to further

elucidate the quantitative findings, a focus group was held with 17 students. Findings indicated that a range of learning tools were used within supervision and on placement. These included process records (required for the portfolio); modelling (observing PEs in their practice); 'rehearsal' (not explained in the paper, although this may be direct observation of the student's practice and differentiated thus from 'role play' which is noted as a tool?); role play; video play and audio tape. The use of process records was the most extensive tool used and modelling the second most frequently experienced. Where students had a singleton (on site) PE a greater percentage experienced modelling, whereas role-play, videotaping and audio taping were the less experienced activities. Flanagan and Wilson's (2018) study retrospectively surveyed 100 MSW students in a Republic of Ireland University, seeking to gather data on 'what makes a good placement' and to explicate 'who or what facilitated their learning on placement' (p.565). Nearly two thirds of students rated their PE as 'very helpful' in facilitating their learning on placement, and a further quarter rated their teacher as 'helpful' and ratings of helpfulness were positively correlated with both overall satisfaction with placement and learning on placement. The "what" element of the 'helpfulness' of PEs included 'support' offered by PEs, along with the provision of formal and informal supervision, induction, assisting with case load management, feedback and guidance on theory and discussing theory and practice, all of which were pivotal to experiences of satisfaction.

In a further study, Wilson and Flanagan (2019) placed the spotlight on 'what tools facilitate learning on placement?' (p.1), using the same sample and survey as the data collection method in their previous study (Flanagan and Wilson, 2018). Students ranked a range of learning tools on placement in relation to both usefulness and frequency. Ranked as frequent (once a week) and highly useful were observing others at work; informal supervision; co-working; responsibility/independent work; and critiquing your own work. The authors note the importance of exposure to direct work with service users as the most highly ranked learning tools.

These findings echo those found elsewhere (Bogo, 2015; Fortune and Kay, 2003), that direct and independent practice is important for students.

To conclude, the literature search established that there are a limited number of studies (n=11) illuminating the particular content and activities on placement. Significantly, the studies demonstrate a similar range of learning activities within placements, across Western continents and academic cohorts, alongside notable consistency in the learning activities that students find helpful to their learning and development. Key activities include undertaking direct work and being given increasing responsibility for this; observing and being observed; being given constructive feedback as part of reviewing practice and being given opportunities to reflect and discuss feelings. Thus, there is evidence that both 'doing' and 'thinking' (Fortune et al., 2000) activities are central and that students require both experiential learning via direct practice with service users, and educational activities, follow up and 'thinking' opportunities, that enable and encourage them to theoretically conceptualise their practice.

However, the nature of the studies suggest that some caution must be employed. All the studies are quantitative studies, using survey instruments that have as their frame a focus on evaluation and 'student satisfaction' with placement. Whilst these questionnaire surveys offer insights and contribute to face validity, they do so using evaluative measures that are based solely on student interpretation and perception and / or self-report on researcher given categories. There are well-identified issues regarding both self-report of behaviours, particularly self-report of behaviours taking place after experience, and of self-report using surveys (Bryman 2008; Wilkins et al., 2018). For example, there can be issues of respondent memory or question interpretation or meaning. In their study of (practitioner) supervision, Wilkins et al., (2018) noted that respondents may have differing interpretations of questions which 'may not be problematic for concrete questions (e.g., "How often do you have supervision?") but may be troublesome for abstract concepts (e.g., "To

what extent does your supervisor promote reflection and analysis?’”’ (p.351). Further, many of the studies refer to evaluative or outcome measures relating to student satisfaction and most studies are framed within this evaluative context, and thus student responses regarding the range of learning activities present and experienced may be predicated on positive, 'warm and rosy glow' (or negative) feelings about the placement overall. There may also be some element of 'desirability effect' evident (Bryman, 2008, p.255), in that students may assume that, by being named, such learning activities are assumed (or desired) within a placement. Thus, if they did not happen; did not take place frequently or there was disjuncture between the activity label and student perception of what it included, honest reporting of these issues might impact upon respondent's perceptions about the robustness of the placement, the PE assessment and thus the legitimacy of the qualification obtained.

Further, whilst supervision - both informal and formal - is consistently named as a key learning activity or tool, the detail of how supervision is used as a tool or activity is omitted. Thus, what is included within supervision or how the more educational activities or opportunities to reflect or discuss feelings are enacted within supervision, is not revealed within these studies. The search for audio-recorded activities within student supervision that follows seeks to address this omission.

### 3.7.2 Content and activities within supervision - audio recording of student supervision

As Table A Indicates, electronic database searches for articles published between 2000-2021 and focusing on audio recordings of student social work supervision revealed only one article of relevance (Maidment and Cooper, 2002). Two further articles of relevance (Brodie and Williams, 2013; An and Szto, 2018) also surfaced in the wider searches for practice learning experiences. Seven articles and one book have been selected as relevant for inclusion and given the paucity of published research in this area, four of the selected research items lie outside of the database search frame of 2000-

2021 and includes research that was either already known to the researcher or was gleaned through reference harvesting. The included research from New Zealand, mainland China, US and the UK and were chosen for inclusion as they used audio recording to focus on the content of student supervision sessions and thus contributed to a 'behind the scenes look' at what takes place within supervision encounters.

Over the course of the study, researcher general 'alertness' to any mention of audio recording of supervision in published reports, research and articles about social work practice or supervision has also been important. Since the beginning of this study, there has been a growth in the use of audio recordings as a tool of research, in relation to practitioner supervision research (Wilkins et al., 2018; Turney and Ruch, 2018; Rankine, 2019; Wilkins et al., 2020) and direct social work practice, particularly within the children and families arena (Forrester et al., 2017; Forrester et al., 2013; Bostock et al., 2017). These studies offered wider contextual insights helpful for this study and their significance and contribution to knowledge for practice will be considered at the conclusion of this study.

The four articles included that pertain to the date range 2000-2021 are Maidment and Cooper (2002); An et al., (2017); An and Szto (2018) and Brodie and Williams (2013). The Maidment and Cooper study (2002) used recordings from 7 Field Educator (FE) /student dyads of 'one or two supervision sessions where issues of difference were attended to' (p.400), the final number of supervision recordings that were received or transcribed is not stated. The research aims were to consider how 'difference' was considered within supervision and to discover the techniques used by FE to facilitate student learning in this area. The study concluded that the taped sessions were 'devoid of overt references to power, oppression, structural inequality, 'othering' and marginalization and as such the degree to which the sessions reflected anti-oppressive practice was limited' (p.406). However, the findings do shed some light on the content of supervision and the techniques used. For example, the authors noted that, within the supervision sessions,



there were 'many examples where Field Educators used questioning to raise awareness and challenge assumptions held by students' (p.402) and as a technique to encourage student reflection. The study also asserted that FEs used 'self-disclosure' to encourage student awareness, for example, in relation to oppressive language used by the student and the FE choosing to share a recent experience of her own.

An et al., (2017) and An and Szto (2018) also used audio recordings in their studies into field supervision in China, along with other methods of data collection including individual interviews, student written journal entries and recordings of informal (student) peer support meetings. In the An et al., (2017) study, twenty hours of audio-recorded supervision sessions were collected from 3 MSW students and their agency field supervisors, along with three sessions with their 'university supervisor' (a role relating to the 'dual supervisory' approach in mainland China and partially akin to the 'off site PE role' in the UK). However, the data is not analysed separately so the overall themes identified relate to the overall data collected, and specific content of the supervisory sessions is thus not available. The later research (An and Szto, 2018) into the 'supervisor-intern' relationship in Shanghai also used 'audio recorded conversations' as part of a wider collection of data as previously. Audio recordings from one supervisor and three students (interns) were analysed, including 'group and individual supervisory meetings (15 meetings for a total of 20 hours)'(p.5). The latter were noted to be 'in addition" to the 'audio recorded conversations' and it is unclear whether these 'audio recorded conversations' were part of the data collected within the individual supervisory sessions or separate to them. However, the themes reported in the study regarding the key factors shaping and maintaining the supervisory relationship, referred to the overall data collected, and specific findings relating to the audio-recorded sessions were again not identified.

In contrast, the Brodie and Williams (2013) study uses audio recording of student and PE supervision sessions to 'lift the lid' on the supervisory

encounter (p.519) and provides clear data regarding activities within these sessions. This study, and the Brodie (1993) study that preceded it, are key papers that, along with the Nelsen (1974) research, have been pivotal in the genesis and the development of my study and I turn to these now.

The Brodie (1993) study was a small-scale UK study that considered the content of PE / student supervision sessions, including 6 dyads (PE and student) and recordings of 22 supervision sessions. To code activities during supervision, Brodie divided the content of supervision sessions into 'subject coverage', including casework discussion; practice or general issue (not explained); placement review; academic assignment and new referrals and 'techniques' used by PEs during the taped supervision sessions. These 'techniques', such as 'offering opinion'; questioning; clarifying and summarising; giving feedback; making suggestion; giving feedback and eliciting feelings were coded and then collated into overall percentages for all PEs. This study also specifically considered how and if PEs referred to theory within supervision. Such theory referencing was differentiated in terms of oblique references; explicit but unelaborated references or references to theory that were explicit and elaborated.

Findings from this study indicated that very little time was spent during supervision sessions explicating theory (0.09%) or the PE referring to theory (35%), with the techniques of (PE) 'offering opinion' (34%) and questioning (23%) being coded most frequently. Most supervision time consisted of 'casework discussion' (64%). In conclusion, Brodie suggested that this was 'minimalist supervision...generally characterised by the student 'telling the case' with the PT (Practice Teacher) checking and providing practical information...and repeatedly missing opportunities to encourage the student to 'make sense' of practice issues and dilemmas...as a supervisory style it seems consistent with that described elsewhere as 'caseload management' (p. 84).

In a follow up study, Brodie and Williams (2013) again considered the content of social work supervision, indicated through a discussion of 'topic coverage and PE 'activities', in addition to interviews with the 8 students and PEs. The study included 8 dyads and analysis of one taped supervision session from each pair towards the end of a 65-day placement. The 'topic coverage' areas were based on Brodie's previous study (1993). This 2013 study found that topic coverage included a similar focus on 'casework discussion' as in the 1993 study (57% in the 2013 study) but with an enhanced focus on 'academic assignment' (13%); also, placement review (23%) featured significantly. The methodological approach taken in the 2013 study was similar to the 1993 study (content analysis of taped supervision sessions), although the study did not directly aim for 'comparison' with the 1993 study. The main areas of difference that the authors note in relation to the 1993 study are a significant increase in references to theory and the students' academic work, and 'practice discussion' involving 'the analysis of a practice situation rather than merely "telling the case" as was evident previously' (p.513). The authors conclude that the PE and student were 'actively and interactively engaged in a learning process' (p.519) and, in contrast to the 1993 study, the PE was (more) 'able and ready to bridge the gap between the academic and practice 'worlds' of the student' (p.519). However, caution must be applied, as there are differences in coding terminology and counting methods that make comparison difficult. For example, in relation to PE 'activities' (termed techniques in the 1993 study), the 1993 study gives their occurrence in overall percentages, whereas the 2013 study counts the number of occurrences and rates them 1st to 10th most frequent occurrences. It is also notable that the 1993 study included 22 supervision recordings (although only 6 were transcribed in full) that were presumably gathered over the entire course of the placement, whereas the 2013 study included 8 recordings (transcribed in full) but singular recordings from each dyad at the end of the placement. However, the authors noted that some findings were similar - i.e. in the 2013 study, PEs use of 'exploring' (instead of 'questioning' as a technique (23%) noted in the previous study) was the most frequently coded and PEs 'expressing opinion' (instead of

'offering opinion' as a technique (34%) noted in the previous study) was the second most frequently coded activity. This study took place 10 years after the first study and the authors suggest the findings indicate an enhanced focus on analysis and discussion during supervision and a more active promotion of its 'educative' function.

In an earlier US study, Nelsen (1974) audio taped supervision sessions between 11 Field Instructors (FI) and 19 social work students (these sessions were referred to as 'fieldwork conferences'). The study collected 68 conferences; these sessions were mostly from early stages of the placement but one session from each student was submitted during later stages of the placement. Communication between the FI and student was coded in relation to the 'content of the discussion, teaching techniques used and some apparent student response to these and relationship messages (communications implying equality or authority) of both parties' (p.147). Within this study, Nelsen also specifically coded particular 'teaching techniques' used by the FI such as giving support, eliciting student feelings and giving directives. The study found that FIs engaged in an 'active teaching style' that included a large amount of case discussion (70% of time during the supervision sessions was spent on this) and a considerable number of directives. However, 'even where FI directives appeared in case discussion, the context often indicated a sort of summing up of mutual discussion rather than the bald issuing of an order' (p. 152). During later conferences, a 'particular discussion pattern was common' (p.149) where 'both FI and student participated actively, with much volunteering of information and ideas' (p.149) and it was noted that overall students had equal participation in discussions. Nelsen further wonders if student participation in discussion was stimulated partly by FI's 'enthusiasm and willingness to expose their thinking' (p.153). This clearly replicates some of the findings of Maidment and Cooper (2002) in relation to the positive effect of FI 'self-disclosure' within supervision, and the role and preponderance of PE 'exploring' and 'offering opinion' in the Brodie and Williams (2013) study. The mutually reinforcing elements of the supervisory encounter are also

highlighted by Nelsen (1974) as she suggests that the 'supervisors use of techniques, student responses, and content of discussion were mutually related to each other' (p.152).

Of particular interest is Nelsen's focus on feelings, emotions and support, aspects of practice which previous student self-report studies have considered central to satisfaction with the placement (Bogo, 2006) but which were not activities coded for within the Brodie (1993) or the Brodie and Williams (2013) study. Nelsen (1974) found the FI 'use of support' more frequent than expected, both as a vehicle for emotional reassurance but also a 'reinforcement' type of support' or 'intellectual reinforcement' (p.151). This FI 'technique' of 'using reinforcement type support in this way elicited more active participation from their students than did others; the students seemed more certain about what they did know and more eager to tackle what they did not' (p.150). The attention paid to feelings and support echoes the importance placed on these aspects of the placement as indicated previously by Bogo (2006; 2015) and is particularly relevant in the light of the general 'absence' of emotions and the loss of the affective dimension noted within contemporary research within supervision (Ruch, 2102; Wilkins et al.,2017).

The study by Basso (1987), also in the US, analysed 30 audio tapes of supervision sessions between one Field Instructor (FI) and three students. Each student and FI discussed 10 individual service users on three occasions, taping the first, third and last session for each service user discussed. The focus of this study was to analyse student and FI use of the Task Centred Model (Reid and Epstein, 1972) and content of supervision discussion was coded according to time given to the eight 'problem solving' activities required within the Task Centred Model. Many of the findings pertaining to the pattern of discussion time for each activity across the beginning, middle and end of student involvement are not surprising - for example, discussion time given to 'intervening' peaked in the third (middle) session and declined in the last session, and 'supporting changes' increased in each session. However, Basso notes that 'understanding the problem'

remained a significant area of discussion in all three sessions, and in particular, the 'client's perception of the problem' remained steady and accounted for between 50-65% of discussion time in each session. Whilst this study investigated the application of a specific model to work with service users, the findings have relevance for this study in that they suggest that both "doing" and "thinking" activities were facilitated during the supervisory encounter.

The book included in this section of the literature review is Gardiner's classic study (Gardiner, 1989) that explored the 'anatomy' of supervision and in particular the patterns of interactions in supervision. It is included in the literature review as it is a study that utilises a single in-depth case study that includes audio recordings of supervision sessions between a supervisor and student (within a children and families statutory placement) over a 16-week placement period (11 supervision audio recordings in total). Alongside the case study, the study included a questionnaire for supervisors and interviews with students and supervisors. Gardiner's aim was to explore the learning process for students and this early work recognised the under researched nature of the supervisory process, and specifically noted the existence of 'little direct reporting of what actually occurs in supervision' (p.15).

In contrast to some of the previous studies outlined (Nelsen, 1974; Brodie, 1993 and Brodie and Williams, 2013), Gardiner's study does not use topic codes or count incidence or time, and instead examines 'qualitative features of the teaching and learning interaction' (p.45) and the patterns therein, such as the 'extent of hierarchy and directiveness in the supervisory relationship; any changes in the patterns of interaction in supervision (and) the impact of assessment on teaching and learning processes' (p.45). Gardiner did not transcribe tapes in full but made notes as he listened to the tapes. Whilst this is a single case study involving only one dyad, and therefore findings cannot be easily generalised, this research and Gardiner's analysis of elements of the subtleties of interaction research throws an interesting light on the content of supervision sessions and the impact on student learning, as they

develop over the course of a placement. For example, in the first supervision Gardiner notes that the supervisor was instructing frequently, suggesting a 'hierarchical relationship' (p.48) which could be due to the uncertainty involved in establishing a new supervisory relationship or as an attempt by the supervisor to establish her power and authority. The pattern of supervisor direction and advice in relation to case work - and asking direct questions of the student - was replicated in the next few supervision sessions. The student responds but does not proffer many views independently. Gardiner comments that the student and the supervisor seemed to be 'moving towards each other on parallel but separate lines and missing each other' (p.50). The differing expectations of student and supervisor are underlined in session 6, where Gardiner comments that the interaction seems to suggest that 'the student appears to want to find out right and wrong ways to do things' (p.52). By the penultimate session however, Gardiner considers that both the supervisor and student appear more relaxed, and the student in particular indicates increasing confidence and competence, feeling able to share a taped interview he had conducted with a family and seek feedback from the supervisor. There is clearly a significant developmental aspect present in the interactions - student confidence, understanding and approach develops as the placement progresses and the PE understanding, and enactment of their role also changes.

### 3.7.3 Student Experiences of supervision on placement

The literature relating to student experiences of supervision can be broadly categorised into three areas:

- Supervisory behaviours, qualities and style
- Purpose and structure of supervision
- Content of supervision

#### 3.7.3.1 Supervisory behaviours, qualities and style

Knight (2000 and 2001) studies specifically sought student views on their supervisors' skills and behaviours. In the earlier (Knight, 2000) survey study

249 BSW and MSW students in a US university, the focus was placed upon supervisory behaviours that were influential for students at the beginning stages of the placement. Findings suggested that at the earlier stages of the placement, highly rated behaviours included those that helped orientate the student to the agency and were particularly related to case work. In the later study, Knight (2001) uses the same instrument and student sample but reports on two time points in the students' placement, thus studying views about students' overall experiences of supervision and the FIs supervisory behaviours. The effect of time was evident, findings confirming that certain FI behaviours were considered more highly effective in the beginning stages of the placement (such as 'clarifying expectations and role' and 'reviewing cases in supervision' (p.373), whereas at the latter stages of the placement students considered FI behaviours such as 'encouraging discussion' and 'integrating theory with practice' as more influential. Knight concludes that the FI and student relationship is a 'dynamic, evolving one, requiring the FI to use a variety of skills, depending on where the student was in the learning process' (p.373). As noted previously however, (Wilkins et al., 2018) there remain issues of meaning and interpretation that a survey study cannot fully address. Thus, whilst these studies throw light upon the range of supervisory skills required and received, the interpretation of these supervisory behaviours by individual students may vary. Further, the detail or explication of these activities or how they were manifested within the placement or within the supervisory relationship was not indicated.

The Cooney et al., (2017) US survey study asked 147 BSW and MSW students about Field Instructor (FI) behaviours that 'facilitated their learning' on placement. Within this study, students were asked to comment on 9 FI behaviours that facilitated learning, split into those that provided 'developmental support' such as providing emotional support, providing feedback, being challenged, encouraging autonomy, being available and open; and those that provided 'task support', such as providing learning opportunities and instructions and planning tasks. As with the Knight (2000, 2001) studies, it may be presumed that many of these FI supporting



behaviours took place within supervision, although there is only one specific mention of the supervisory encounter within the study. A third of respondents reported that the availability and openness of their FI contributed to their learning and 'this often occurred when they met privately (viz. during scheduled supervision), but it also extended to when they were on the move, before or after working with clients and others ' (p.7). This suggests that both formal and informal supervision are encounters that have meaning and value for students.

The Baretto (2009) US study considered student views of the 'desirable characteristics' (p.47) of Field Instructors (FIs). This study surveyed 25 BSW students and interviewed 20 BSW students, asking students to rank (and then describe in the interviews) three categories of FI qualities and characteristics. These were FIs personal qualities (such as reliability, openness, honesty); the FIs supervisory qualities (such as their teaching style) and the FIs professional qualities (such as their social work skills and knowledge). The findings indicated that the FIs professional competences and skills were the most desirable qualities of FIs and that 'professional competence was valued over both instructional effectiveness and affective-relationship qualities' (p.56).

Beyond consideration of specific supervisory behaviours, some studies of student placement experiences refer to the impact of supervisory 'style'. The Killick (2005) Northern Ireland survey studied the placement experiences of 149 students who had completed their first placement. The supervisory style of the PE is defined within three dimensions: Attractiveness, incorporating a warm, supportive 'collegial approach' (p.44); Interpersonally Sensitive incorporating a perceptive, therapeutic approach and a Task Oriented approach that is content focused and structured. Findings indicated that the 'attractive style' was the most prevalent of supervisory styles experienced by students; it was also the style most frequently correlated with satisfaction. However, this study also found that the 'strongest single factor in determining students' satisfaction was the final outcome of placement' (p.47) and of the 4

failing students who responded, 'none of the failing students identified their practice teacher as having an attractive supervision style' (p.47). This serves to remind us that the concept of supervisory 'style', attractive or otherwise, is a nebulous, nuanced, and contentious concept that needs to be treated cautiously and that overall satisfaction with supervision, style or the placement may be related closely to whether the placement was passed.

However, the concept and impact of supervisory 'style', however interpreted, cannot be dismissed and is further discussed in the Giddings et al., (2004) US study. This study reports on the questionnaire responses of 484 social workers (not current or necessarily recent students) in relation to a list of 50 'behaviourally specific problems with FIs' (p.191) they may have experienced on placement. Whilst 43% of respondents reported no problems with their FIs, 45% reported at least one problem that caused them stress. The authors noted that such problems 'seem to occur as discrete types, related generally to supervisory style or professional comportment' (p.209). Indeed, the most frequently noted 'problem behaviour' and which caused the most stress was 'FI had a difficult style'. Findings suggested that such a 'difficult style' was not defined by a singular feature and the authors' offer a view that it is better considered as a 'continuum of supervisory style.... a continuum ranging from an extremely rigid approach to an extremely lax approach ' (p.210).

In contrast, some studies of student experiences on placement refer positively to the supervisor as a role model and note the positive impact of supervisory knowledge and experience. Students in the Miehl et al., (2013) US focus group study involving 21 students across 4 groups, commented that identifying and learning from their supervisors' 'professional functioning' (p140) contributed to satisfactory placement supervisory and experiences. A similar finding is indicated in the larger Ketner et al., study (2017). This US study used archival data from programme evaluations of 86 BSW and MSW social work students to examine the 'meaning and value' (p.1) they attached to supervision. Over a quarter of the students in the Ketner et al., (2017) study reported benefitting from the knowledge and experience of their

supervisors. The Moorhouse et al., (2014) study, a small-scale qualitative interview study carried out with 7 students in New Zealand regarding their supervisory experiences, reiterates this. In this study, students noted that supervisory experience and skill, particularly in being able to challenge and question them appropriately contributed significantly to their supervision encounters.

### 3.7.3.2 Purpose and structure of supervision

Identification of the purpose and the preferred structure of supervision is a feature of some studies. The Miehl et al., (2013) focus group study noted that students preferred a 'structured approach to supervision...setting goals in a collaborative manner with their supervisor (including) the setting of the agenda for individual supervisory meetings' (p.139). Student respondents in the Moorhouse et al., (2014) NZ study initially felt unsure of the purpose and process of supervision, but through participation within the structured process, their understanding increased. In particular, enhanced understanding also meant they felt more 'confident to pursue their expectations' (p.44) and increase their assertiveness in relation to any unmet supervisory needs. In contrast, the Chen et al., (2018) qualitative interview study into the placement supervisory experiences of 22 MSW students in China specifically details the students' dissatisfaction with supervision structure and process. For these students, inconsistent supervision, the limited structured content within supervision and a 'lack of common approach' (p271) amongst supervisors contributed to a significant and negatively felt gap between their supervisory expectation and experiences. The authors conclude that this is due to the early stages of social work education in mainland China and to the lack of training for FI/supervisors.

### 3.7.3.3 Content of supervision

The broader content of supervision is explored in some studies. Zahav et al's., questionnaire study (2020) sought the views on satisfaction with supervision of 259 BSW students from three universities in Israel, and from

across all years of study. Students commented upon their satisfaction with three components of supervision - the educational and teaching component, emotional support, and administrative issues and were asked to estimate how many minutes per week on average were spent on each component during their supervision sessions. Figures were not stated in the study, but the analysis suggests that the greater the time spent on the emotional supportive and educational elements of supervision, the higher the student satisfaction with supervision.

Students in various studies have referred to the role that feedback plays within supervision. Thus, within the Ketner et al., (2017) study over half of the respondents referred to the benefits of supervision as being the forum where they were 'able to ask questions and address concerns, as well as to learn about their own strengths and weaknesses' (p.10). Students in the Miehl et al., (2013) study expressed a desire for greater constructive criticism on their work and criticism that is more 'complex'. Similar findings were indicated in the Ross and Ncube (2018) study, which reported findings from a questionnaire into the placement supervisory experiences of 93 BSW students in a South African university. In this study, 63% of students felt the feedback they received was helpful to their learning as it 'was perceived as constructive and encouraged them to learn new skills and acquire new knowledge' (p.38). However, students who found written or verbal feedback unhelpful commented that this was due to the supervisor 'being too busy; only receiving overall feedback and not on specific aspects...the supervisor lacks theoretical knowledge and skills and is therefore unable to assist with integration of theory and practice' (p.38).

To summarise, studies that specifically study student experiences of *supervision* are limited and studies that consider student experiences of *placement* dominate the literature base. The latter studies inevitably refer to student experiences that lie outside of the supervisory relationship; however, some studies discuss student experiences that will have taken place within the supervisory encounter, but which are not specified or highlighted.

Nevertheless, the findings from this limited range of studies, allied to the range of studies that outline the elements and confirm the centrality of the student and PE relationship, offers many insights. Thus, sound supervisory and placement structure, managed collaboratively by an available, emotionally attuned and professionally skilful PE or supervisor and that incorporates increasing autonomy for students, can contribute significantly to positive student experiences of supervision and placement.

#### 3.7.4 PE experiences of supervision

There is a very limited range of studies specifically considering PE experiences or perceptions of *supervision*. These sit within a research base where studies relating to PE views of particular elements of their role (such as student assessment) or experiences relating to other aspects of practice learning are wide and diverse in nature and country of source. Thus, there are studies on PE views on assessing social work students (Stone, 2016; Jasper and Field, 2016); dealing with changes and challenges in social work education (Moriarty et al., 2010; Burton, 2020); working with issues in the student and PE relationship, in particular dealing with issues of competence, providing critical feedback or working with struggling students (Finch and Taylor, 2013; Bogo et al., 2007) and the ongoing and various challenges of resourcing and facilitating placements (Domakin 2014; Domakin, 2015; Hay, 2020; Maidment, 2003; Homonoff, 2008).

The seven studies that have been chosen for inclusion here are those that position PE (or supervisor) experiences of *supervision* within the placement, as the focus, or are stated or implied as a significant feature of study.

The Nordstrand (2017) study is a small-scale Norwegian interview study involving 9 supervisors of social work students. The sample was purposive and included 'experienced' supervisors only (p.6) and, conforming to the study's phenomenological approach, participants were asked to 'describe and discuss supervision in their own terms, as it appeared to them' (p.5). Participants noted challenges presented within supervision - about the

balance of direction and autonomy to give to students; the impact of their own workload on their time and anxiety about disagreement or conflict with the students and how this would affect their supportive role with students. Only one supervisor spoke about the power they had over students and the author noted that the content of supervision was dependent on the agency setting. Thus, in what the author terms 'welfare settings' (p.11) (akin to 'statutory placements' in the UK and in contrast to the differentiated and more therapeutic 'clinical settings' (p.6)), the author comments that 'organisational imperatives and discipline are seen as most important...this results in a kind of minimalist, rather brutal style of administrative supervision' (p.6). There was also a 'generation gap' (p.11) evident, participants commenting on students' immaturity and further, commenting on the gap between the academic and theoretical teaching and practice.

Many of these themes are echoed in a UK regional study (Yeung et al., 2019) which carried out interviews with 13 PEs (alongside two focus groups involving 11 students). Although this study sought PE views about the practice placement and did not focus on experiences of supervision, it is included here due to the similarity of themes apparent. Thus, PEs in this study also noted challenges of 'social differences' (p. 4), including the challenge of supervising younger students (particularly so since the launch of the social work degree in 2003) and the limited life experiences they are perceived to bring to the placement. With such students, PEs were keen to be non-directive in order to encourage student development and learning but were also conscious that this could be construed as unsupportive. The difficulties of engaging students in 'critical dialogue' (p.7) were also noted, the role strain and potential 'role conflict' (Finch and Taylor, 2013) inherent in their role was clearly felt.

The Everett et al., (2011) US study surveyed 81 FIs and held focus groups with 14 FIs in relation to their use and understanding of the 'developmental model of supervision' (p.250). Such a model presumes that students develop within a 'series of sequential hierarchical stages from less to more

competent, and that supervision interventions differ at each stage of development' (p.250). Findings from FIs experiences of supervision did indeed reflect that their supervisory approaches and 'teaching methods' differed with first and second year MSW students. With first year MSW students, over 70% of FIs reported they gave concrete advice and suggestions and offered structure; for second year students approximately 80% of FIs said their focus shifted to more abstract and complex dynamics within case work and a focus on 'relational processes' (p.257).

The Fazzi and Rosignoli (2016) Italian study set out to study supervision as a 'dual learning process' (p.205) and thus to examine students as a source of learning for supervisors and the impact on supervisors learning and professional growth. Interviews with 40 supervisors from one university who had supervised a student in the past ten years were carried out. The study identified three types of supervisors in relation to how they enacted supervision. These were bureaucratic normative supervisors (BNS) pertaining to 17 participants: critical reflective supervisors (CRS), pertaining to 8 respondents and supportive supervisors (SS) pertaining to 15 respondents. For the BNS supervisors, supervision is task oriented, and the student considered a novice who was to be trained and not seen as a source of learning. These supervisors were the least experienced of the supervisors and most of them worked in front line roles and had 'narrow margins of professional autonomy' (p.210). The smallest group of supervisors - the CRS supervisors (8) - by contrast found students to be 'simultaneously recipients and sources of learning' (p.212). Here, the relationship with students was collaborative and these supervisors had both longer professional and more varied experiences, whilst also having greater autonomy in their current working environments. The SS supervisors also had lengthier practice experience than the BNS supervisors and their supervision style was 'largely centred on a search for dialogue....'listening' was one of the words most frequently used' (p.217). However, whilst the SS supervisors also had some greater 'operational and procedural flexibility' (p.217) in their work environments, they also viewed supervision as a 'one directional' (p.216)

process. The authors conclude that the growth of managerialism and task-oriented supervision has hindered the dual learning process of supervision. Whilst greater detail of the working environments (location, agency structural or organisational components), of those supervisors who were able to negotiate more autonomy and flexibility in their role(s) would enhance the findings, this research shines a light on an important aspect of supervisory experience. It suggests that a 'developmental' process may not simply pertain to students' professional growth but may also pertain to supervisors and PEs. This growth in supervisory confidence and expertise and the impact of experience and number of students supervised has been identified in the Waterhouse et al., (2011) UK study.

The Ketner et al., (2017) US survey study used archival data from programme evaluations of 22 FIs (alongside students' views) about the benefits they received from supervision. The study reports minimal findings from FIs, mainly in relation to their 'perception of contributing to the professional growth of students and overall, to the discipline of social work' (p.9), alongside 5 FIs commenting on the contribution that their supervisory role had played in their own professional development. These findings relate more generally to these FIs experiences of being a FI and are similar to findings from an earlier UK study carried out by Develin and Mathews (2008). This questionnaire and focus group study analysed 50 responses from those training to be PEs and found that reasons were diverse but included intrinsic motivations such as wanting to contribute to the profession and the learning of others alongside motivations for stimulation and personal satisfaction.

The issue of personal satisfaction and the notion of learning and development as reciprocal finds echo in the findings from the Haanwinckel et al., (2018) study. This study interviewed 17 'supervisors' from placements sourced within one UK university to explore the 'contribution of the supervisor in the student's process of learning' (p.949). Undifferentiated terminology used within the study makes it difficult to tell if those interviewed were supervisors, PEs, on site or off site, or a combination of both although 'half



of those interviewed 'operated as full-time supervisors (PE and PS or both roles)' (p. 951). Significant findings reflected those of other studies discussed within this review: more experienced supervisors were able to 'bring more critical analysis to the supervision process' (p.950) (although detail or quotations of how this was done was not included in the study); and participants felt that learning and development was a 'two-way process' (p.950), acknowledging the benefits to career and professional development that arose from supervising students.

The McSweeney (2016) study interviewed 20 Social Care Practice Teachers in Ireland about their experiences of their supervisory role. Using a particular methodology, PTs were required to sort and rank thirty-one prepared statements about aspects of their role (e.g., encouraging self-reflection; providing support and encouragement; providing opportunities for learning; provide feedback; use supervision to link practice to college work). Findings were presented as 'viewpoints' and two main viewpoints about the role emerged, the first viewpoint (shared by 11 of the PTs) referred to the centrality of work with service users, including the role of the PT to give feedback and provide support; the importance of student accountability the importance of encouraging open mindedness in students. The second viewpoint (shared by 9 PTs) focused on the self-awareness of the student in relation to their values and learning needs; their reflective learning and the importance of linking theory to practice. One statement 'facilitating constructive self-criticism' scored low in both viewpoints and the authors note with concern this 'reluctance to critique the practice of students' (p.17). These findings echo the difficulties outlined in the Yeung et al., (2017) study outlined above.

### 3.8 Chapter Summary

This narrative review of the literature has focused upon the content and activities of the student placement and/or student supervision, including self-report quantitative survey studies and smaller qualitative studies, alongside qualitative studies analysing the content of audio recordings of supervision.

This review has also included research that has explored student and PE experiences of placement supervision, although these are fewer in number (particularly in relation to PE experiences), and often student experiences of *supervision* are not differentiated from overall experiences of *placement*. The content and experiences of supervision are located in the wider context of the PE and student relationship and thus some of the key elements of this relationship, as explicated in the wider practice learning literature base, has been included. Overall, the reviewed literature makes a compelling case for student supervision that allows for 'doing' and 'thinking' activities to be undertaken and explored. Students need to undertake direct work with service users and this has to be based upon the understanding that their learning needs develop and change over the course of a placement (and their period of training) and should thus include the opportunity for increasing student autonomy and responsibility. Such student experiences must be cultivated and nurtured within a supportive, emotionally attuned, available, and enabling relationship with the PE that encompasses direction, feedback and challenge, and assists students with theorising and reflection.

There are some significant gaps or areas of weakness highlighted by this literature review:

- The studies featuring the tools, activities and content of supervision (mainly indicated by students), do not reveal how or where the activities are enacted. These are also mainly self-report, survey studies and their limitations have previously been outlined.
- The studies using audio recordings of supervision do 'lift the lid' (Brodie and Williams, 2013) on many of the hidden or hereto unrevealed elements of the supervision session or supervisory interaction on placement. However, these are few in number and across these studies, nether content coding or content 'counting' is consistent, thus making comparability difficult.
- There are few studies considering PE experiences of student supervision. Against the backdrop of increasing international

concerns about the managerialist demands of practitioner supervision and the increasing 'task' focus of such supervision; allied to the widely acknowledged lack of workload relief for PEs and concerns about either placement shortages (Australia; US) or the limited recognition and inadequate infrastructure for practice learning (UK), such an omission is a concern.

## **Chapter 4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter considers the methodology of this study, including the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings and all aspects of research design, ethical considerations, the role of reflexivity and rigour of the research. The methods used in the study, along with the frameworks for analysis, are considered in the following Chapter 5.

### **4.2 Theoretical framework and ontological and epistemological perspectives**

This study is a qualitative study and as such, is concerned with meaning and how the social world is experienced and understood by the actors within it. Thus, its philosophical and epistemological foundations lay within the broadly 'interpretivist' paradigm (Crotty, 1998), which views the social world as (largely) constructed rather than given, including multiple perspectives and 'knowledges' that are evolving and multi-faceted. The particular philosophical approach underpinning this research is 'subtle realism' (Hammersley, 1992; Maxwell, 2012), a form of realism that combines a ontological realist perspective with an epistemological constructivism (Maxwell, 2012).

Ontology, according to Crotty (1998) is the 'study of being...it is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality' (p.100). In considering what there is to know about the world, ontological considerations include whether there exists a single, static, observable (and measurable) reality, that is independent of and separate to social actors (including researchers) and is therefore 'discoverable' and 'knowable'. If reality and a 'real world out there' is considered external to our thoughts or understandings, then this is often referred to as an objectivist (or realist) position (Taylor and White, 2000; Ormston et al., 2014). The alternative ontological position is often referred to as relativist or constructivist position (Ormston et al., 2014), or a social constructionist perspective (Taylor and White, 2000). This perspective

considers there to be no single shared and external reality or 'objective truth waiting for us to discover it' (Crotty, 1998, p.8), rather social actors individually construct meaning and thus there are a number of different realities. It is important to acknowledge here that idealism (or relativism) and realism represent two extreme positions, and there are variants of these positions (McLaughlin, 2012), as will be discussed. Further, as Taylor and White (2000) suggest in relation to social constructionism, rather than trying to debunk the myth of "'there is no reality" form of universal constructionism' (p.24), we should consider 'how we engage with the complexity that is reality...and how we come to know about the world'(p.25). Subtle realism allows for the possibility of engaging with this complexity and understanding of knowledge. This leads us to a consideration of epistemology, the nature of knowledge and 'how we know what we know' (Crotty, 1998, p.9). Ways of knowing, learning and studying the world are broadly delineated within the epistemological positions of positivism and interpretivism.

Briefly, these contrasting epistemological positions entail differing views and approaches to the study of social phenomena and the collection and examination (or analysis) of data. Thus, positivism is described by Bryman (2008) as 'an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality' (p.13). Social reality is considered observable, measurable and 'facts' can be collected and analysed in an objective and value free fashion. Such an approach to research and the generation of knowledge relies generally on deductivism whereby hypotheses are stated, tested and 'verified' in line with scientific method. The contrast with the epistemological approach of interpretivism is reflected in what Bryman (2008) refers to as the 'division between an emphasis on the *explanation* of human behavior that is the chief ingredient of the positivist approach to the social sciences and the *understanding* of human behavior' (p.15). Thus, an interpretive approach uses methods that seek participants' subjective experiences, with the aim of exploring and interpreting meaning, based on an

ontological understanding of the world as socially constructed. Consequently, research within this tradition has an inductive approach to the generation of knowledge and moreover, denies the possibility of objective or 'value free' research, as reality is impacted by the researcher and the participants and within the research process.

Thus, epistemological and ontological understandings and assumptions underpin and guide the research design and process and an acknowledgement and understanding of them is essential to transparent research.

#### 4.3 Realism and subtle realism

Between the polarised positions of the 'abyss of relativism' (Taylor and White, 2000, p.31) and a plethora of constructed realities, and the constraint of structure and the 'one truth and independent reality' offered by a naïve realist approach, Hammersley offers a subtle realist position (Hammersley, 1992; Hammersley, no date). This approach acknowledges the existence of an independent and single reality (ontologically realist) and a social structure that has impact on social actors, whilst acknowledging that there are different perspectives on reality and our 'understanding of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspective and standpoint' (Maxwell, 2012, p.5).

Maxwell (2012, p.4) notes that there are a number of versions of realism, and he uses the term 'critical realism' in a 'broad sense to include all these versions of realism' (p. 5) as opposed to the 'critical realism' usually associated with Roy Bhaskar (1989). There are elements of Bhaskar's 'critical realism' that clearly have resonance within subtle realism, for example, a philosophical foundation of ontological realism and an acknowledgement of the influence of a range of other and wider social structures and factors, coupled with an understanding that an individual can impact and transform their social world. However, there are other

elements which differ, particularly the 'emancipatory thrust' (Houston, 2001, p.849) of Bhaskar's critical realism and his view that social science and social research should not be 'value free'. In relation to research within social work, Houston (2001; 2010) contends that the role of critical realism (as defined by Bhaskar and within his work) is to be welcomed. He asserts that critical realism seeks to challenge and expose the influence of 'oppressive mechanisms' (Houston, 2001, p.852) and to 'identify those mechanisms which are enabling and to seek to strengthen their influence' (2001, p.856). This critical approach to research suggests that the position of a value free and neutral researcher is neither desirable nor achievable. Further, critical researchers such as Humphries (2005) suggest that there should be a 'clear "positioning"' of the researcher in terms of taking sides and reframing questions about knowledge and truth (p.282).

Hammersley (1995) disagrees and suggests that research should seek no other goals other than 'the production of valid and relevant knowledge' (p.116) although he acknowledges a distinction between 'indirect' and 'direct' goals for research and the place of a researcher's value commitments within both. Thus, whilst a researcher may have motivations generally aligned with benefiting wider societal 'good' (however defined), these need to remain their indirect goal; to be otherwise and for researchers to aim to bring about social change would risk or encourage bias (Hammersley, 2009). I share Hammersley's (1995; 2009) discomfort with a philosophical stance or stated 'standpoint' (Harding, 1992) that imposes a value/evaluative stance on the research process, and the potential for the promotion of a 'what should be' agenda on the research process from the beginning. This could risk unintentional (or intentional?) researcher imposed, confirmatory bias arising within the research. However, this is not to argue that the elimination of subjectivity is possible or that the researcher's values can be removed from the research process and 'researcher neutrality' imposed. I am reminded of the relevance of Parker 's (2004) contention that 'the claim to be "neutral" in research is one that sustains a particular standpoint and to prevent the standpoint

from being opened to question' (p.98). Thus, I am not claiming the possibility or desirability of researcher neutrality and argue that the presence and influence of researcher values needs to be acknowledged and subjected to scrutiny; hence the need for rigorous reflexivity, discussed later in this chapter.

There are key features of a subtle realist approach. Firstly, subtle realism acknowledges that whilst an independent reality exists, it is not an 'objectively' knowable reality. There are different perspectives on reality and thus there can be 'multiple, non-contradictory and valid descriptions and explanations of the same phenomenon' (Hammersley, 1992, p.51). There is no direct access to reality and the 'real world' is not objectively knowable (Maxwell, 2012; Madill, 2008). Subtle realism holds that research aims to represent reality, not reproduce it and as Hammersley (1992) notes, representation must 'always be from some point of view' (p.51) and thus there are 'multiple perspectives, even though there is a single reality' (Hammersley, no date, p.4). Our understandings of this world and our realities are constructed from our own experiences, perspectives, and cultural assumptions. These in turn, influence our experiences and our interpretations of the world. Houston (2001) suggests that this is the strength of subtle realism, as the 'influence of human agency is acknowledged whilst at the same time taking cognizance of the effects of real structure on action' (p.849).

Further, whilst knowledge of phenomena is possible, the contingent and constructed nature of this means that 'we can never be certain that any knowledge claim is true' (Hammersley, 1992, p.51). In judging knowledge claims, Hammersley (1992) suggests that we can assess such claims in relation to their plausibility and credibility. This will be discussed further later in this chapter when the rigour of research is considered.

An additional element of subtle realism relates to the position of the researcher within the research process. Rather than being an 'objective



outsider', the researcher is part of the social world they study, and their beliefs, assumptions and prior experiences influence and play a key part in the research study. Maxwell (2012) refers to qualitative fieldwork as a 'body contact sport' (p.97), where subjectivity, according to a subtle realist perspective, is not excluded but seen as a 'component of the actual process of understanding' (p.98). This does not mean that researcher subjectivity goes unnoticed or remains hidden, rather it must be acknowledged and open to scrutiny through the process of reflexivity and 'in process monitoring' (Maxwell, 2012, p.98) throughout all stages of the research process (see further discussion on reflexivity). The discussion of subjectivity as a variable is also further developed by proponents of subtle realism such as Hammersley and Maxwell. So, rather than a simplistic plea for subjectivity to be 'controlled' and the negative consequences of bias or subjectivity be eliminated or lessened, both Maxwell and Hammersley refer to the positive consequences that can arise and recognise that 'prior assumptions and commitments can lead to insights' (Hammersley, no date, p.3). This does not deny that researcher bias and error can arise as a consequence of researcher subjectivity and reminds us that the researcher must be reflective and reflexive throughout the research process.

Subtle realism as a theoretical approach has much to offer this research study. As a study based within the situated practice of student supervision where practitioners, PEs and students are operating within a defined and clear framework and expectations for practice placements, there is clearly some form of shared reality and context. PEs and students are also located with wider social structures and omnipresent contemporary policy directions and paradigms of social work practice (Parton, 2014; Higgins, 2015). Subtle realism suggests that such structures and policy paradigms will impact upon practice but can also be impacted upon by individuals. Thus, responses to this reality and imposed structure, based on individual experiences; differing environmental or workplace circumstances; cultural assumptions; conceptions of role; negotiation or resistance, will differ.

Further, Taylor and White (2000) point to the fact that 'an objective knowledge base has been seen as a defining characteristic of a profession' (p.22). They note the drive within social work (alongside, as Hammersley (2003) confirms, other professional fields such as teaching and social policy) to develop and maintain such a knowledge base, fortified by evidence based practice and 'what works' approaches within more recent social work research (e.g. as provided by the What Works for Children's Social Care Centre). A subtle realist approach troubles this conception of objective and value free knowledge and requires it is further scrutinised in relation to how such knowledge is constructed and affected by real world considerations and subjective experiences.

#### 4.4 Research design

##### 4.4.1 The research question and aims

The original research question at the heart of this study and the aims developed through a number of iterations. In understanding this iterative process, Maxwell's (2012) notion of the researchers 'conceptual framework' - the sources and influences on this along with the impact of this on research design - has been helpful. My conceptual framework was influenced by my prior research and reading and by my experiential knowledge of the field of practice learning. This in turn impacted upon my consideration of my goals - Maxwell (2012) suggests that, in considering research design, the qualitative researcher has to consider both practical goals (how to achieve change or meet a need) and intellectual goals (Maxwell, 2012, p.85), the desire to understand or examine areas that have been inadequately understood or explored previously. However, my conceptual framework has been continually consulted, refreshed, reviewed, and challenged as the research has progressed. The evolution and changes to elements of the research will be discussed in following chapters as they occurred throughout the research process.

#### 4.4.2 Methodology and choice of methods

As previously stated, my epistemological assumptions have contributed to my choice of methodological approach and a qualitative approach to the study has been adopted. A qualitative approach pays attention to the actions, perceptions and understandings of individuals within their situated practices and environment - 'seeing through the eyes of the people studied... (and aiming) to probe beneath surface appearances' (Bryman, 2008, p.385) and thus can be helpful in illuminating some hitherto under-exposed areas of practice.

The qualitative approach taken was informed by the naturalistic tradition within qualitative research and the 'virtues' of naturalistic data (Potter and Shaw, 2018) and has also been informed by the ethnographic approach of 'practice ethnography' (Longhofer and Floersch, 2012). The latter is an approach which aims to get as close to practice and the detail of interactions between participants as possible. It is claimed that practice ethnography is helpful for investigating interactions in open systems over time and within on-going relationships (Longhofer and Floersch, 2012) thus this methodology is appropriate for this study and the setting and aims.

As this research question at the heart of this study has two main research aims, I have chosen methods that are appropriate for the different aims. More detailed consideration of the methods used will be considered in Chapter 5, but I briefly outline the methods here.

Data has been gathered via ethnographic methods, in particular, audio recorded supervision sessions (researcher not present). This method of data collection is an unobtrusive method particularly helpful in capturing the 'naturally occurring talk' (Silverman, 2014) within the supervision encounter and thereby assisting in the unveiling of the content and activity within supervision session. Each dyad (PE and student) was given a small

handheld digital voice recorder and were asked to record three supervision sessions during the placement and to send the recordings to the researcher. After placements were completed and each student's final year marks (including placement pass) had been ratified by the Examination Board, students and PEs in each dyad were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. I also collected some documentary data in the form of written supervision records from PEs. (See Table B).

There will be further discussion of working with naturalistic data, both audio recorded supervision sessions and semi structured interviews, in the following Chapter 5.

#### 4.4.3 Sample selection and recruitment

Purposive homogeneous sampling has been used in this study (Bryman, 2008). Homogenous purposive sampling was chosen in order to narrow the range of variation as much as possible, so only on-site PEs (whether Stage 1 qualified or Stage 2 qualified) with final year students were chosen for inclusion in the study. At the time of data collection for the study, the PEPS 2013 pertained. Therefore, PEs taking on responsibility for final year students could be either Stage 1 PEs who had recently trained and were taking their first student (and thus were 'working towards' Stage 2, and being supported by an appropriate mentor); PEs who were Stage 1 trained and were working towards Stage 2; Stage 2 PEs or those with the Practice Teacher Award (PTA). As explained previously, the PTA was the post qualifying award that pertained prior to the PEPS (BASW, 2013; 2019) and under the current PEPS (BASW, 2019), the PTA is considered equivalent to Stage 2 status. Under the current PEPS (2019) , only PEs who have already obtained Stage 2 or who have the PTA can be PEs for final year students (BASW, 2019).

Collection of data took place over two academic years and sample selection and recruitment involved a number of steps:

- Once final year student placements were confirmed, I emailed all onsite PEs with final year student placements (BA and MA) informing them about the study and requesting their participation. The Participant Information Sheet (PIS) for PEs (Appendix 1) was included in the explanatory email.
- I then followed up with an email, phone conversation or visit (if requested) to the PE to explain the study further.
- Once the PE agreed to participate and the PIS was signed and returned, I then contacted the student separately by email enclosing a Student Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2). It was made clear that although their PE had agreed to participate in the study, they were under no obligation to do so.
- Once a completed Student PIS was received and both PE and student from a single placement (dyad) had thus agreed to participate, I then sought agreement from the PEs employer - either via the relevant Local Authority Research Governance procedures or via the CEO of the PEs employing voluntary agency.
- Once agreement was given via the Research Governance procedures or by the employing voluntary agency, I then visited each PE (sometimes with their student) at the start of the placement, giving them a small tape recorder with instructions about recording, saving and returning the recorded files to me. At this point, I clarified that consent was still given.

For final placements taking place during the academic year 2015 -16, I contacted 79 on site PEs and their students (either final year BSW or MSW students) by email. The following 3 PEs (covering 4 final year placements) and 4 students agreed to participate, and permission was received for the study from employers:

- PE 5 and St E (Dyad 5) - placement within a specialist mental health unit, PE employed by the LA. Permission given by the LA for the study.
- PE 6 and two students, St F and St G (Dyad 7 and Dyad 8) - placement in voluntary agency offering mental health services to young people 16-25. Permission given by the agency CEO.
- PE 1 and St A (Dyad 1) - placement within a Children and Family Looked After Children team. Permission given by the LA for the study.

In this academic year 2015 -16, there were 4 other PEs who also agreed to participate and returned the signed PISs. However, one of these PEs was employed as a Mental Health Social Worker by a Mental Health Trust and after meeting with the PE and discussing the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) procedure with my Director of Studies, it was considered too cumbersome and lengthy to pursue (Bryman, 2008). The students of two of the other PEs also agreed to participate and as both PEs were employed as Children and Families social workers in separate LAs, agreement was sought from the individual PEs employers, via their Research Governance procedures. Unfortunately, both requests were refused, one LA not giving any reason and the other voicing concerns over confidentiality and service user names being used during the (recorded) supervision sessions. I pursued the refusal with both LAs via email and telephone calls, offering to visit to explain the research and steps taken to address any confidentiality concerns, but the refusal stood in both cases. The final PE who agreed to participate offered a final student placement in a small voluntary project offering in-depth support for ex-offenders. This project lost funding and closed shortly before the placement began and the student was placed elsewhere.

Thus, the positive response rate from PEs (those returning the signed PIS and wishing to participate in the study) contacted in 2015/16 was 10% of

those contacted, although only 5% of potential placement dyads were included in the final sample (4 placement dyads).

For final placements taking place during the academic year 2016 -17, 85 on-site PEs and their students were contacted by email. The following 6 PEs (covering 7 final year placements) agreed to participate, and permission was received for them to do so from their employers:

- PE2 and StE (Dyad 2) - placement within a LA Children initial referral team. Permission sought and given by the LA for the study.
- PE3 and StC (Dyad 3) - placement in a LA 16+/Leaving Care team. Permission sought and given by the LA for the study.
- PE4 and StD (Dyad 4) - placement in a LA 16+/Leaving Care team (different LA to Dyad 3 above). Permission sought and given by the LA for the study.
- PE7 and two students, StH and StI (Dyads 8 and 9) - placement in voluntary agency offering advocacy and representation services (delegated LA duties for adults) and therapy/bereavement services for adults and children. Permission sought and given by the CEO.
- PE8 and StJ (Dyad 10) - placement within an LA older adults' team. Permission sought and given by the LA for the study.
- PE9 and StK (Dyad 11) - placement within an LA older adults Care Home team (different LA to Dyad 10). Permission sought and given by the LA for the study.

In this academic year 2016-17, one further PE agreed to participate as did the student. However, LA research governance procedures were followed and applied for and repeatedly followed up by the researcher, but no response was ever received. During both academic years, reasons from PEs for non-participation (where received as email responses to my initial email) included concerns about overload of work (for example, if they were

undertaking their Stage 2 qualification for example); this was their first student; or feeling too inexperienced as a PE.

Thus, the positive response rate from PEs (those returning the signed PIS and wishing to participate in the study) contacted in 2016 -17 was 9% of those emailed, although only 8% of potential placement dyads were included in the final sample (7 placement dyads).

The final sample included 11 PE and student dyads. These dyads represent a cross section of areas of social work practice and placement sites for final year students:

- 7 placements were in statutory / Local Authority settings; 2 were in older adult teams; 2 in Children and Family teams; 2 were in post 16/ Leaving care teams and 1 placement in a (specialist) Mental Health Team
- 2 placements were in a voluntary agency working with young people 16-25 providing mental health support
- 2 placements were in a voluntary agency working with children and/ or adults providing advocacy or bereavement support services.

Each student was asked to provide basic data (self-completion of a short questionnaire) about age and ethnic status. The table of Student Profiles is provided in Table C.

This information was also requested of PEs, along with other information about PE qualification held, length of qualification as a PE (at the time of participating in this study) and as a social worker and if their current job role included any other supervisory element. The table of PE profiles is provided in Table D.



#### 4.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical practice principles are part of the bedrock of social work practice (BASW, 2014), integral both to practice (McLaughlin, 2012; BASW, 2012) and professional registration standards (SWE, 2019a, SWE, 2019b). Similarly, there are ethical principles underpinning research, and as Webster et al., (2014) note, there is a broad level of consensus in relation to ethical standards, codes and guidance across the arena of social research. However, Webster et al., (2014) also suggest that such ethical guidelines and codes are 'not enough' (p.80) and point to the complexities and dilemmas of ethical research practice, invoking the distinction between 'ethical codes and ethical values' (p. 92). This distinction is particularly acute in relation to social work research, Shaw (2008) suggesting 'reliance on codes alone risks compartmentalising ethical aspects of research, and...shutting them off into a preamble to research' (p.403). There are explicit ethical and moral dimensions in relation to social work research particularly with service users (McLaughlin, 2012; McLaughlin, 2021; Butler, 2002) that acknowledges power differentials - such as ensuring dignity and inclusion, an anti-discriminatory approach, having a concern for welfare - and that lie beyond ensuring non-maleficence, non-coercion, informed consent and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. There are also particular complexities in relation to research within and about professional education and social work practice. I will outline these ethical considerations here and examine them as they pertain to this study.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained via MMU Research Ethics Committee in 2015 (see Appendix 3) and thus the collection of data could begin. Issues relating to the integrity and transparency of the research - the purpose of the research, the methods of data collection, how data would be stored and who would access the data, and the potential uses of the research - were included in the Participant Information Sheets sent to each participant (separate PISs for PEs and students) (see Appendix 1 and 2). These PISs contained information relating to confidentiality and anonymity,

undue intrusion and consent and a consent form was attached. However, it is important to acknowledge that whilst ethical approval lays the foundation for the research, it is the case that not every ethical issue or risk can be anticipated, and some may take shape post approval and arise during the research process. Therefore, an ethical approach to research needs to be one that acknowledges that ethical considerations are present in every phase of the research process (McLaughlin, 2021), a perception of ethics that is 'always in progress, never to be taken for granted, flexible and responsive to change' (Davies and Dodds, 2002, p.281).

#### 4.5.1 Confidentiality and anonymity

Each participant was assured that they, their place of work or placement setting would not be identified and that pseudonyms would be used in transcribed audio recordings and during the semi structured interviews. Each PE, student and dyad was given an identifier - e.g., PE1; StA; Dyad 1. When transcribing the audio recordings, I did not use either the PE or student names, referring to them by their identifier. Where service user names were mentioned in the audio recordings, I used pseudonyms such as SU1, SU2 or X or Y for their names and did not transcribe either first or family/surnames. In most cases, only first names of service users were mentioned during the recorded supervision sessions and these were not transcribed. This was discussed in more detail with each participant at the follow up meeting to discuss the use of the audio recorder. I gave assurances that the names of service users would not be transcribed, and that although I would be privy to such service user stories and circumstances, my focus for the research was the content and finer detail of the discussion and topic areas covered within the supervision session as it pertained to the PE and student interaction.

Confidentiality was also paramount when I interviewed PEs in the aftermath of the placement and students' degrees had been confirmed at the summer Examination board. At the end of the first period of data collection (2015/16) and the data collected from the audio tapes of the supervision sessions (4 dyads), I had transcribed 12 supervision sessions. At the end of the second

period of data collection (2016/17) I had transcribed a further 18 supervision sessions (from 7 dyads), the average length of each supervision session being 62 minutes. Prior to undertaking the interviews, carried out over the late summer periods in 2016 and 2017, I re read the supervision transcripts relating to the student or PE I was interviewing. This was to ensure that I did not inadvertently breach confidentiality during the interview (Webster et al., 2014) by referring mistakenly to a particular incident or example from the recordings that did not relate to that dyad.

#### 4.5.2 Avoiding undue intrusion

Webster et al., (2014) advise that this issue of 'overburdening' participants can be a particular feature of a research design involving 'multiple data collection encounters over a period of time' (p.87). I was mindful of this when asking participants, all busy social workers and PEs, to consent to the research, and then again, as I sent gentle email reminders and prompts (at various times during the placement) to the PEs about sending me the recordings and supervision records. I received only 2 supervision recordings from 3 dyads /PEs and only 4 PEs sent supervision records. I had chosen an unobtrusive method of data collection for supervision content (the recorder used in the supervision sessions, researcher not present), but I was still intruding in other ways and via other means. Turney and Ruch (2018) note the impact of the audio recording device for the seven supervisor participants in their small-scale study (recordings of 12 individual supervision sessions and 5 group supervisions using a particular supervisory approach). They noted ambivalence and strong resistance, and for one participant, a quite visceral response to the recording device, gesturing and referring to it during a group discussion as 'that' (p.131). Such a strong response or even a more passive 'resistance' or ambivalence was not indicated in the separate interviews with PEs or students in this study, and the PEs who had sent only 2 recordings thought they had sent them or said they must have forgotten. For the whole study, I received 30 recorded supervision sessions instead of an anticipated 33 recorded sessions. This does not point to a similar type of

'anxiety about being 'exposed' as a result of having a supervision session 'on record' in this way (p.131) as discussed by Turney and Ruch (2018) in relation to the participants in their study. It may have been the case that the anxiety and resistance amongst the participants in their study was influenced more by the nature and exercise of the particular and new supervisory approach they were recording.

However, it is the case that, within this study, given the low response rate of PEs emailed, there could have been generalised anxieties about exposure of practice embodied within the finer details of the supervisory encounter. To a degree, this evokes a similarity with Ferguson's (2011) notion of 'intimate child protection practice' (p.3) and the 'intimate practice' (p.4) that takes place between social worker and children and their families within their homes. For Ferguson, this intimate practice relates to both the settings and spaces where the 'work' of social work takes place - the living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens and gardens - and also 'the humanity of the encounter' (p.4) between social workers and children. The parallel of this to the supervisory encounter is clear, as is Ferguson's observation regarding the absence of 'any considered attention to the core dynamics, experience and methods of doing the work'(p.4) in such intimate spaces. In relation to those who did consent to participation in the research, this could suggest confidence in their abilities and skills as PE. Consideration of this, and the potential impact on the data, along with the challenges of 'lifting the lid' (Brodie and Williams, 2013) on the workings and content of the supervisory encounter, will be discussed in the chapters to follow.

#### 4.5.3 Informed consent

The issue of informed consent; the importance of research participants not being coerced (by subtle or forced means) to participate; the prioritisation of participants' wellbeing and there being no risk of harm, is important within all areas of research. Participants must be given adequate information, in a form and language they can understand and be allowed time to consider this without pressure. In this study, the PIS also specifically outlined that consent

could be withdrawn at any time, without repercussion and, without influencing professional or academic relationships with the university or within their employment settings. However, I considered that the consent represented through the signing of the PIS was not absolute or fixed, and that consent is 'not a single event but a process' (Webster et al. 2014, p.88). Therefore, consent was revisited and regained at the start of each interview. The desire to ensure ongoing and informed consent also influenced how I collected the audio-recorded supervision tapes during the first phase of data collection. I asked each PE and student dyad to send me three supervision recordings over the course of the placement. These were of their choosing. Each dyad would have had more than three supervisions over the course of a 100-day placement (a supervision session of at least an hour's duration is required at least every 10 working days according to my HEI guidelines) and I hoped that the element of choice given to each dyad would enhance informed and ongoing consent.

With regard to student participation in the study, for the two academic year periods of data collection, I was not an academic tutor for any final year tutees, either BA or MA, so any potential conflict of interest in relation to an academic tutor role did not arise. The Student PIS also reassured students that they would not be invited for an interview until after placement had ended, their degrees were completed and confirmed at the summer examination board. This was to avert any anxieties that non-participation would affect degree completion or degree. However, it must be acknowledged that power differentials exist; students are less powerful than PEs in the placement context and are also subject to power differentials within the academic context. Thus, rather than the PE having direct initial contact with the student about the study, I contacted the student requesting participation. Whilst this may have mitigated potential student concerns about refusing a direct request from a PE with whom they were to start (or had started) placement, students could still have felt awkward about refusing to participate if they knew their PE had agreed to participate. Students may

also have felt uncomfortable refusing a direct request from a lecturer known to them, even if the email and PIS said they had this choice.

Further, within this study, I did not need to work through a gatekeeper (individuals with access to participants), as I had access to the details of confirmed placements and personnel involved. Within qualitative research, gatekeepers are often key points of access to research participants or research sites, researchers referring to their help or hindrance in the research process, and the complexity of negotiation involved (Reeves, 2010; Clark, 2011). Gatekeepers can wish to safeguard participants or may not view the research project as worthy; alternatively, they can be closely aligned with service provision and this can affect participants' sense of obligation to consent. However, working through gatekeepers, rather than direct researcher contact as was the case in this study, can also provide an 'independent' source for discussion of participants concerns and thus help minimise feelings of coercion or obligation (Webster et al., 2014; Clark, 2011). Therefore, within this study, it might have been the case that working through gatekeepers, such as employer or LA Placement Coordinators or Workforce Development Leads, could have increased participant numbers and also enhanced 'true consent'. Conversely, working through gatekeepers may have compromised the study in other ways - for example, I would have had to contact several LA gatekeepers and students on placement in their authorities would have been from several HEIs and including first and final placements with onsite and offsite PE arrangements. Thus, constraints of time (and undue burden on gatekeepers) could have resulted in purposive homogeneous sampling being compromised. I consider this conundrum to be an example of the 'tension between ethical principles and quality' present in research designs (Webster et al., 2014., p.92), a further example of this being my ethically informed decision to only invite student participants for interview after the confirmation of their degrees at the summer exam board. Given that participants were no longer students and were hopefully enjoying their summer and preparing for employment, I am grateful that 9 of the 11 students agreed to an interview. However, the 2 students who did not

respond to my request for interview were from the same placement setting (StF in Dyad 6 and StG in Dyad 7, each with the same PE6) and thus their insights and views on placement are missing from this study.

The discussion so far has been in relation to consent issues and complexities in relation to student and PE participants in this research. However, Humphrey (2012) raises important questions pertaining to the consent of wider actors, including colleagues and service users. Humphrey carried out a longitudinal study into social work students' professional socialisation (Humphrey, 2011) which involved multiple methods of data collection including interviews and focus groups with PEs and students and reading student placement portfolios in the aftermath of placements. She acknowledges that whilst consent had been given by students and PEs and portfolios were anonymised, in the reading of the portfolios and during interviews she was accessing stories from other 'actors' also. She asks:

Whose stories are being told here? Yes, they are stories about students' practice learning, but they are also stories about supervisors, colleagues, service users and carers...would all the actors have consent to these stories being circulated, albeit in an anonymized form and for a defensible reason?' (Humphrey, 2012, p.577)

This is an important question and one that is particularly pertinent to this study. Other research studies have used participant observation (e.g., such as in Ferguson's research into child protection, the home visit and long-term social work practice (Ferguson, 2018b; Ferguson et al., 2020a; Ferguson et al., 2020b). In relation to the home visit (Ferguson, 2018b) and when accompanying social workers during home visits, it is possible for the researcher to gain formal consent from service users before entering the home and 'in the moment'. Other studies have recorded or observed practitioner supervision sessions as part of the research (Wilkins et al., 2017; Wilkins, 2017b; 2017c) and these studies do not reference seeking service user permission or consent. Within a student placement supervisory

encounter, it can be difficult to predict which service user(s) the student will be working with (and therefore discussing in each supervision) and thus seeking consent is more problematic. However, given the increasing use of observations and recordings of supervisory conversations within professional social work practice (Ferguson et al., 2020a; Bostock et al., 2017; Wilkins, 2017c) it is an issue that requires further consideration.

#### 4.6 Insider positioning

The issue of insider/outsider positionality in qualitative research has been considered by a number of researchers (Flores, 2018; Humphrey, 2012; Berger, 2015; van Heugten, 2004; Mercer, 2007) and is particularly relevant to studies within professional education or practice, such as this study. 'Insider researchers' are those who are considered to share either a similar background as the people they are studying (Flores, 2018) or who are 'already members of the community they are seeking to investigate' (Humphrey, 2012, p. 572). I have had a long involvement with practice education and my role(s) of social worker, Practice Educator, trainer of PEs, author and co-author of texts and articles about practice learning and lecturer in social work education, could thus confer the position of 'insider'. There are benefits and challenges to 'insider positionality'. For those holding such a position (or being ascribed that position by the participants) it can ease access to participants and research sites (Shah, 2004; Mercer, 2007; Berger, 2015). Within qualitative research interviewing, Shah (2004) distinguishes between 'getting in' and 'getting on' within an interview (p. 560) and suggests that a shared identity can help with establishing rapport. Familiarity and awareness of key issues within the area being studied can also assist during data collection and analysis. Berger (2015) feels that her insider status (as an immigrant interviewing other female immigrants) helped her research but she does however recognise the potential danger here - that the 'implied content', if not stated, can be the researcher's 'projection of biases' (p.224) or their experiences onto the research. Conversely, language sensitivity and familiarity with the artefacts of a particular 'culture' or area of research may



constrain the data in several ways. Berger (2015) notes that participants would often leave sentences unfinished, and Shah (2004) notes other potential constraints, for example, participants might make assumptions (during interviews) about the researcher's knowledge and not explicate their views more fully. This involves the researcher in some delicate tightrope balancing - to prompt or probe further in the manner of a 'naïve and curious listener' (Smith et al., 2009) might risk undermining participant's confidence in the researcher's 'insiderness'. This may also present as duplicity. However, to ignore, based on researcher assumption of 'understanding', risks bias within the research. In addition, Alvesson (2011) suggests that interviewees may not be able to express 'tacit' knowledge in words, or they may do the opposite and speak the 'competent language' (p. 30) expected of their professional role. This may involve the language, terminology and associated with the professional role and expectations, but this may not reflect their action outside of this (talk the talk rather than walk the walk?)

Shah (2004) also suggests that participants might be fearful of judgement in sharing information or views with an 'insider' if they felt that such views might be construed as being outside of a shared value system. This recalls the concerns of Murphy et al., (1998) in relation to health services research - 'where the researcher is known to be a health professional, it is likely that the information that is given will reflect that which is deemed appropriate to give to a health professional' (p.189). Alvesson (2011) extends this caution and questions the positioning of the interviewee as an 'honest, unselfish subject' (p.29); rather, he suggests interviewees may not necessarily be motivated by honesty but rather by a desire to please. In the case of the interviews with PEs in this study, this could mean saying something that they think is required or expected by the interviewer or that will demonstrate their competence as a PE in some way.

However, whilst the interviewee may be involved in 'impression management and give answers that place themselves in a positive light' (van Heugten, 2004, p.215) in this way, so too is the researcher involved in such impression

management (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). As I have stated previously, as the researcher I have a long-term association with social work practice education locally. Although I had only previously met 3 of the 9 PEs (they had attended one or more PE workshops I had delivered over the years, or attended regional PE assessment panels), it may be the case that I was 'known' by the other PEs also and this could thus impact on the interview.

Potter and Hepburn's (2012) notions of 'footing' and 'stake and interest' as particular challenges of interview research have resonance within professional and organisational contexts and are considerations particularly relevant to this study. In their discussion of 'footing', Potter and Hepburn (2012) note that people speak to one another from a range of different positions or 'footings'. I was interviewing PEs as a (part time) PhD student, and had received their recorded supervision sessions in this role, and thus this was *my* perceived 'footing' within the interview. However, the interviewees may not have shared this perception. Being aware of my lecturer role, employer and (possibly ascribed) status, they may have felt that I had both expectations regarding their (good) practice and some 'power' to do something about it if 'good' practice was not presented. Thus, they could have perceived my role as 'conduit or reporter' (Potter and Hepburn, 2012, p.564) and their responses affected by this. Issues of 'stake and interest' (Potter and Hepburn, 2012, p.565) may also influence the interview. Interviewees were recruited as a particular member of a social category (as PEs) and had a stake in this category and their membership of it. Within the interviews, the PEs professional standing and thus their 'stake' as a PE was potentially vulnerable - e.g., would they be 'exposed' as not very good or not meeting (unstated or assumed or regulatory) requirements? However, 'stakes' were present also for me as the researcher as I share membership of the PE social category, but I have also contributed to teaching and writing about the PE role and expectations within it. Thus my 'stake and interest' were also present in the interview – would the interview questions expose me as some kind of charlatan who had no idea of what the PE role or supervision should, would, or could provide within the placement?

Additional challenges of 'insider positionality' lie in the risk of 'blurring boundaries' (Berger, 2015, p.224) between the researcher and participants and the risk that 'familiarity can blunt criticality' (Shah, 2004, p.569). The effect of the presence (or assumption) of a 'shared' language and experiences have been discussed, but it is also the case that researchers can also assume too great a shared language or experience, and this can frustrate the research process or interview. Humphrey (2012) in her interviews with PEs assumed 'they would share the discourse of professional pedagogy and practice, thus generating a collegiate conversation'(p.578). Her experiences during the interviews were the opposite, and her questions around topics relevant to practice education (she mentions supervision and student learning styles) 'were often greeted with long silences followed by struggles to retrieve relevant sounding words' (p.578). Humphrey eventually abandoned this 'topic' discussion and instead 'sought concrete case examples about their experiences of working with students' (p.578). This echoes Spradley's (1979) suggestion that during interviews, researchers 'don't ask for meaning, ask for use' (p.81), which informed my understanding of the structure of the interview and is discussed in the following chapter (Chapter 5). I did not experience any silence or floundering during PE (or student) interviews as discussed by Humphrey (2012). The PE interview schedule may have played a part, as could the fact that the PE interview was additional (and later) method of data collection and PEs were previously engaged with the study and the focus of supervision within it.

Mercer's (2007) contention that 'insiderness and outsidersness are better understood in terms of a continuum rather than a dichotomy' (p.3), and as a continuum with multiple and fluctuating dimensions is an important argument and relevant to this study. Therefore, even if I were considered as an insider or 'knower' by the participants in this study, such an ascribed status is flexible and can be affected by differing dimensions and as the study proceeds. Thus, participants may consider me an 'insider', but an out of date one; and this view may or may not be challenged or changed during the

course of the interview as we both 'impression manage' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.83).

To sum up, within qualitative research, the researcher is a key instrument (van Heugten, 2004) and as such, there must be detailed scrutiny of their subjectivity. As an 'insider', sensitivity to the way the researcher shapes the research process of research is particularly heightened. The process of attending to these issues is referred to as reflexivity and discussion of this follows.

#### 4.7 The role of reflexivity

Haynes (2012) describes reflexivity as 'an awareness of the researcher's role in the practice of research and the way this is influenced by the object of the research, enabling the researcher to acknowledge the way in which he or she affects both the research processes and outcomes' (p.72). Reflexivity is differentiated from reflection, or even critical reflection (Berger, 2015) as the researcher is required to move beyond 'looking back' on the research process or outcome, but to engage with differing and complex layers involved throughout the process. This involves questioning and acknowledging how the researcher's assumptions and values and thus the 'lens' through which they view the subject of study have informed the entire research process. This form of 'reflexive accounting' (Popay et al., 1998, p.348) entails active consideration by the researcher of several layers - choice of study topic, formulation of research question, methodology and choice of methods, collection, analysis and interpretation of the data, outcome and presentation of the findings. In this way, whilst the broadly interpretivist research tradition within which this study sits suggests that there is no objective knowledge, the researcher aims to avoid obvious or systematic bias throughout the conduct of the research. Reflexivity in research is important as it contributes to the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research and is thus a key part of the rigour of research.

However, it is acknowledged that whilst reflexivity is fundamental within qualitative research the 'actual practice of reflexive research is less clear' (Haynes, 2012, p.77). There are a number of recommended ways in which reflexivity can be nurtured and maintained. Berger (2015) views reflexivity as 'the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher positionality' (p.220) and she also recommends the completion of a log; 'repeated review' (p.230) and peer review. Haynes (2012) also recommends the keeping of a reflective diary and field notes and memos. Echoing Berger (2012), Murphy et al., (2008) refer to the need for 'self-conscious monitoring of the researcher's impact on the setting' (p.189) during data collection and suggest the importance of time away from the research setting and peer debriefing sessions. Within this study, the keeping of a reflective journal, internal dialogue and making notes and memos as the research progresses was important. In addition, as a single researcher undertaking part time PhD research, it might be argued that both time away and 'repeated review' of the elements of the study are built into its very fabric. However, conscious care needed to be taken to utilise these elements of the research process appropriately as a means and measure of enhancing reflexivity and rigour.

Many of the strategies discussed for promoting 'reflexive awareness' (Haynes, 2012, p.79) are considered to be a form of 'bracketing' within qualitative research. This concept (of suspending values, beliefs, or presuppositions to mitigate against the 'researcher effect') has its origins in the phenomenological tradition of research. However, Tufford and Newman (2010) note a number of tensions in relation to 'bracketing', in relation to the 'nebulosity of the bracketing process' (p.84) but also in relation to 'who brackets: researcher, participant or both?' (p.85). Whilst the researcher may be able to bracket their preconceptions, through the process of reflexivity, the researcher cannot assume or ensure that the participants do likewise. As discussed previously, interview participants may hold a number of preconceptions, assumptions and attitudes about the researcher and the purpose of the interview. Further, as Tufford and Newman (2010) note,

'participants' bracketing out preconceptions may be the antithesis of what is desired in qualitative research' (p. 86) as access to underlying or hitherto hidden or uncovered experiences or views is the aim of such research.

#### 4.8 Rigour of the research

Integrity and rigour are essential to research, the issue of rigour often considered in relation to criteria of reliability, validity and generalisability. However, these are criteria that have been developed in relation to quantitative research (Bryman, 2008; King and Brooks, 2018) and their usefulness in assessing the robustness of qualitative research has been questioned (Tobin and Begley, 2004; Davies and Dodd, 2002; Popay et al., 1998). A range of alternative criteria for ensuring and judging rigour has been developed or adapted and many of these criteria are apt and have informed this study. Thus, Tobin and Begley (2004) enhance Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of 'trustworthiness' with the suggestion of 'goodness' as an application of rigour (p. 391), involving transparent researcher attention to the 'essence of goodness' (p.391) in every aspect and moment of the research process. Similarly, Davies and Dodd (2002) highlight rigour as an 'attentiveness to research practice' (p. 288) and refer to the need for openness, honesty, and carefulness of the researcher and for research practice to be 'visible and accountable ...and faithful in providing an account of the social world' (p. 288). Thus, the transparency of the research process, how data has been collected, analysed and presented is key and can provide a suitable 'audit trail'.

The plausibility and credibility of qualitative research is further considered essential criteria for judging qualitative research (Hammersley, 1992). Regarding the credibility of research, Cutcliffe and McKenna (1999) refer to the most 'useful indicator...is when practitioners themselves...view the study findings and regard them as meaningful and applicable in terms of their experience'(p. 379). This can include using respondent validation (Bryman, 2008) but can more generally speak to the findings being considered

relevant and recognisable to the wider practitioner group or population under study. To enhance this judgement of credibility, other qualitative researchers such as Popay et al., (1998) argue it is essential that the research study is thus informed by the lay perspective; that the subjective meaning of participants is highlighted and that the research is responsive to the social context.

Many qualitative researchers refer to triangulation and using more than one method or source of data collection (Bryman, 2008) as an important contribution to the rigour of qualitative research. Whilst different methods of data collection have been undertaken within this study, as discussed in the following Chapter 5, the aim of this has been to enhance complementarity and additionality rather than confirmation or 'completeness' of the findings (Tobin and Begley, 2004, p.393). Thus, Tobin and Begley's (2004) alternative concepts of a 'crystal' and 'crystallization' (p.393) which 'allows for infinite variety of shape, substance, transmutations, multi-dimensionality and angles of approach ' (p.393) are more helpful considerations for this study.

In relation to the subtle realist approach taken within this study (combining an ontological realist perspective with an epistemological constructivism), it is important to acknowledge that the issue of validity is not rejected, but is rather recast (Maxwell, 2012). A realist understanding of validity does not judge the validity or quality of research solely on the design, method or procedures used but rather 'focuses attention on the credibility of the *interpretations* and *conclusions* drawn from the study, and the ways in which the researcher used the study's data to assess these interpretations and conclusions in light of plausible interpretations' (Maxwell, 2012, p.148). This approach to validity will inform this study's concluding analysis and recommendations.

#### 4.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has considered the methodology of the study, the philosophical underpinning of subtle realism and the impact of epistemological and

ontological understandings on the research. All aspects of research design have been addressed, including discussion of the research question, methods chosen, sample selection and recruitment. This is a study where issues of power, positionality and insider positionality are features, and these issues have been reflexively discussed, alongside considerations of ethical issues pertaining to research more broadly. The centrality of reflexivity and the nature and importance of rigour within research has been discussed. Detailed consideration of the methods used in the study, along with frameworks used for analysis, are considered in the following Chapter.



## **Chapter 5 Methods and frameworks used for analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter considers the methods used to collect data and the frameworks used for analysis of the data. As the research question has two main research aims, I have chosen methods that are appropriate for the different aims. These methods are:

- naturalistic methods used in the collection of data from audio recorded supervision sessions
- semi structured interviews with PEs and students after placement completion

### **5.2 Audio recorded supervision sessions – working with naturalistic data**

Data has been gathered via ethnographic methods; in particular, digitally recorded supervision sessions (researcher not present). Thirty audio and digitally recorded supervision sessions, from eleven PE/ student dyads, has been collected over the course of a 100-day final year placement. These sessions have been transcribed by the researcher and amount to 1851 minutes of supervision across the 30 recorded sessions, the average length of a supervision session being 62 minutes. The least time in a supervision session was 37 minutes, and the lengthiest supervision session was 1 hour 36 minutes (see Table of Recorded Supervision Sessions, Table E).

This method of data collection is an unobtrusive method particularly helpful in capturing the 'naturally occurring talk' (Silverman, 2014) within the supervision encounter and thereby assisting in the unveiling of the content and activity within supervision session. Such naturalistic data is contrasted to 'elicited data' by Potter and Shaw (2018), who suggest that naturalistic data has a number of virtues, focusing as it does on '*life as it happens* as far as possible independent of the researcher's constructions, practices and interventions' (p.182). Potter and Shaw (2018) argue in favour of the

collection of data using audio or recording recordings , as the data captured is a record of the event as it happened and 'not removed to varying degrees by description of the event from either the researcher or participants' (p.188). The naturalistic approach to data collection is closely linked to the ethnographic tradition in qualitative research, and in particular the ethnographic approach of 'practice ethnography' (Longhofer and Floersch, 2012). Whilst the term 'ethnography' is often regarded as synonymous with participant observation, it is acknowledged that it also embraces a range of other research strategies such as audio recording, one-to-one interviews and documentary text analysis (Floersch et al., 2014). Practice ethnography is an approach that aims to get as close to practice and the detail of interactions between participants as possible. It is claimed that practice ethnography is helpful for investigating interactions in open systems over time and within on going relationships (Longhofer and Floersch, 2012). Ferguson's research (2016; 2018b) and Ferguson et al's., research (2020a; 2020b) into social work direct practice and face to face work with children and families is a key contemporary example of such practice ethnography.

There are critiques of the 'virtues' of naturalist data, and as Potter and Shaw (2018) comment 'naturalistic data is not free of possible reactivity' (p.189). For example, in relation to audio recordings, participants may take time to get used to the recording device and its operation or they may not act or as they would without the recording device on. Further, in working with only audio recordings, other visual aspects of communication or interaction will not be captured.

Within this study, I took steps to reduce the impact of these issues by:

- familiarising myself with the recording device
- preparing a sheet with instructions on operating the device and how to send the recording to me
- once agreement had been received from both PE and student, visiting them both to give them the instructions and to show them how to operate the device and send the recording to me

- checking in with each PE on a regular basis, via email , and also after receiving a recording, to confirm receipt and enquire about / encourage further recordings.

### 5.3 Analysis of the audio recorded and transcribed supervision sessions.

#### 5.3.1. Ethnographic Content Analysis

The methodological approach that has been used to analyse this data is Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), alternatively called Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) (Altheide, 1987; Altheide and Schneider, 2017). Bryman (2008) refers to Altheide's approach as 'typical' of QCA and refers to these two terms as being synonymous (p.276); for ease, the term ECA will be used throughout the rest of this chapter. ECA has its origins in (quantitative) content analysis and a consideration of this is important in defining what ECA shares with content analysis and how it is differentiated. The weaknesses of this type of methodological approach will also be considered along with discussion of coding frameworks that have been developed in other relevant research.

Content analysis has been defined by Bryman (2008) as 'an approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner' (p.275). Content analysis has frequently been used in research of mass media printed content and is regarded as a transparent and unobtrusive research method that is flexible and can be applied to a wide variety of unstructured information. Its strengths are that it can help reduce data whilst also providing a "big picture": trends, patterns and absences are discernible across a large number of documents' (Harlow, 2016, p.678). Interestingly, Bryman (2008) notes that in a strict sense it is not a research method, but it is 'an approach to the analysis of documents and texts rather than a means of generating data' (p.274).

Central to both content analysis and to ECA is the issue of what is to be 'counted' or identified (determined by the research question) and the production of a coding frame (what is to be coded). Within (quantitative) content analysis, and in line with its positivistic assumptions regarding objectivity, the coding frame is essential, and includes pre-determined categories (researcher defined or developed) and codes, for example, use of certain words or phrases are counted for frequency or significance and are coded (Bryman, 2008). The progression of data collection, analysis and interpretation is serial and the coding frame is predefined.

ECA differs from content analysis in a number of ways. Firstly, within ECA, data collection, analysis, interpretation is circular (Altheide, 1987; Altheide and Schneider, 2017). Rather than remain static, Schreier (2014) and Altheide (1987) suggests that the coding frame within ECA should be open to revision and not simply conceptually driven, but also evolve in an iterative fashion. Thus, initial categories within the coding frame can change and be adapted and include data driven and emerging categories arising from the process of data collection. Further, within ECA, emphasis is not solely on numerical data, 'frequency counts' or description of data, but on manifest, latent and context dependent content. Here, ECA highlights the researcher role in the construction of content meaning and interpretation and this is another major difference with content analysis. Unlike content analysis, 'in which the protocol is the instrument, the investigator is continually central in ECA' (Altheide and Schneider, 2017, p.5), interpreting meaning and thus interacting with the coding frame and the predefined categories and concepts and refining them, in a reflexive manner.

There are limitations to using ECA. Silverman (2014) urges caution concerning the use of a conceptually driven coding scheme with pre-defined categories, which can deflect attention from 'uncoded' activities, categories or more discrete dimensions and thus inhibit the development of new or

revised codes. When devising the coding frame and the categories within it, there is also the possibility of category / code overlap. Further, any 'counting' - of topic coverage (in minutes) or PE/ student occurrences of activity - could conflate frequency with either importance or significance, when this may not be the case and the frequency of occurrence could be related more to the format of the supervision session itself.

In addition, coding frameworks and content analysis are not widely used within social work research. More recently, a coding framework has been developed and championed by Wilkins and colleagues, in relation to the content of supervision of children and family social workers (Wilkins, 2017c and Wilkins et al., 2018b). Wilkins (2017c) considers a coding framework is helpful as it 'can offer a way of describing the key elements of a given activity – in this case, supervision – including what high, moderate and low skill examples might look or sound like' (Wilkins, 2017c, online). However, this research also indicates that developing a reliable coding framework, with suitable and relevant dimensions, alongside developing and assuring inter and intra rater/researcher reliability is not a simple task and the coding frame used has been revised and reduced (Wilkins et al., 2018b). In the task and process of developing and refining a coding framework in this manageable fashion, there is the potential danger of missing uncoded activities or more discrete dimensions of practice.

### 5.3.2 Development and application of the coding frame

Consideration of ECA, the flexibility it offered in suggesting a conceptually driven approach to the development of a coding frame, helped in the development of the initial coding frame for the analysis of the recorded supervision sessions. Like Brodie and Williams (2013), I used Richards (2005) formulation of 'topic coding' and 'analytic coding' as the basis of the coding frame - 'topic' coding to summarise supervision content and analytic coding to capture supervision 'activity' (see Appendix 4 for the final version of the Coding Frame). Topic coding is timed in minutes and analytic coding is numbered in

occurrences. Thus, the Coding Frame was conceptually driven initially - topic coding and categories (activities) were taken directly from Brodie and Williams (2013) but also the wider literature review and from 'insider accounts' referred to previously. However, version 1 of the Coding Frame had additions and differences with Brodie and Williams (2013) such as:

- Additional categories for elicitation / talking about feelings and emotions. This was in response to recent studies and research about the (limited) presence of emotions in practice supervision (Wilkins et.al, 2017; Ruch, 2012). Nelsen (1974) also included the elicitation of student feeling, as an element of PE activity within her study and the inclusion of such categories were considered important as a way of indicating the interaction within supervision. Gardiner (1989) suggests it can indicate interaction and any changes in pattern of interaction and can indicate the extent of 'hierarchy and directiveness' (p.45) within the supervisory relationship.
- An additional category for expression / use of support (PE activity) - based on the literature review and self-report of student satisfaction with placement experiences.

The development of the Coding Frame, based on the above, was a demanding and complex task and my thoughts on this echoes Nelsen's (1974) comments that the challenge in devising the Coding Frame was to 'capture both content and process in some manageable fashion' (p.148).

### 5.3.3 The Coding Frame – the final version

The first version of the Coding Frame was applied to one taped session initially, hand coded with coloured pens, then some categories were revised. For example, category / code overlap was indicated - student providing analysis of practice' and 'expressing opinion, hypothesising' were initially different categories (version 1 of the Coding Frame), but could be considered to mean the same. After two further sessions were coded, in the final version

of the Coding Frame they have been conflated into one student activity (expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice).

The final version of the Coding Frame, including areas of topic coverage (Part 1) and analytical coding (Part 2) against which each supervision was coded, can be found in Appendix 4.

Nelsen's (1974) example of the difficulty in the development of her coding frame is quoted in full here as it proved so apt once I began the coding:

For example, during a given period of time, the content of the discussion between the field instructor and the student might be the student's handling of one of his cases. At the same time, the process of such discussion might include the field instructor's offering of support of what the student had done with the client (a teaching technique): or the student's volunteering feelings about what he had done (one of the student's communications possibly responsive to the field instructor's use of techniques); or the field instructor's telling the student that his opinion about what to do next with the client was as valid as that of the field instructor (a relationship communication implying equality).(Nelsen, 1974, p.148)

#### 5.4 Qualitative interviews – exploring experiences

Within this study, I have chosen to undertake qualitative interviews with PEs and students as an additional method of data collection and as a means of exploring PE and student experiences of supervision.

Interviews are considered a core method within qualitative research (Yeo et al., 2014; Rapley, 2004) and their ubiquity is noted to be an effect of the 'interview society' (Silverman, 2014; Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012). Rapley (2004) notes a range of descriptive terms attached to 'interviews'– including in- depth; semi- structured; collaborative; active, and guided - to name but a few, choosing the term 'qualitative interviews' as an 'overall 'term (p.16) . It is this term that is predominantly used in this chapter. Interestingly, Rapley does not include the descriptive term of 'ethnographic interview' (Spradley,

1979), but an understanding and consideration of this type of interviewing was pivotal to my research and the interviews undertaken and will be discussed further in this chapter.

#### 5.4.1 Accessing the 'real' or co-constructing 'accounts'?

Interviews are generally considered helpful in accessing and gathering descriptive data about individuals' views and perspectives and a method that can illuminate individual experiences and social worlds. Much of the literature outlines the conduct and practices of interviewing, (for example, Ritchie et. al., 2014) and focuses upon what Rapley (2004) refers to as the 'traditional account' of qualitative interviewing 'and its aim of 'gently nudging without bias' ( p.20). Within such a 'traditional account', the researcher is neutral but interested, often following an interview schedule that allows the interviewee to talk, with the researcher probing responses and hoping thus for some 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973, p.6) of experiences. This account of qualitative interviewing thus aligns with Kvale's (1996) conception of the interview as 'mining' for data and an assumption that knowledge (in the form of the 'real' and authentic experiences of the interviewee) is pre-existing and discoverable via the effective 'mining' skills of a thorough researcher. Silverman (2014) suggests that whilst there are differences in approaches to interview data, they also share some assumptions in that they consider interviewees accounts and responses to be straightforward 'simple reports on....an external reality' (p.193). Silverman (2014) calls this a 'romantic' but 'seductive' position (p.178/182) and contrasts this with a constructionist view of interviews.

The constructionist critique posits qualitative interviewing and the data derived from it, as accounts produced within the interaction between researcher and interviewee. Narratives and 'stories' (Silverman, 2014) are created within the interview and this critique foregrounds the role of the researcher, as well acknowledging the wider cultural context within which qualitative interviewing takes place. The importance of this challenge to the 'traditional account' of qualitative interviewing is recognised beyond the



constructionist critique. For example, Rapley (2004) argues that interviews are both inescapably interactional – 'whatever 'ideals' interviewers practice, their talk is central to the trajectories of the interviewees talk' (p. 26) – and contextual, in that 'we are never interacting in a historico-social-cultural context, we are always embedded in and selectively and artfully draw on broader institutional and organisational contexts' ( p.26).

Extending this critique and arguing from an ethnographic methodological perspective, Atkinson (2015) suggests that interviews, as the active 'social encounter' sites that they are, (p.60) do not offer insight into the worlds or minds of the interviewee, nor can they be considered a source of direct knowledge about interviewees experiences, views, or beliefs. Rather, he suggests that whilst interview accounts might be usefully explored as 'performances in their own right' (p.86), direct observation is required for behaviour and experiences to be more fully understood.

My understanding of qualitative interviewing and the approach taken to them has been informed by these critiques and underpin my stated theoretical position of subtle realism (see Chapter 4). I concur with the view that interviews are 'got - up social events' (Potter and Shaw, 2018, p.186) and a 'construction site for knowledge' (Kvale, 1996, p.14). Thus, qualitative interviewing is both a co-produced and contextualised 'conversation'. The data derived from interviews is thus 'created knowledge', localised truths and subjective views and meanings which still require to be scrutinised by the researcher.

## 5.5 Understanding and Preparing for interviewing

### 5.5.1 The Ethnographic Interview – the contribution of James Spradley

My further and more detailed understanding of the interview, along with assisting with preparation for interviewing the PEs and students involved in this study, was helped by Spradley's (1979) work on the ethnographic

interview. This work helped me in many ways – to conceptualise the role of the researcher/ interviewer within the interview; to consider the importance of interviewees' language and terminology used; to explore issues surrounding the process and conduct of the interview, and to formulate the range and types of questions to include in the interview schedule. Understanding of his work also directly contributed to revision of the interview schedule after interviews with the first two PEs. I will outline some of Spradley's ideas and discuss their impact on this study, in particular the development of the interview schedules and the conduct of the interviews.

An anthropologist, Spradley's work has included ethnographic accounts of "skid row men" in America (Spradley, 1979, p. 31) and cocktail waitresses (Spradley and Mann, 1975). His view of the ethnographer is described here:

Ethnographers adopt a particular stance toward people with whom they work. By word and action, in subtle ways and direct statements they say, "I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way that you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel things, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?" This frame of reference is a radical departure from treating people as either subjects, respondents or actors. (Spradley, 1979, p.34).

In a similar vein to the critiques of the interview offered previously, Spradley (1979) acknowledges the role of the ethnographer and that s/he will bring their own terms and meanings to the interview (particularly within the formulation of the questions and interview schedule) and thus 'every ethnographic description is a translation' (p.22). However, he also stresses the need for ethnographers to use and refer to 'native' (sic) terms and language used by interviewees (who he refers to as 'informants' (p.25)) and to remember that to access the cultural knowledge of such informants, the ethnographer must be careful about bringing in 'concepts from outside the culture' (p.31), particularly when formulating interview questions. He uses an example from his own study into skid row men to illustrate this. He writes

that, at the time of his study, there had been survey studies published regarding such men, including information about employment and income. He suggests that asking the skid row men questions related to concepts such as steady job, income, employment could 'predefine what respondents will report and do not necessarily tap the cultural knowledge of tramps' (p.31). Instead, Spradley says he listened to the tramps (sic) conversations, setting aside his concepts and 'tried to learn their language' (p.32). He learnt that 'ways to make it' (p.32) were a feature of the tramps' language, a concept that was defined by at least twenty different terms (e.g., "junking (finding and selling junk items); meeting a live one (a person who will give them money); working; panhandling (a form of begging) (Spradley, 1979, p.32).

Spradley's work is particularly insightful in relation to the process of the interview and the elements and range of questions the interview involves. His view on the ethnographic interview indicates similarities with other perspectives and views on the interview (Silverman, 2014; Kvale, 1996) but also highlights some differences. For example, Spradley notes the need to create rapport and to treat the interview as a 'conversation' (Kvale, 1996) and in doing this, suggests that the early stages of the interview are an 'exploration' on both sides. He urges the ethnographic interviewer to 'make repeated explanations...restate what informants say ...(and) don't ask for meaning, ask for use' (p.81).

#### 5.5.2 Ethnographic questions and their application to this study

Within the ethnographic interview, Spradley (1979) indicates three main types of ethnographic questions (p. 60): descriptive questions, structured questions and contrast questions. Descriptive questions were particularly important within this study and I will discuss and indicate where I incorporated such within my interview schedule for PEs and / or students (see Appendix 5 for the PE Interview schedule and Appendix 6 for the Student Interview schedule).

Spradley (1979) notes that descriptive questions 'form the backbone of all ethnographic interviews' (p.91) and he describes five main types of descriptive questions and several subtypes.

- I. Grand Tour Questions – usually at the beginning of an interview. He suggests this could asking for a description of 'how things usually are....typical grand tour questions ask the informant to generalise' (p.87). The first question on my PE interview schedule (version 2) – 'how was the experience of being a PE for you?' is an example of such a Grand Tour Question. Within two PE interviews, such a Grand Tour Question also elicited 'questions', in that both spoke of contrasting experience with previous students, without prompting or questioning on this issue by me.
- II. Mini Tour questions – these are like Grand Tour Questions but deal with a smaller unit of experience. Here, my second question focusing on supervision within the placement is an example of this ('what happens in a typical supervision session?').
- III. Example questions – these are questions relating to more specific elements – described as a 'single act or event' (p.88) and an example of this can be seen in PE question 4, asking for examples from within supervision of specific activities that took place within each element of supervision
- IV. Experience questions. As they suggest, such questions ask the interviewee to speak about particular experiences. Whilst I did not ask PEs for specific instances or experiences, the question regarding what makes a positive supervisor relationship could be considered an 'experience' question, as could PE Q8, what would you change?
- V. Native language questions. Spradley (1979) suggests that native language questions are those that use the terms that interviewees use to talk about their job or experiences. Native language questions can be sought openly by the interviewer asking 'direct language questions' (e.g. asking the interviewee how s/ he would say something) or by asking 'hypothetical –interaction' questions (e.g. set a hypothetical

scene and ask the interviewee what they would say.

### 5.5.3 Revision of the Practice Educator interview schedule

My understanding of Spradley's ideas evolved after the first two PE interviews, particularly in relation to the use of native language questions; his caution about bringing in 'concepts from outside the culture' (Spradley, 1979, p.31) and his advice 'don't ask for meaning, ask for use' (p.81), and had a direct impact on this study and revision of the interview schedule. The first version of the PE interview schedule included a lengthy question referring to the work of Marion Bogo within which I used her term 'conceptualisation of practice' as being one of the main elements that should be present in a student placement. Whilst I 'explained' this term, both PEs did not refer to it but instead referred to their understanding of it and used their terms, such as 'theory', 'values' and 'reflection'. This then enabled me to use their 'native' terms in response during the interview and to change the question in subsequent interviews. I thus revised the interview schedule and replaced the Bogo question with a question that used Doel's (2010) elements of the PE role. Doel's (2010) elements of the PE role includes education, support, management and assessment functions – are concepts and terminology more familiar to PEs. These also asked for 'use not meaning' as suggested by Spradley (1979). I also used visual prompts - four cards with these elements named on them, which I laid out on the table and asked for their use, inviting the PE (Q4 , PE Interview schedule, Appendix 5) to 'give me an example of what happened in supervision under each of these headings?'

### 5.6 The challenges of qualitative interviewing – and their impact on this study

As is indicated within this discussion of Spradley's (1979) work and as discussed in Chapter 4, there are a number of challenges within qualitative interviewing, including issues of insider positionality (Shah, 2004); 'footings' within the interview (Potter and Hepburn, 2012) and the potential impact of power differentials to consider. Given that my view is that data derived from interviews should be considered as co constructed, I purposefully carried out

semi-structured interviews, hoping for a conversational feel and being aware of some of the challenges involved. I also thought carefully about my interview schedule and my conduct during the interview, for example, seeking to not direct or judge responses.

## 5.7 Analysis of the student and PE individual interviews

### 5.7.1 Template Analysis

The method used to analyse the data gathered from the PE and student semi structured interviews was Template Analysis (TA) (King, 2012). TA is a form of thematic analysis that is considered a 'flexible technique' (King, 2012; Brooks et al., 2015) and one that is considered to work well in studies 'that seek to examine the perspectives of different groups within an organisational context' (King, 2012, p.447). King (2012) and Brooks et al., (2015) also suggest that TA can be used within a range of epistemological positions, including 'realist' research , and therefore this approach to analysis is apt for this study.

There are particular elements of TA, as outlined by King (2012) and Brooks et al., (2015) that indicate that this choice of thematic analysis is particularly suitable for this study. For example, TA allows the researcher to identify some apriori themes as the basis for a coding template, in advance of analysis of the transcripts. The interview schedule for the PE and student interviews was aligned with the objectives of the research, based on my initial conceptual understandings of the issues to be explored and are related to the key dimensions of student supervision (education, support, assessment and managerial aspects) as outlined by Doel (2010). Thus, it seems helpful that such apriori themes are acknowledged and used as initial thematic codes for the coding template. Brooks and King (2014) suggest that a priori themes should be limited in number, closely aligned to the research aims and are always tentative.

Further, TA provides procedural steps to follow, including the familiarisation with the data (reading and re reading the interview transcripts) and preliminary coding of the data (including identification of apriori themes as above). This then leads to the formation of an initial coding template, applying the template to a sub set of the data / interview transcripts, marking apriori themes and coding new ones. The template is then applied to further transcripts and modified and adapted, and once a final template is defined, it is applied to the full data set. However, whilst such procedural steps are helpful for a novice researcher, they are not confining and indeed, TA expects that the initial template will be modified and adapted as it is applied and emerging themes are identified. Thus, TA is an iterative process, described by King (2012) as a 'fluid and exploratory process' (p.436) where the researcher is urged to 'remain open to your data' (King and Brooks, 2017, p.38). However, in providing such a structured approach to data coding, TA also provides a helpful audit trail that contributes to the 'quality check' (King and Brooks, 2017) of the analysis.

In addition, TA allows for the development of as many levels of themes as the researcher finds helpful, rather than stipulating a set number of coding levels. However, as Brooks and King (2014) make clear, within TA 'hierarchical coding is emphasised, with broad overarching themes encompassing successively narrow, more specific ones' (p.4). Themes are defined as 'recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts'(King, 2012, p.430) and coding 'the process of attaching a label (code) to a section of text to index it as relating to a theme' (King, 2012, p, 431). Sometimes, 'integrative themes' may be identified within the data, explained by King (2012) as 'undercurrents running through participants' accounts; often, perhaps not addressed explicitly but very apparent to the careful reader' (p.432).

Central throughout this process is researcher reflexivity (as discussed in Chapter 4) and the need to examine and question researcher assumptions and ideas. The highly iterative nature of TA expects this

and King (2012) suggests, robust researcher reflexivity is necessary at all stages of the analysis, as there are potential dangers that need to be avoided. Thus, a critique of TA is that it is possible to over rely on apriori themes, or complete preliminary coding too early. A consequence of not recognising or acknowledging new themes and failure to adapt the coding template could result in data being uncoded and the narrowing of the analysis. King and Brooks (2017) also note that, in common with other forms of thematic analysis that aim to examine and present themes across a data set, and in particular, the clustering of codes within themes, then fragmentation or neglect of individual experiential accounts can occur. This can be circumvented through the use of 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) and use of participant quotes, which can also aid the rigour of the study and assist with quality checking, as discussed in the previous chapter.

#### 5.8 Supervision records and analysis of documentary data

Within this study, written and anonymised supervision records were requested from participants. This method of data collection was less successful than the other methods used and only 4 dyads sent me written supervision records - Dyad 6 and Dyad 4 sent one anonymised supervision written record; Dyad 9 send two anonymised supervision records and Dyad 10 sent 12 supervision records, a written record for each supervision session held during the placement (of which only three were analysed). Thus a total of 7 supervision records were analysed.

Originally, the aim was to undertake basic documentary content analysis (Silverman, 2014) of one written record of supervision from each Dyad, to note and analyse content, focus and if/how the written record differed from the audio recorded (and transcribed) supervision session the audio recordings transcribed. Analysis of these written records will be discussed in Chapter 8.



Within the practice learning literature there is a significant dearth of discussion regarding the written recording of student supervision sessions, and earlier texts (Butler and Elliott, 1985; Shardlow and Doel, 1996; Danbury, 1979; Ford and Jones, 1987) nor more recent texts discuss this in any detail whatsoever. Within the more recent texts, reference is made to 'practical arrangements' (Showell Nicholas and Kerr, 2015, p.21; Williams and Rutter, 2019, p.150; Field et al., 2016, p.41) and responsibilities for recording and sharing supervision notes and records between PE and student, but there is nothing written about what should be recorded or included in placement supervisory records. Further, there is very little written on the purpose and function of these supervisory notes or records. What little that is written does not extend beyond rudimentary accountability purposes, such as the recording of discussion of concerns about student practice (Williams and Rutter, 2019) and the recording of supervisory discussions as a source of 'evidence' for the assessment of the student (Williams and Rutter, 2019; Field et al., 2016).

The focus on (formal) written supervisory records for accountability purposes is echoed within many statutory and voluntary agency supervision policies (Wilkins, 2017; Wilkins et al., 2018a). In particular, the function of supervisory records as a repository of recorded and agreed actions and to meet audit demands in relation to record keeping (Ofsted, 2017) is highlighted, particularly within statutory children's services (Wilkins et al., 2018a). In the only study available, Wilkins et al., (2018a) analysed ten pairs of supervision audio recordings and their corresponding written records, the authors noting that these were 'fortuitously' identified from within a wider study encompassing 200 written records and 35 audio recordings of supervision, thereby contributing to a 'much richer sub-set of data than we had initially anticipated' (p.95). This study's concluding hypothesis - that the intended or expected audience (particularly Ofsted Inspectors and senior managers) and the need to provide 'evidence of management oversight' (p.105) understandably influenced the content and nature of the supervisor's written record - is significant and consideration of the audience and

oversight/accountability imperatives were helpful when analysing the 7 student supervisory records (see Chapter 8).

This cautionary reminder, that documents such as written supervision records need to be analysed within the context and purpose in which they were produced and with the implied readership in mind, aligns with the ontologically realist and epistemological constructivist philosophical approach of subtle realism pertaining to this study. Silverman (2014) also contends that such content analysis of documentary data is not an exercise in making judgments according to 'apparently objective standards' (p.280) but aims to analyse how such records 'work to achieve particular effects - to identify the elements used and the functions these play' (p.280). These considerations impacted upon my analysis of the supervision records that follows within Chapter 8.

### 5.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has considered the methods used to collect data, including a naturalist method of data collection of audio-recorded supervision sessions, complemented further by qualitative interviews and collection of documentary data in the form of written supervisory records. Ethnographic Content Analysis (Altheide, 1987) as the basis for the analysis of the audio-recorded supervision sessions and the journey and challenges of developing a bespoke Coding Frame has been discussed. The complementary use of qualitative interviews, their challenges and philosophical complexities and the development of the PE and student interview schedules have been considered, the latter particularly informed by the pivotal contribution Spradley's (1979) work on ethnographic interviewing. Template Analysis (King, 2012) is proffered as an appropriate choice of thematic analysis template for this study, due to its iterative nature and reflexive demands of the researcher. Lastly, consideration has been given to the content analysis of written supervision records.

## **Chapter 6 Findings from the recorded supervision sessions - Part 1: Topic Coverage**

### 6.1 Introduction and a note on presentation

This chapter presents the findings and the data drawn from the recorded supervision sessions provided by the 11 Dyads, in particular the Topic Coverage within supervision (Part 1 of the Coding Frame, Appendix 4). Findings from the recorded supervision sessions in relation to Part 2 of the Coding Frame - the Analytical Coding of PE and Student Activities follows in Chapter 7 and analysis of the coded supervision sessions overall is presented in Chapter 8.

As indicated in Table E: Table of Recorded Supervision Sessions, 30 supervision sessions from 11 student / PE Dyads were transcribed. Overall, 1851 minutes (equating to just over 30 hours) of supervision time was recorded. The average length of the supervision sessions was 62 minutes; the shortest session was 37minutes in length and the longest session was 1 hour 36 minutes.

This chapter and the following chapter include some lengthy extracts from the supervision sessions. They are included in these chapters (rather than within an appendix) as they are central to understanding and illumination of the fine detail and content of the supervisory encounter, but it is hoped they will aid ease of reading. The 30+ hours of supervision recorded (and coded for detailed content) meant that 30+ hours of discussion, discourse and the inevitable to-ing and fro-ing of conversation had ensued. This dialogical context provides rich data that, unlike other methods of data collection (for example, such as interviews), does not easily lend itself to single quotations or comments by participants. Hence, there are 26 Extracts (examples from the supervision sessions) within this chapter and the following chapter, some lengthier than others, but all chosen to illustrate, with colour and depth, the content and activities coded. As each recorded supervision session was being transcribed, they were timestamped periodically, often at the beginning

of each spoken occurrence (PE or student speaker labels). This was necessary for the timed content of the coding process. However, for the purposes of presentation, timestamps are included as follows:

- A single timestamp at the beginning of an extract – indicates that the spoken occurrences within that extract occur as synchronous ‘turn taking’; thus, the extract is single, conversational flow
- Timestamp(s) at the beginning of the extract and throughout the extract - indicates spoken segments that were not synchronous but were present at various (time stamped) points within the transcribed supervision session.

The chapter outlines the coding process; the details of the Coding Frame (see Appendix 4: Coding Frame) and how each supervision session was coded using this frame and recorded on a table (see Appendix 7 - Supervision coding - All Dyads). The findings from the data are presented in two chapters, corresponding to the two parts of the Coding Frame.

- This Chapter 6 - Topic coverage, Part 1 of the Coding Frame - this presents broad areas of content and topic discussion during each supervision and is counted in minutes. This is presented in table form in Appendix 7 - Supervision coding - All Dyads.
- The following Chapter 7 - Analytical coding, Part 2 of the Coding Frame - this presents and analyses the coded PE and student activities in relation to direct work / practice discussion and academic /portfolio work discussion. Activities are counted in numbers of occurrences and detailed analytic coding and number of occurrences of PE and student activity within *each* supervision session is given in Appendix 7 - Supervision coding - All Dyads. The frequency of coded PE and student activities that were present across the data set of 30 supervision sessions is given in Appendix 8: Data Set - PE and Student Activities.

## 6. 2 The coding process

### 6.2.1 The Coding Frame

The rationale and the development of this study's bespoke Coding Frame has been discussed in detail in Chapter 5 and has its roots in an understanding of Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) (Altheide, 1987; Altheide and Schneider, 2017). Richards (2005) formulation of 'topic coding' and 'analytic coding' was used as the basis of the coding frame - 'topic' coding to summarise supervision content (Part 1 of the Coding Frame) and analytic coding to capture supervision 'activity' (Part 2 of the Coding Frame) . Topic coding is timed in minutes and analytic coding is numbered in occurrences.

The development of the Coding Frame was a complex task and the application of it to the taped supervision sessions proved equally challenging. This process was reminiscent of Nelsen's (1974) example of the difficulty of applying her coding frame to the content of FI and student interaction given the interplay and overlap of the discussion. Thus, there were inevitably areas of issue with the coding categories used in the Coding Frame, including areas of overlap, duplication, and omission and these will be discussed as they arise.

### 6.2.2 The coding of each supervision session and initial responses and analysis

Each recorded supervision session was coded and recorded on a table (see Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads). I coded each Dyad's transcripts singly, generally starting with the first supervision session from each Dyad and then proceeding to the other two or three supervision session transcripts, coding all supervision sessions from one Dyad before moving to the next Dyad. Each supervision transcript was read either two or three times; the first to code for topic coverage and the second time to code for analytical coding and PE and student activities. Some transcripts were read and coded for a third time, and this was either random or deliberate.

Transcripts were read randomly, as 'self-check' to see if I coded the same session differently a few weeks or months after the initial coding; or read as a deliberate return, if my coding of subsequent sessions from a particular dyad 'triggered' any thoughts or ideas that made me want to return to the previous coded session(s).

The analysis of the data, and initial formulation of my thoughts and responses, really began as I was listening and transcribing the taped supervision sessions. This included critical observations, including writing memos about some sessions, noting passages or conversations that could illuminate analysis and noting if any significant features or elements of the coded session 'stood out' for me. In some cases, I then read the student and / or PE interview transcript (if transcribed at that point), to see if features or aspects (or patterns) I had considered salient or interesting (in some cases, areas I had noticed were noticeably absent during the sessions) were referenced in the interviews. Many coded sessions were simply read again for the third time (not coded again), either during the course of writing this chapter or when I had (re)read the interviews and some new 'detail' emerged that I remembered from a coded supervision session and I needed to find it.

### 6.3 The findings: Topic coverage (Part 1 of the Coding Frame)

Topic coverage and the categories that follow are those on Part 1 of the Coding Frame (see Appendix 4: Coding Frame). There are eight topic categories under Topic Coverage on the Coding Frame.

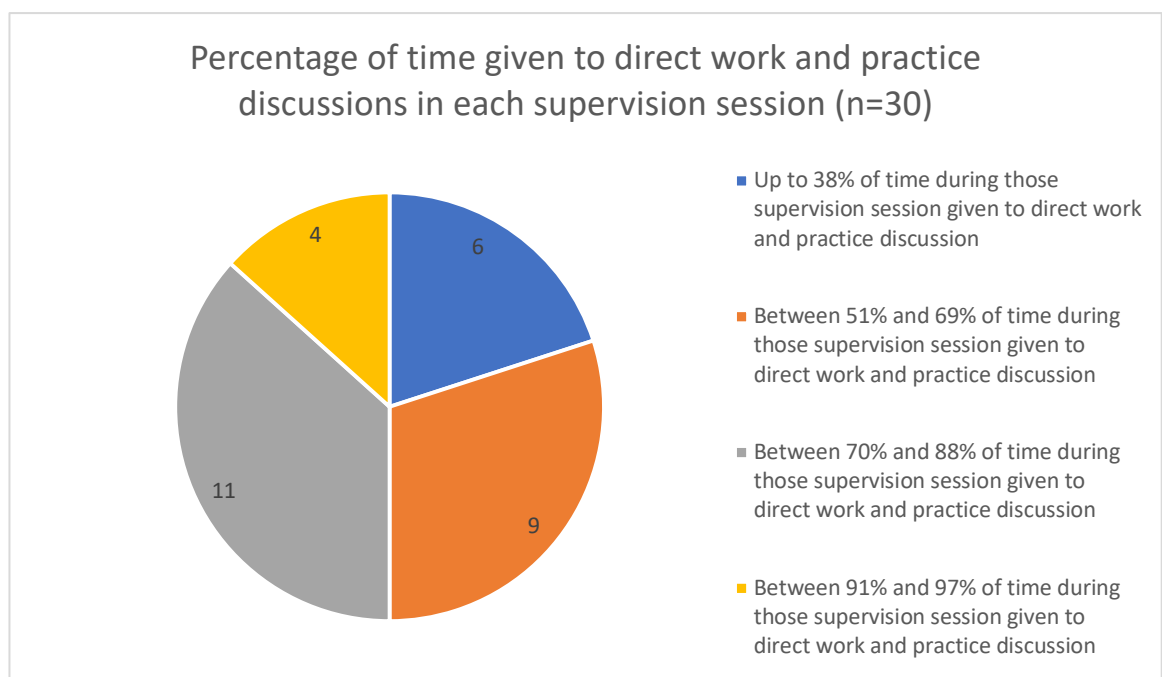
Each supervision session was noted for its overall length (minutes) and for the time (minutes) given to each topic category. More detailed descriptions of what each category refers to is given under category headings below.

#### 6.3.1 Direct work/practice discussion

This broadly named category of direct work / practice discussion included discussion of work with service users and the more traditional and individual

'case work' discussion covered in any student or practitioner supervision. The number of service users discussed within each supervision session was also noted (see Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads). In addition, this category was intended to cover aspects of student work or practice on placement that was not exclusively related to individual 'case work' with service users. Students on placement undertake a wide variety of learning opportunities beyond working with and supporting individual service users or families, and such opportunities included group work; co working; giving presentations; chairing meeting; or undertaking research, projects or preparing materials for the host agency or for work with service users.

Chart 6.1



As can be seen in Chart 6.1, for the majority of the 30 coded supervision sessions (24 of the 30 transcribed sessions), direct work and practice discussion took up more than half of the time during those sessions, and for half of the transcribed sessions (15) such discussion took up over 70% of the time in each supervision session. This could suggest that, as consequence, there would be less time during each session for the discussion of other aspects of the student placement – for example, academic work and portfolio

content or placement review. Alternatively, it could be argued that direct work/practice discussions do not need to be hermetically sealed in this way, and that direct work and practice discussion could be used as a lever and segue into a discussion of academic work, portfolio content and wider theoretical discussions. This was the case for one of the Dyads (Dyad 10) and examples of the integrated nature of practice and theoretical discussions will be given later in this chapter. However, for the most part, the initial supposition – that the time spent on direct work/ practice discussion precluded discussion of other aspects of the student placement - was largely borne out by the data.

There are further issues of interest and significance that underlie the ‘simple’ percentages within [Chart 6.1](#) and that require discussion. The average number of service users discussed in each supervision session was 6, with the minimum number of 1 discussed (Dyad 8, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision and Dyad 9, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision) and the maximum number of 18 discussed (Dyad 6, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision). It could be assumed that the amount of time given to direct work and practice discussion would correspond directly to the numbers of service users discussed, so the greater number of service users discussed, the greater the percentage of time therefore taken up by this discussion in the supervision session. This is certainly the case with Dyad 6, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision (see Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads), which records the highest number of service users discussed (18) over the data set and highlights that 88% of that supervision session was given to such direct work/practice discussion. At the lower end of service users discussed (Dyads 8 and 9), where 1 or 2 service users were discussed during each supervision session, these Dyads do record the lowest percentage of time given to direct work/ practice discussion. For example, Dyad 8, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision records 1 service user is discussed and 18% of the time given to direct work / practice discussion and 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision records that 2 service users are discussed, taking up 21% of the supervision time. However, as Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads indicates, this is not borne out by the rest of the data. For example, Dyad 1 discussed 3 service users in each of their three recorded



supervision sessions, but such discussions respectively accounted for 75%, 86% and 82% of the time in each recorded supervision session. Similarly, Dyad 11, discussed 4 service users in each of their two supervision sessions, and these discussions respectively accounted for 93% and 97% of the time in each recorded session. Thus, a simple 'correlation' is not possible, and this enhances the rationale for the (separate) analytic coding of PE and student activities, as these not only aid the analysis but also add to the rigour and validity of the analysis.

Further, as has been noted, the broadly named category of direct work / practice discussion was intended to include other student activities and learning opportunities undertaken on placement that were not directly related to 'case work'. Discussion of such activities did take place – for example, discussion of a student presentation to the hosting placement team and other professionals; a student chairing a professionals meeting and the student undertaking research and preparing information for use by the host service. However, early in the coding of the supervision sessions, it became apparent that most supervision agendas centred upon, or began with, discussion of work undertaken with service users. Such discussions could and did include wider 'practice' considerations: thus, aspects of work undertaken by students that were unrelated to individual 'case work' with service users were indicated in some recorded sessions. For example, StA was compiling a list of local family support agencies and resources and this was briefly mentioned in two of the recorded supervision sessions. Some of these discussions will be referenced in the following Chapter 7 (Analytical coding) but nonetheless, the reporting of work with individual service users predominated and framed most of the discussions within supervision sessions. Interestingly, even where one particular Dyad (Dyad 10, 3<sup>rd</sup> supervision) suggested a different approach and the PE started the session with the suggestion '*the main thing we are going to look at is the critical reflection...so should we get out of the way the practical bits and the general updates so we can focus on that?*', both PE and student did not get to talking

about the critical reflection the student had completed until 54 minutes into the session.

### 6.3.2 Academic work, including discussion of portfolio content and preparation, case study or dissertation

The inclusion of this category within the coding frame and the general heading of 'academic work' is in recognition of one of the expectations of student supervision on placement, that it should assist students with the application of theoretical knowledge and understanding to practice. All students had a placement portfolio to complete and, as the students in this study were also final year students, they had either academic dissertations to complete (the MA students) or an extended case study to complete (BA students). The student's placement portfolio typically requires students to provide written and reflective accounts that incorporates theoretical and analytical understanding of the work undertaken on placement, reflection upon and analytical discussion of direct observations of their practice and self-appraisal of their developmental progress in accordance with professional frameworks. The usefulness of the portfolio – as a tool that can integrate theoretical knowledge and application in practice (Doel et al., 2002) and therefore can aid student learning, as well as providing a foundation for the PEs assessment - has been well documented within the practice literature (Jasper, 2017; Doel et al., 2002; Slater, 2007; Heron et al., 2010). In contrast, the dissertation or case study are academically required and assessed pieces of work and are usually completed outside of the placement. However, the focus of this final piece of academically assessed work is often 'placement related' and thus can provide further opportunities for PE and student exploration of the student's academic knowledge and application of their theoretical understanding.

Beyond the use of the portfolio, the dissertation or the case study as a basis for academically and theoretically based discussions within supervision, the practice education literature (and wider literature on adult learning) offers numerous tools that can be utilised in supervision to assist in the application

of theoretical understanding to practice. For example, the models provided by Collingwood (2005); Davys and Beddoe (2009); Kolb (1984; 2015); exercises and activities from Doel and Shardlow, (2005); materials, models and resources provided by Maclean (2017); Maclean and Caffrey (2009) and Maclean et.al. (2018). Attention to the 'educative' purpose of student supervision and the use of the student's academic work or portfolio contents as triggers for discussion of theoretical understanding is thus implied within this category.

As Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads indicates, academic work and discussion of portfolio content and preparation was discussed in 23 of the 30 supervision sessions, and 10 of those supervisions involved discussions that were less than five minutes in length. Only 4 of the 11 Dyads, Dyads 1, 3, 5, 7 discussed academic work including portfolio content and preparation, in every one of their recorded supervision sessions. Within these Dyads, discussions ranged from 2 minutes in length to 19 minutes, with Dyad 5 being consistent in offering some of the lengthiest discussions in each supervision session, mainly in relation to portfolio preparation (1<sup>st</sup> Supervision, 18 minutes; 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision, 19 minutes and 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision, 12 minutes). Consideration of the student's dissertation or extended case study took place in only three Dyads – Dyads 1, 3 and 10 - although within Dyads 1 and 3 this was only in one supervision each and discussions lasted only 2 minutes within Dyad 1 (2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision) and 4 minutes in Dyad 3 (2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision). The lengthiest discussions regarding portfolio and academic work were within Dyad 10. Within this Dyad, there was a specific section on the supervision agenda for 'academic work/PCF' and this was addressed in two of the three supervision sessions. There was a 45 minute discussion in the 1<sup>st</sup> supervision about an assessment of a service user used for the student's Critical Analysis of Practice (CAP) required for the portfolio and, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> supervision, a discussion around the service user chosen and the content of for the student's (academic) extended case study, lasting 30 minutes.

However, if we take as a definition of discussion ‘the action or process of talking about something in order to reach a decision or to exchange ideas’ or ‘a detailed treatment of a topic in speech or writing’ (<https://www.lexico.com/definition/discussion>), then the term must be used lightly in relation to findings within this category. Only within five Dyads (Dyads 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10) did the overall discussion under this category last into double figures (minutes) during any supervision session, and Dyad 10 held the lengthiest discussion of a CAP during the 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision, lasting 45 minutes, along with Dyad 8, 2<sup>nd</sup> supervision at 30minutes. As Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads indicates, most ‘discussions’ were limited in scope and nature and in many instances consisted of mentions of portfolio content or progress, rather than the ‘detailed treatment of a topic’ or theoretical understanding or application suggested by the definition above. In most cases, the student informed the PE about what they were doing/had done in relation to their portfolio preparation or CAP, with limited input or explication from the PE. At other times the mention of the portfolio was approached in a process driven manner, with either PE or student referring to the expectations/form of the portfolio content(s) such as how the CAP should be presented (or what should go in each ‘box’ or under each heading), rather than engaging in a fuller exploration or reflection about the nature of the work undertaken. See Extract A below:

Extract A: Dyad 3, 3<sup>rd</sup> supervision

*S: [00:01:03] I have to do it next week because I want to get this CAP done by, preferably by next week,*

*PE: right, okay*

*S: I am doing it on SU X, and obviously there is a lot of stuff that has gone on, so in the bit where it is writing about what you did, obviously it started off and I was just going to do about the plan, and with the other agencies, but you know, obviously everything that has happened... it is great because there is loads more stuff to write about and reflect on, but it just means that there is so much more for me to filter in and stuff*

*PE: right*

*S: and I know that I could carry it on until the end, because there is going to be stuff happening, but I think if I included that meeting from yesterday and sort of*

*PE: right*

*S: do that as kind of... maybe the end bit, this is the plan, then*

*PE: right, okay*

*S: unless anything happens next week and then I will put that in as well*

*PE: I think because the case has changed daily, hasn't it really? Are you finding pieces of, kind of social work theory that is fitting in?*

*S: yes*

*PE: with that, and social work methods and, so, it is kind of fitting in with*

*S: with each bit, yeah*

*PE: brilliant, brilliant, that is good...*

The above extract is an example of similar practice indicated in several recorded supervision sessions, where opportunities were not taken up, by both PE and student, for more detailed and critical exploration of theoretical understanding and learning. Using this Extract A as an example, there were a number of areas that could have been explored further to enhance student learning, such as:

- Was there anything in particular that the student had been reflecting upon?
- What was the impact of the 'filtering in' on her thought processes, emotional responses and decision making with SU X?

- How might she 'filter in' (or indeed, 'filter out') the daily changing 'story' of SU X into the written CAP to ensure a critical analysis of practice rather than a descriptive account of happenings?
- What social work theory or methods might 'fit' and be helpful to the student's thinking and work in relation to SU X? How do these theories or methods 'fit'?

There could be a myriad of personal, relational or contextual reasons why such opportunities were not pursued, and some tentative explanations will be offered in Chapter 8.

There were some notable exceptions amongst the Dyads, where student academic work or portfolio content was used to prompt and explore thinking about the student's wider understanding and foundation of this for their practice. For example, the lengthiest of all discussions across the data set, underpinned and initiated through discussion of a CAP, took place in Dyad 10, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision. Extract B (Dyad 1, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision) includes extracts from this lengthy 45-minute discussion. This extract is also unusually lengthy but has been chosen to exemplify how a CAP can be used to instigate, promote and extend student thinking. My initial response, as I listened and transcribed this supervision session was "easy conversation, skilled PE". However, as I reread the transcribed session, I consider the conversation to embody both 'stroll' and 'purpose' - stroll exemplified through dialogue and reveal of student thinking but punctuated by purpose and skilled PE intervention that promotes and helps extend the student's thinking. The extract also typifies issues with analytical coding and potential code overlap, which is discussed further in Chapter 7, as some of the discussion could be considered – and coded – as 'reflection'.

Extract B: Dyad 10, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision (Context: the student had sent a draft of her first CAP to the PE and the PE introduces this 2 ½ minutes into the supervision session. In the extract X is the service user and Y is the service user's wife and carer).

*PE: [00:03:04] And you have picked X, because you kind of got the preparation, the intervention and the review and that fits nicely with the CAP.*

*S: So, it's also good to do CAPs when work didn't go well, but I thought it'd be good to have one where you could actually see a beginning, middle and end, and then the other ones, I don't know we'll just see what happens. You know, I thought it'd be good to have one where you can see the difference.*

*PE: yeah, so a brief outline of the scenario, a brief outline of the assessment process, brill, so you are talking about our requirements under the Care Act and stuff.*

*S: Yeah. Because it's got to link to theory and it is strength based isn't it, the Care Act assessment? But I was going to do that with like some references at home., to make it sound academic (laugh)*

*PE: [00:04:50] because under the under the Care Act, obviously the emphasis is around tailored information, advice and information and advice, that's kind of like a critical intervention itself. So that uses that word, you know, in the statutory guidance for the Care Act, it talks about this critical intervention idea, that an assessment isn't just like a procedure in itself, you get outcomes and that's what you've done with X, haven't you? Just you doing the assessment, You've not even had to do a support plan or whatever, you've been able to provide advice, like you need to get into a routine with your pendant alarm.*

*S: [00:05:35] And this one, I found a little bit difficult, because these are all about service user's feelings about the agency and about us.*

*PE: Yeah,*

*S: so I'm, I think it's quite easy to figure out Y's feelings because she can tell us and how*

*PE: yeah, lots!*

*S: Yeah, but what I wrote, well, what I have written so far, is (STUDENT READING) it's difficult to gauge what X feels is it can take him a while to process information and communicate*

*what he thinks , he often gets stuck on a thought or an action , and through all my contact with X, he has appeared happy and willing to participate. He does understand he has vascular dementia and knows we would like to support him to be part of his community. He seems pleased about this and would like to join Community projects and activities. When asked what he would like to achieve, he said he'd like to try new activities.*

*PE: I think you reflected on the kind of dynamic between Mr and Mrs. She's...obviously she's got an agenda. She's kind of in control. She's very talkative, not in a negative way, you know, she's not abusive in anyway, but it's her narrative that we get and not so much X. If you started from scratch again, if you started from scratch now, knowing that that was going to be a challenge, you know, we have heard a lot from her, you came away from the first time and you [00:07:20] were kind of saying, it was good, but I didn't really get sense of X*

*S: mm*

*PE: What could we do differently or how could we have asked questions differently?*

*S: Do you think. I think I could have been clearer, in saying to her (Y) that I need to understand what X's wishes and feelings are, even if X says something that isn't true. I'm not going to take that and run with it.*

*PE: Yeah*

*S: but I'd like to know what X's feelings are, so I could have probably been a bit clearer, not authoritative, because I don't mean it as , I'm going to do this ,but you know almost , yeah , but more authoritative than like, set the line that I need to speak to X*

*PE: Yeah, it's almost like setting out your store at the beginning.*

*S: Yeah*

*PE: and so although the carer is there to support his narrative, and she's part of his support network, isn't she, and the advocate for him, we were sort of struggling because it was very much like a carers Centre assessment, wasn't it?*



S: Yeah.

PE: So, okay. So, like setting out your stall to start with, you know, you were saying you could have been clearer with her. Is there anything else about the way that we ask things, or our approach that we could have done differently?

S: In the second visit when I did try I speak to X a bit more. I don't feel I explained myself as simply as X needed me to, like sometimes I asked a question and X got confused by my question

PE: Yeah

S: and then other questions which I did think about, what I was asking, how to ask it, and I tried to make it more simple, he answered a lot quicker, and his answer made more sense because I think he actually understood what I meant.

PE: So which, what sorts of questions were dead successful then, and which ones worked well, can you remember. Why were they like, what made them work?

To offer a contrast, Dyad 8 also included a 30-minute discussion of the student's written CAP (2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision (Extract C below) and within Dyad 4, discussion of particular theories took place (as a specific agenda item) in each supervision session (see Extract D). These are presented here together prior to discussion of their differences.

Extract C: Dyad 8, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision (Context: the student had sent a draft CAP to the PE and the PE is giving feedback and discussing the content with the student, prior to the CAP being sent to the student's tutor).

PE: [00:39:20] and again, I know what you mean by narrative approach, but what you have to do is show your tutor that you know what it means, and what your role is in that, so what is a narrative approach and what are you going to do in order to use that model

S: mm

*PE: okay? And what is the difference between narrative and process driven?*

*S: are you asking me that now do you mean?*

*PE: mm*

*S: yeah, narrative is obviously more about their story and like it is quite free, whereas process driven, I mean it is both of them, because they are telling you the story but the process driven is, you have to do the sheet and get the information across in the handouts*

*PE: so, a paragraph explaining that, because otherwise somebody might look at that and think well, that is two opposite things, how stupid, she says...(both laugh).*

*S: Yeah*

*PE: and maybe later on, once you have got a much clearer picture of her specific issues or perhaps because, we go back up here, where you say she gets angry and frustrated, well you might do a piece of work using CBT methods to look at managing anger*

*S: mm*

*PE: so I can get that, but I think you need to be a little bit more*

*S: okay*

*PE: specific in the way you write it*

#### Extract D: Dyad 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision

*PE: [00:21:02] So, shall we move to attachment theory?*

*PE: can do, it is what underpins everything (laugh), yeah, let's go for it*

*S: yeah so, attachment theory was developed by Bowlby*

*PE: Bowlby, yeah*

*S: and it was, he was saying basically that the relationship between parents and children has an impact on how the child is developing and how the child later behaves and he is saying especially about the early stages of childhood, what is the role of the parent or the key person and why the attachment is necessary so the child can go away and come back and still know the person is there and it is how the babies are exploring the world, like go away from the parent but then if they feel that it is possible that it is not safe or something, then they just go running back and it is how they will learn that this is a safe way to explore*

*PE: mm*

*S: and then there are people, or others, who believe that if the attachment is not formed or there is a broken attachment, it will have an impact on the development of the child or the person and can cause issues later on in the life which, developing healthy relationships with other people, self esteem*

*PE: Security*

*S: security, yeah*

*PE: mm*

*S: achieving in life*

Both extracts are taken from lengthier discussions where theoretical considerations are named and discussed within the supervision discussions. However, they offer contrasting examples of how theoretical discussions can be introduced and used within student supervision. Extract C (Dyad 8) uses the discussion of theory (in relation to a CAP) in a limited fashion. Thus, theories and approaches are named (narrative approach and CBT) but with limited student response and the focus on meeting (tutor) requirements for the written CAP, rather than a discussion of the helpfulness or limits of the models or approaches in relation to student work with service users. In contrast, discussion in Extract D (Dyad 4) is very much related to work with service users and direct practice, rather than to portfolio or academic work. This was a feature of each supervision session within this Dyad, when

different theories - attachment, person centred theory and ecological theory – were discussed in each respective supervision session. The discussion within Dyad 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision also continued beyond that illustrated by the above extract (Extract D) and was a very wide ranging and in-depth discussion of issues relating to attachment in later life. Towards the end of the discussion, the PE introduced a feminist critique of Bowlby and the PE and student began conversation regarding fathers and their role. Within Extract C, the discussion of theory is both framed within the context of the CAP and PE feedback on this, so it is perhaps inevitable that it would be more PE lead and dominated, with greater student “mm’s” than active involvement and exploration of their understanding. In contrast, within Dyad 4, it was the student who began the conversation regarding theory (as s/he did in each supervision session) and the PE was able and confident to go with and add to whatever the student was bringing, including making references to other academic sources. My written thoughts and comments at the end of coding this session were: “Very nice two-way conversational discussion, related to particular service users and thus real / helpful to student understanding and development?”

The lengthy discussions that took place within two of Dyad 10 supervision sessions – around discussion of a CAP (Extract B) and later, discussion of the student’s choice of service user/focus for her extended case study – were exceptional in their scope. The latter included discussion of reading and research the student had completed (the student mentioned reading on dementia; mental wellbeing and reablement) and its impact on her thinking; introduction and reference by the PE to strengths based working and motivational interviewing and lengthy ‘values talk ‘ (Timms, 1989, p.12) and conversation about older people and how they are viewed and valued. Whilst theoretical discussions in Dyad 4 and 10 were in depth and regularly present, the data does indicate that other PEs ‘presented’ theory during some supervision sessions – either directly asking students about use of theory or by referring to a particular theory as being in use in the student’s work (but without elaboration). However, many of these discussions were either very

short, unfocused, or not sustained or developed to any degree, by either PE or student. See Extract E:

Extract E: Dyad 9, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision

*PE: [00:29:25] what else are you using at the moment on placement in terms of the theories and the models you have been taught on the course?*

*S: is it like, working within a team, multi-tasking and*

*PE: [ 00:34:47]mm, what sort of social work methods do you think you have been using so far?*

*S: oh....(silence). Give me an example (laugh)*

*PE: okay..erm, do you think that for instance, are you using crisis intervention? or solution focused practice? what models might be guiding the way you relate to and what you do with those clients?*

*S: at the moment one of my recent ones, because he has schizophrenia, so I think solution focused to find out from him exactly what he wants, so he wanted to , because he kept on saying , you can go there and be happy and it is all well, and there might be some things he wants changing , so the market trips he wants to go to, he is in his late 50s and he doesn't have any family coming in and he can't obviously go on his own*

*PE: [00:33:59] Right so you are looking at some solution focused, what does he want, erm, what is the difference between solution focused and task orientated?*

Only one of the recorded and coded supervision sessions included the use of a particular model - the Kolb Experiential cycle (Kolb, 1984; 2015) was used in Dyad 10, 3<sup>rd</sup> supervision to enhance student reflection. The absence of tools or models from 29 of the 30 transcribed supervision sessions sent to the researcher however, suggests that use of available tools and models was not a consistent feature of supervision. However, the use of certain models were referred to within student and PE interviews, such as the 'Kit' model (Collingwood, 2005) and the 'weather model' (Maclean, 2016), thus

indicating that some models were used within the placement to enhance or focus student learning and reflection.

To summarise, most of the recorded supervision sessions indicated that opportunities to discuss or explore students theoretical understanding, using the student's academic work, including portfolio content and preparation, CAPs or feedback after direct observations were not fully realised. With a few exceptions, discussions of student academic work or portfolio content were either brief or limited in scope and content even where discussion lasted into double figures (for example, Dyads 7, 8 and 9). In most cases, theoretical avenues remained underexplored (see Extract A). Where discussion did take place (as in Extract C), the discussion often focussed on task (CAP) completion explain rather than extracting student understanding or theoretical application. Only three Dyads – Dyads 4, 5 and 10 - offered consistent and integrated use of academic work and portfolio contents to frame and provide space for theoretical discussions. Significantly, such elements were a regular feature of the agenda within each of these Dyads – so, within Dyad 5, academic and portfolio work and the agenda items of “*log, PCF, reflective practice?*” (2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision) were features and prompts within each supervision and used as the launch for wider reflective and theoretical discussions. Similarly, within Dyad 10, there was an agenda item for ‘Academic work/PCF’. As has been noted, the discussion of theory and application to practice was also a standard and itemised feature of the supervision agenda within Dyad 4. Here however, discussion of theory within each supervision session centred upon applying the theory to work undertaken with specific service users, and not discussed or introduced in relation to academic or portfolio work (and thus, such discussions feature under the ‘other’ category of the coding frame to be discussed later). This will be discussed further within Chapter 7 to follow.

### 6.3.3 Administrative issues (annual leave, toil, mileage, phone)

Only one Dyad, Dyad 3, referred to and discussed administrative issues including leave, Time Off in Lieu (TOIL), mileage, work phone, mileage

claiming, during each of their three supervisions. This PE (PE3) also referred to use of the student's 'reflection time' encouraging her to take it and was keen to ensure this:

*[00:00:37] I have noticed that you haven't taken any reflection time for some weeks?... because you are entitled to that [00:54:54] Well, what I want you to do with that is identify some time for your toil and add some reflection time to that you are always in early [00:55:10] I just want to make sure that we honour what you are giving to us (Dyad 3, 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision)*

PE3 was an exceptionally supportive PE and both PE feedback and the expression and use of PE support was a key activity during placement (see Chapter 7). I suggest that this PEs regular attention to such issues as TOIL, student mileage, arranging for the repair of the student phone, and insisting that the student take her 'reflection time', can be seen in the light of such use of support and positive feedback, rather than simply taking care of 'administrative issues'.

#### 6.3.4 Agenda setting, including check in

In relation to this content category, all the supervision sessions began with some sort of general 'check in' where the PE enquired how the student was and generally if 'everything was okay' or if there was anything they needed to know from the student? These were usually single comments or questions. Similarly, with agenda setting, many sessions were led by the PE checking off an agenda and asking the student for contributions, but often lasting under a minute. Dyads 6 and 7 had two supervision sessions each where agenda setting was a shared activity, taking between 2 to 4 minutes, but this was a rarity. Where an agenda was not mentioned, it was clear from the recorded tapes that there were proforma supervision agendas used, different Dyad to Dyad, but which gave the sessions a structure and were clearly familiar to both students and PEs.

### 6.3.5 Feedback (including placement review)

Topic coding within the next three categories (Category 5, Feedback (including placement review); Category 6, Workload Checking and Category 7, Placement Review) indicate several areas of code overlap and these will be highlighted as they arise.

This category of Feedback, (including placement review) was included in the Coding Frame to capture generalised feedback on student practice, after the student had undertaken particular elements of work with service users, or feedback and discussion after a direct observation or other student activity. The inclusion of 'placement review' as a descriptor, was added to incorporate more generalised feedback on student progress and informal overall review of progression, rather than a more specific and formalised 'placement review' (as indicated by Category 7, Placement Review). Generalised feedback indicated within this category was included in 11 of the 30 supervision sessions, much of this feedback being 2 minutes or less in length. Examples included the student being complimented on a recent positive observation and Interim Review; the PE informing the student about positive feedback from the team; the PE commenting on the student's handling of a 'difficult' parent and feedback to the student regarding their handling of a challenging situation with a foster carer (see Chapter 7).

The notable exception was the time spent on feedback within Dyad 8 (12 minutes during the 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision) which included some detailed feedback and discussion about the reflective log the student had sent to the PE; and Dyad 9, where 32 minutes during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision was spent on feedback after the PE had undertaken an observation of the student. This PE feedback about student practice during a direct observation was used as a helpful tool to develop wider student understanding about her role within the agency. Dyads 8 and 9 had the same PE7 and interestingly, these were the *only* supervision sessions (2) amongst the data set of 30 recorded supervision sessions, during which the PE gave detailed feedback after a direct observation and the students practice during the observation was discussed.



Direct observation of practice was referred to within some other supervision sessions, but this consisted either of confirming arrangements for the timing and location of the observation rather than planning or discussing the expected content, aim or preparation required; or the student and PE discussing the detail of the form to be completed. Prior to undertaking a direct observation of practice, students are required to use a prescribed form to plan, provide aims for the observed practice and consider what theoretical insights or understanding might apply to their intervention. Thus, while Dyad 11, (2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision) spent 4 minutes arranging the direct observation, the discussion focused on the student's completion of the form's 'boxes' (StK "*I have filled in, I have tried to fill in my first five boxes...and then I have still got two boxes after that before I send it to you anyway*) rather than the content or the student's aims or expectation for the observation. Similarly, an exchange within Dyad 5 (3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision), clearly after an observation had been completed and the PE had shared written feedback and comments with the student, also centred on the student's understanding of the 'boxes' and the PE providing advice (PE5 "*..so the first reflective bit (box) would be the good, and the bits you would keep, and the things you would change, how you would do it in the future...you would identify it and say how you would practice differently*"). Given that each student would have been formally observed three times over the course of the 100-day placement, and even if each PE only carried out two of these observations (the third can be carried out by another professional), this means that over 11 Dyads, at least 22 observations would have been carried out. The fact that only two in depth discussions are present within the 30 recorded sessions is significant and this omission will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 8.

It has become clear that, in relation to the inclusion of 'placement review' in the descriptor for this category, there is some category overlap (Nelsen, 1974) between this category and Category 7 Placement Review, and my assumptions as to what each would (or should?) entail have been exposed. As can be seen below, Category 7 Placement Review discussions are present and coded in 15 of the 30 supervision sessions but the majority of

these are limited in length and nature (between 2 and 5 minutes) and could thus easily have been included in this Category 5, Feedback (including placement review) instead. This, along with some subsequent coding issues and overlap with Category 6, Workload Checking will be discussed further.

#### 6.3.6 Workload Checking

This was a feature of 8 supervision sessions and as has already been suggested, there are degrees of overlap with Category 5 and Category 7. For example, whilst I have coded the 9minute discussion in Dyad 10, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision as Workload Checking, the extended nature of the discussion included elements of learning review and thus could have been in the Placement Review Category 7 that follows. The lengthier discussions, ranging from 5 minutes to 22 minutes in 5 of the supervision sessions, took place during the first supervision session (the first recorded supervision session sent to the researcher). These recorded supervision sessions would have taken place earlier in the placement and after the student's induction period. Thus, discussions around the range and availability of learning opportunities and work available to the student would be expected and standard practice. Notably, the lengthiest and most sustained discussions (in Dyad 5, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision, lasting 11 ½ minutes and Dyad 9, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision, lasting 22 minutes) took place in placement agencies where the students were working across more than one setting. This suggests that where PEs are involved in such multi-setting placements, consideration and coordination of work and opportunities across the settings requires particular attention.

#### 6.3.7 Placement Review

As noted previously, this content category was included to incorporate the more specific and formalised 'placement review' assumed or expected to take place within a student placement, often prior to the formal mid-point assessment or Interim Review meeting or at the end of the placement. Such placement reviews are typically expected to happen within supervision, involving an interim evaluation of progress and taking the form of a

discussion and preparation for a mid-way Interim Review meeting or the final meeting and/ or overall PE assessment. One of the key functions of the PE role is assessment of the student, and regular review of student learning and discussion of student self-evaluation marks a partnership approach to this element of the role (Williams and Rutter, 2013). The Interim Review provides the opportunity for both PE and student to review progress, to consider work allocation for the second half of the placement and discuss progress on student learning and development. However, this category is not referring to the formal Interim Review meeting or the final meeting itself, which the tutor usually chairs as part of a recorded, formal process within the placement, but to the preparatory discussions and planning beforehand. This category was included within the coding frame as differentiated from the more informal, generalised and ongoing appraisal of placement progress indicated within the Feedback category (Category 3) previously.

However, as indicated in Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads, whilst discussions in this Placement Review category took place in 15 of the 30 supervision sessions, the nature and length of these discussions were limited. They were also not specifically about review of learning or any interim evaluation of progress and could thus easily have been included in Category 5, Feedback (including placement review) instead. Generally, such discussions involved arranging dates for observations and future supervisions; discussing details of upcoming observations; checking that students were happy with the amount and range of work; discussing training undertaken; agreeing other work with service users or learning opportunities the student could access; and checking if and how the student was using their reflective time (thus indicating some code overlap with the Workload Checking category (Category 6 previously).

In only 4 supervision sessions was the Placement Review category used within supervision as implied by the category (Dyads 5, 8 and 10) and involved some sustained PE and student review of the placement and /or learning. For example, PE6 (Dyad 7), used 10minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision

session (which lasted for 1 hour 31 minutes) to discuss and prepare for the student's upcoming Interim Review. This included discussing and agreeing a range of work the student would be undertaking for the second half of the placement; gathering some student self-assessment about her progress and the PE giving the student feedback about her progress:

PE 8 (Dyad 10) used 9 minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> supervision to review the student's learning in preparation for the Interim Review and in particular probing what the student felt she would like to do and learn in the second half of the placement:

*[00:16:55) how do you feel about new stuff kind of soon? [00:18:47] is there anything else new wise that you are thinking, I have seen that happen, I really want to get my teeth into that, or anything you want to try? [00:20:22] okay, so you would like to go to a CMHT meeting, is there anything else you have been thinking about or you have seen and you think that is something I don't know much about yet and I would like to have a look at? (PE 8, Dyad 10, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision)*

PE5, Dyad 5, with a slightly different focus than intended by the category, used 8 minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> supervision to both review the student's induction and her learning from the training and shadowing she had attended and to focus upon and agree areas of work the student would be undertaking for the first half of the placement.

Overall, and notwithstanding the areas of code overlap discussed, these three categories - Category 5, Feedback (including placement review); Category 6, Workload Checking and Category 7, Placement Review – indicate that, across the data set, feedback and review of learning and evaluation of progress were not significant or sustained features of supervision. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

#### 6.3.8 Other

This category was included in the light of Silverman's (2014) caution that the use of a coding frame with conceptually driven and pre-defined categories,

as devised and used in this study, has the potential to deflect attention from 'uncoded' activities, categories or more discrete dimensions of practice. To a degree, the nature of the Coding Frame used in this study mitigates against this hazard, aided by the dual focus on content (topic coding) and process, and the more 'discrete' activities included within the analytic coding of specific PE and student activities (Nelsen, 1974; Richards, 2005; Brodie and Williams, 2013). However, the category of 'other' proves a worthy inclusion in that it highlights several reflective discussions that were not conceptually coded elsewhere but could be interpreted as meaningful for student learning and the PE and student relationship.

Thus, for 9 of the 10 Dyads, there is at least one supervision session where discussions take place that are not coded elsewhere within topic content within the Coding Frame. Such discussions were wide ranging – for example, an 8-minute discussion of safety when home visiting (Dyad 8); a 7-minute discussion regarding a student 'mistake' (Dyad 1) and a 6-minute discussion of safeguarding, the PE sharing a particular example from her experience and using it to skilfully raise issues for discussion with the student about the complex nature of safeguarding (Dyad 10). As noted previously, the discussion of 'theories' as applied to work with service users is also included in this category (Dyad 4) as discussion of such theories was a regular and stand-alone feature of supervision and was not introduced in supervision as the topic code of 'academic work' implied.

To reiterate the importance of the 'other' category and the potential arbitrariness and pitfalls of conceptually driven and pre-defined categories, two examples (from Dyads 5 and 8) are given below, illustrating where particular student reflection or learning is indicated or where areas of PE activity (such as prompting and support for student learning, or expression of support) is evident:

Firstly, Dyad 5, Extract F. This is a discussion, during the first supervision, regarding student learning and reflection triggered by a recently attended

training course during their placement induction period. Amongst all Dyads, the detail of this discussion is unusual, in other Dyads where there are references to training attended, prompts by the PE or discussion of the impact of training and / or the learning of the student are much more limited.

Extract F: Dyad 5, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision

*PE: [00:19:12] any thoughts from that, any reflection?*

*S: to be honest before she put it on, I thought it's one of them courses that you've got to do, the mandatory courses like everywhere I've worked, so I've done it a couple of times a year for the last 5 years, so I thought, sigh, here we go, another one*

*PE: right*

*S: but it was actually quite, it was different, it was delivered differently and was quite interesting actually, erm, emotional, because she gave her own experiences, the social worker that delivered it [00:19:55] but she gave her own experiences being involved in serious case reviews and things like that, so it was interesting, and the focus on, you know when I first came I was adult, adult focussed, and you were like, remember children and bringing me back*

*PE: mm*

*S: to children? That as well woke me up, that we always need to put children at the forefront of everything, and that really got me back in to thinking that way as well*

*PE: mm*

*S: because I think when I was first here, I was adult focussed*

*PE: yeah*

*S: and really struggled because they're not here to see, you can't see the children directly,*

*PE: that's it, yeah but the thing is the adults we work with are all part of families, aren't they so even if it's not their own children there's*

*other children in that family and the impact of mental disorder that you have to think about*

*S: yeah, a lot of that was mentioned in the training*

*PE: yeah*

*S: it was really useful for me, as coming to adult services and not forgetting but not realizing the impact that person's mental illness has on the family and children, and think of that, and being in their shoes*

The student's thoughtful reflections are coded in the Part 2 of the coding frame (see Chapter 7). Secondly, Dyad 8, Extract G, involves a discussion, prompted by the PE, about student anxieties about making phone calls and sounding and being 'professional'. Amongst all Dyads, this PE was one who (as I noted immediately after transcribing the sessions) was confident in 'reaching for feelings' (Shulman, 2009, p.135) and within this Dyad, this was readily responded to and discussed by the student. The discussion also prompted further exploration about the meaning of 'professionalism'.

Extract G: Dyad 8, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision

*PE: [00:23:22] you've reflected on...is that anxiety?*

*S: yeah, I just build up scenarios; it is so frustrating because I just build up scenarios,*

*PE: before you pick up the phone?*

*S: yeah, it's stupid, I know, but I just consistently do it*

*PE; and when you say that, do you mean negative ones, so you assume that things will go wrong? Have you got any mechanisms that will help you with that?*

*S: erm, no*

*PE: ever practised positive self-talk?*

*S: (laughs)*

*PE: you are laughing, but*

*S: I know*

*PE: because you are obviously an intelligent young woman, you have a range of experience of working with people face to face, haven't you?*

*S:mm*

*PE: erm, and there is nothing that you could say that you couldn't go back and change later on, or miss out, you know if you have a phone call and at the end you think, oh, I should have asked...*

*S: [00:25:14] but it's not good to present yourself, no one is going to want to be around a professional who is, not like all over the place, but doesn't look like they can keep themselves together...*

*PE: but I suppose what I am saying is, is it better that your first impression is of somebody who is calm, but has forgotten something, or somebody who comes across as being really anxious which they pick up from your tone of voice*

*S: yeah, yes, it's true*

#### 6.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the broad areas of topic and content coverage (timed in minutes) within Part A of the Coding Frame drawn from the 30 transcribed and coded supervision sessions. Discussion of direct work and practice dominated most supervision sessions, which often precluded discussion and exploration of other areas of the student placement. Notable features of topic coverage presented in this chapter includes limited time spent on discussion of academic work; the lack of the use of tools to enhance learning and limited reference to theoretical issues. There were exceptions, and these have been indicated (and contrasted) through the provision of extracts from the audio recorded supervision sessions. The provision of feedback or review of learning were also not significant or



sustained features of the supervision sessions. The finer detail of student and PE activity and interaction during supervision is discussed in the following Chapter 7 and the analytical coding of student and PE activities.

## **Chapter 7 Findings from the recorded supervision sessions - Part 2: Analytical coding of PE and Student Activities**

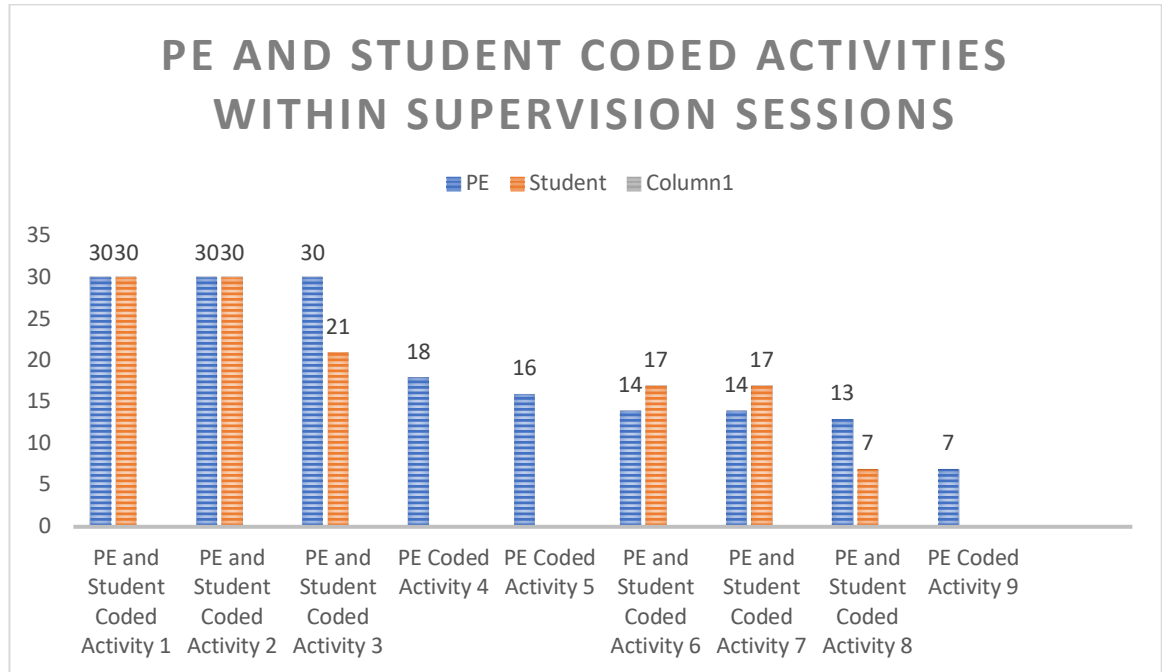
### **7 .1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the Analytical coding of PE and Student Activities as represented in Part 2 of the Coding Frame (see Appendix 4). After each supervision transcript was coded for broad areas of topic coverage (see Topic Coverage findings presented in Chapter 6), analytical coding then took place detailing separate PE and student activities and coding them in number of occurrences (see Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads).

The analytical coding of PE and Student Activities counts activities in numbers of occurrences and detailed analytic coding and number of occurrences of PE and student activity within *each* supervision session is given in Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads. A less detailed table indicating the frequency of coded PE and student activities that were present across the data set of 30 supervision sessions is given in Table F: PE and Student Coded Activities. This table presents the findings from the analytically coded activities (numbered Coded Activity number 1-9) for both PE and student, and how often such activities were present across the data set of 30 supervision sessions. For example, 30/30 means that this Coded Activity took place in each supervision session; 18/30 means that this activity took place in 18 of the 30 coded supervision sessions across the data set. However, the data contained in both Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads and Table F: PE and Student Coded Activities, need to be considered alongside each other, as the *presence* of activities (Table F) does not specify the *number of occurrences* of that activity, nor indeed the depth or strength of such occurrences. Also, the activities in Table F are presented in order of their frequency, not their importance.

Chart 7.1 below indicates the same findings from the coded activities in Table F, in bar chart form:

Chart 7.1: PE and Student Coded Activities



## 7.2 The findings: Analytical coding of PE and Student Activities (Part 2 of the Coding Frame)

The findings from the coded activities are presented under the subheadings below – either for PE and Student Activities together, where activities correspond, or separately, where analytical coding categories differ for PE and student (although may be related).

### 7.2.1 **PE activity** - Use of exploring, questioning and prompting by the PE; and **Student activity** - Describing case/ practice/ case update

These two corresponding categories are presented together, as they are linked and student activity in providing a case /service user update during supervision was often in response to parallel PE activity and their questioning or prompting. However, PE prompting or questioning also helped student analysis and hypothesising and thus informed the content of the next

student coded category of 'expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice' (this category will be discussed separately).

The PE activity – use of exploring, questioning and prompting – is a broad activity category and differed in nature and content within the coded supervision sessions. The varied nature and purposes of 'questioning' was illustrated in a number of supervision sessions and contributed to marked differences in how exploratory the discussion between student and PE was. For example, PEs used closed and open questions; direct questions to ascertain information or for clarification, along with questions that prompted reflection or further unpicking of student statements or responses; at other times PE direct questions were asked to ascertain student feelings or understanding or to enhance the students planning of their work. There was a discernible difference in the approach of some PEs and their use of questioning and prompting, as the following examples indicate.

For example, PE1(Dyad 1) used many open and probing questions to explore and prompt student thinking and hypothesising and to maintain a focus on the service user/child, both in relation to considering the child's feelings but also the student's planning for intervention, as Extract H indicates:

Extract H: Dyad 1, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision (Context: LA Children and Families long term team; these are a range of questions from the first supervision)

*PE: [ 00:39:24] so, why do you think that maybe Grandma's house is no longer appropriate for them or needs to be reviewed? What makes you think that?*

*PE: [ 00:43:33] and how were the carers, how did you find the foster carers?*

*S: yeah, really nice, really nice and really supportive...um*

*PE [00:43:43] how do you think they were supportive?*

*PE: [00:12:10] ok, do you think there are certain things that, from the information you know at the moment, what do you think you want to get out of that meeting?*

*PE: [00:16:04] how do you think he feels about that?*

*PE: [00:17:27] yeah, but how do you think this might be, how do you think this could be an issue for child x?*

PE8 (Dyad 10) also was skilled in asking focused and probing questions, inviting extended student thought and analysis of her practice as Extract I indicates:

Extract I: Dyad 10, 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision (Context: adult care team and student is talking about a recent visit to a young woman with Learning difficulties, where she felt something had been 'off'. The extract contains a number of PE questions during the supervision session, prompted by the student's initial concerns)

*S: [00:57:18] so she's quite hard to gauge, but I don't know, there just seemed something had sort of been off with her.*

*PE: Okay*

*S: because I said, have you enjoyed your morning, and with that, she shutdown. [00:57:48] I sort of walked away from it feeling like really horrible, Like I made her feel horrible.*

*PE: [00:58:03] Yeah, you know you were saying you were you discussing, you were trying to kind of talk about generalities and some other bits, then you kind of approached the respite question, as you as you were leading up to that, was it a bit like, you know, that this isn't right but this is why I'm here , or was it*

*S: No, I thought she's gonna be all right with it. I honestly did, because it's not something we've talked about properly before, but I've commented on it.*

*PE: [00:58:18] had Mum done any seed planting or ...did she look surprised or PE: [00:58:48] What do you think might have been behind the reaction, you know, what might have been her thoughts?*

*PE: [00:59:33] You told me how you felt which was like, rubbish. I have stepped in the poo and what you were trying to accomplish was a conversation*

*S: but it completely changed. My whole aim was to just end it on a okay note*

*PE: and why did you want to end it on an okay note?*

*PE: [01:00:33] What do you reckon about how she might perceive your role or your power? You know, what she can expect?*

*PE: [01:01:19] So, how do you think as a social worker, what does she make of our role? What does she expect, do we know?*

*PE: [01:01:49] So does she know that you don't have the power to pick her up and take her somewhere against her will, it's what I would think*

*S: [01:02:04] I think so, I don't know, that is something I can try and explore,*

PE2 (Dyad 2) in contrast, used many closed and 'clarification purpose' questions, 'what and when' questions as indicated in Extract J:

Extract J: Dyad 2, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision (Context: LA Children and Family area team)

*PE: [00:05:04] So, when is unborn baby due?*

*S: 24th Feb*

*PE: [00:05:33] so, ok, hit me then, what is your plan again?*

*PE: [00:05:40] so we have the meeting today*

*S: yep*

*PE: have school considered a referral to CAMHS?*

*S: [00:23:01] no, I haven't asked them, I don't know*

*PE: because what support is he getting in school?*

*S: he is getting weekly counselling and spends time with that teacher once or twice a week*

*PE: right okay. PE: [00:28:23] why? have they said why?*

My written memo after transcribing this supervision session noted the PE focus on administrative, accountability and oversight issues and the number of directives around student tasks. Interestingly, during this supervision there were also a number of PE directives around what the student should *not* be doing and which were the remit of other agencies ('*you leave that to X colleague....; insist x worker remains....; they can do that....; you are not the person to lead on that sort of work*'). The PE focus on process; asking questions of clarification for accountability purposes and the promotion of concrete actions, also seems to have had an effect on the range of hypothesising and exploratory discussion that took place within supervision, and this will be considered later in this chapter and in the analysis of the overall findings from the audio recorded supervision sessions, Chapter 8.

PE6 (Dyads 6 and 7) asked a number of direct 'process type' questions that were not exploratory but were more related to what the student had done and / or procedural issues and an update on the students work with the service user group - see Extract K:

Extract K: Dyad 6, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision (Context: voluntary sector agency working with young people with mental health issues)

*PE: [00:26:34] Okay and how old is SU1?*

*S: she is 16*

*PE: and have you seen her?*

*S: yes, the day I was due to see her for her initial assessment I went home, so (COLLEAGUE) did it and then I picked it back from colleague and carried on with the initial assessment. She is just struggling a bit; she has had an horrific time with bullying*

*PE: okay*

*S: and her dad kidnapped her and her sister*

*PE: oh dear*

*S: yes, and that has not gone down too well so she has PTSD from that*

*PE: right, has that been diagnosed?*

*S: no, but you can...*

*PE: she is showing symptoms?*

*S: Yes (PAUSE) she only has one friend who is her boyfriend, and I think it is trying to be more positive for her and make her see more positive outcomes for herself. She is very, very low and blames herself a lot*

*PE: okay, so quite isolated as well?*

*S: yes*

*PE: so, have you started the support sessions?*



*S: yes, she has had two support sessions. No, she has had one support session.*

*PE: so, she is attending reasonably well?*

*S: yes*

*PE: and is that here?*

*S; yes, her mum brings her*

*PE: so, who else have you got?*

*S: SU 2....(Student then continues to discuss another service user)*

It is worthwhile noting here that this was a supervision session that 'discussed' 18 young people and these 'process type' questions such as 'have you done...? Who referred? How many sessions has s/he attended?' was a feature of the whole supervision session. The student either responded with one-word answers or very brief 'headline' updates, there were 75 questioning occurrences from the PE and 89 student description or update of the case, both the highest across the entire data set of all supervision sessions. Questioning or prompting by the PE did not elicit or encourage any overt reflection or wider exploration with the student. I noted also that this was a pattern of interaction that had been 'set' or indicated in the first supervision session and that, across the three supervision sessions, very little extended exploration or theorising of the student's work was offered by the student or requested by the PE. I was struck by the pattern of expectation and accommodation that this indicated. There was also what I referred to in my memo after transcribing this supervision session as a 'curious absence of emotion' and complete absence of any reference to the 'emotional labour' (Winter et. al., 2019) present and involved in the student work and this will be considered later in this chapter and in the overall analysis of the findings, Chapter 8. Within Dyad 7 also, with the same PE6,

many PE questions and prompts were limited to 'process' and case work 'update' questions, with limited discussion or in-depth exploration.

In contrast, PE7 (Dyad 8) also asked direct questions but these spoke directly to student feelings and were also more attuned to the 'presence of emotions' for service users and within the work generally. See Extract L:

Extract L: Dyad 8, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision

*PE: [00:14:10] so, if that comes to allocation, what would make you feel okay about doing it and what would you be worrying about?*

*S: erm, I would feel okay that the mum was really interactive, she's fully, does seem, obviously, as a first assessment, like a really good, but erm, not that it wouldn't make me feel okay but I just definitely have to build a relationship with the young girl*

*PE: so how would you go about building a relationship? I know this is just thinking about it because until you meet her, we are only making assumptions.*

*S: erm, try and find out what she, her mum did let us know what she liked and things, what she is into, erm, so try and base it off that*

*PE: so, being really child focused to start with?*

*yeah*

*PE; developing that relationship*

*S: but, I'd be asking her what she wants because she seems quite like strong minded, she knows what she wants and she definitely does not want it at school and things like that, so*

*PE: mm*

*S: just following her lead really*

*PE: yeah, so she might, what would be her worries?*

PE8 (Dyad 10) also asked direct questions of the student during the 2<sup>nd</sup> supervision, but this PE did so sparingly (only 15 direct questions or clarification questions during this supervision) and also used them well to explore the student's emotional responses to a safeguarding referral, as Extract M indicates:

Extract M: Dyad 10, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision

*PE: [00:29:26] so how are you finding the stuff at Xplace, the safeguarding bits and bobs?*

*S: it's really interesting, really worrying (laugh)*

*PE: yeah, what are your views, what kinds of emotions is it eliciting?*

*S: I am really worried that they have dropped her and completely tried to cover it up, because I feel like they have dropped her*

*PE: mm, what do we do with that intuition in this job, do you know what I mean?*

*S: I don't know because I don't want to be biased when I am looking at all this stuff*

*PE: mm*

*S: but at the same time, I don't want to be like naive*

*PE: yeah, what do you think, I don't know if you have done much about this in uni, stuff like about instinct, about bad feelings, do you know what I mean, where does that sit in our job role, how do we use those feelings?*

*S: I think it is really important to acknowledge them and not ignore them but at the same time I don't think you can rely on them completely, because it is quite easy to get, no, that is the wrong*

*wording, but if you meet someone , anyone can get a bad feeling about them , a bad vibe and there might be a reason for that , but I don't know, she could actually be a really nice woman who is just like in a bit of a mess because she has taken on this care home*

*PE: yeah*

*S: with the odd dodgy staff, do you know what I mean? like, I think it is important to listen to it, but you can let it lead your opinion*

*PE: mm*

*S: and navigate all your work because you don't like some one*

*PE: yeah, you were saying, you said like it is important to acknowledge it , to notice that you have that bad feeling, what do you do once you have noticed it, what do you think?*

*S: I think it is like a working hypothesis, it is definitely something you should acknowledge and still be aware of while you are doing everything, but you can't let it be the only hypothesis*

*PE: yeah*

*S: does that make sense?*

*PE: so, you kind of have several running hypotheses at the same time?*

This example also indicates a helpful use of questioning to encourage curiosity and refers to the role of intuition and hypothesising in social work practice. Such skilled questioning to encourage exploration and prompt further discussion was a feature of this supervision session. Other questions used by PE 8 during this supervision session included – ‘*can you think of some things you have already encountered that we could offer?*’; ‘*how are you feeling about that?*’; ‘*what kinds of emotions is it eliciting?*’ ‘*how do you*

*think we have done, in relation to making safeguarding personal?'; 'how has that sat with this process?'*

Student activity, in terms of providing an update on case work or describing the work undertaken with service users was also a feature of all supervision sessions. Sometimes, this was a very descriptive and / or brief update of events or case work, in response to PE questions, or proffered by the student indicating an expected pattern within supervision. Often, student responses were not explored or unpicked fully, as indicated in some of the extracts previously. Within Dyads 3, 6 and 7 this pattern was particularly indicated, and within every supervision, student activity in this category was higher than that of the following category (expressing opinion, hypothesising/ providing analysis of practice). However, in other supervision sessions and Dyads, there was a reversal of this pattern and, particularly for student activity, expressing opinion, hypothesising, and providing an analysis of practice was a key feature of the sessions, as indicated next.

**7.2.2 PE activity** - PE expressing opinion or hypothesising; and  
**Student activity** – Expressing opinion/hypothesising/providing analysis of practice

The coded activity of expressing opinion or hypothesising for both PE and student activity, with the addition of 'providing analysis of practice' in Student activity, was included in the Coding Frame as an indication of the importance of these skills and abilities for social work practice (Munro, 2011a; Munro, 2011b; DoH, 2015; DfE, 2018). This coded activity also offers differentiation from a descriptive update of case work and student work undertaken.

This activity was present in all supervision sessions, for both PE and student activities, and both spent time hypothesising and expressing opinion during supervision, but to different degrees within each Dyad. Thus, whilst some supervision sessions were relatively evenly 'matched' in terms of number counts for student and PE activity in this area (Dyads 4, 5 and 11), other supervision sessions and Dyads indicated higher PE activity in this area

(Dyad 3) or higher student activity in this area (Dyads 1, 2 and 10). It was noticeable that counts in this category were the lowest in Dyads 6 and 7 (with the same PE6) and particularly low within Dyad 6, but as has been discussed, supervision within these dyads focused heavily on PE direct questioning and student description of activity or case update in response or update of case activity proffered.

In most supervision sessions however, the activity of 'expressing opinion' or hypothesising, whether student or PE lead or initiated, resulted in discursive and expansive discussion between PE and student. Thus, dialogue and a distinct 'conversational' tone were key features of most supervision sessions (aspects of supervision also referenced within student interviews, to be discussed in Chapter 7). In some cases, the PE helped encourage and extend student thinking – see Extract N:

Extract N: Dyad 2, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision (Context: the placement is in a statutory child care team)

*PE: (00:13:43] but the key is mum and she needs that support. I mean, it is a difficult one; we are playing it by the cuff*

*S: I know*

*PE: I don't think there is anything, and this is going to sound dreadful, but proportionally, what is needed is an improvement in SU x and SU y relationship and their communication and we are not in a position to do that*

*S: well, no, because he is, he thinks everything is fine in their relationship, so why is he going to change; he is not, because he doesn't think it is necessary*

*PE: no, and he goes out womanising, he goes out drinking, alright, well, they are not crimes, I wouldn't hang around, but SU X is in a situation where she doesn't feel, she feels isolated, she doesn't know anyone else*

*S: she is dependent on him really*

Similarly, within Dyad 4, there was a clear conversational approach and dialogue present within all supervision sessions. The example that follows, Extract O, is part of a lengthy discussion between PE and student about a service user where the Local Authority is in the process of removing a child from her care. This discussion is interesting for a number of reasons, it speaks to conditions of 'uncertainty' and complexity within social work practice, particularly noted with children and families social work (Taylor and White, 2000; Munro, 2011a; Munro, 2011b; Munro, 2019; Fook, 2007). Within the discussion, emotions are referenced and present and both student and PE thinking appears to be extended within the discussion and the problematising of practice is not unidirectional.

Extract O: Dyad 4, 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision (Context: placement is a Leaving care service and the service user is a care leaver receiving support from the student; the service user has a 6-month-old child who the LA are seeking to remove from her care)

*S: [00:26:32] I spoke with SU and I have explained to her, I was trying to talk to her about future plans and what could be different, options for her, she doesn't really see the baby being removed from her as an option, she doesn't really understand that it is possible*

*PE: (sigh in background)*

*S: and I was trying to ask her what would happen if, but she was like, no, it is not going to happen*

*PE: when, right, has this conversation been had by the social worker?*

*S: well, yeah, she had the conversation that there is a possibility of the child being removed, I am not sure if it was done by the social worker, but the x team said that because she has an advocate now and a solicitor, they did explain it to her and this conversation took place*

*PE: (sigh) It is a really tough one this for us to be involved in, because the whole thing about child protection and the child's needs are paramount, there is no question about that whatsoever, but in terms of us being able to support this young woman once the inevitable has happened, it is like you have said, she is probably not going to want a service from us and I probably can't blame her really*

*S: no*

*PE: and also, the whole process of, she is almost being given a message of... she has almost been given a false sense of security, hasn't she?*

*S: well, I don't really know what was told to her, but she thinks that the court and all the proceedings, it is about baby and her being allowed to go back to her family?*

*PE: which is not going to happen*

*S: it is out of the question*

*PE: impossible, yeah*

*S: and it is about her being able to keep the baby and*

*PE: (sigh)*

*S: but they did, they did explain it to her*

*PE: it is about whether she has capacity to understand*

*S: to understand it, and if she wants to accept it?*

*PE: and whether her advocate has actually advised her to undertake a capacity assessment, whichever way, it is not going to make a difference to the outcome, is it?*

*S: no*



*PE: erm, it is very sad really from her point of view*

*S: and I don't know if it is because she doesn't want to understand it, or if she doesn't really understand*

In another supervision session, and within a Dyad (Dyad 5) where the discursive and conversational nature of supervision was established and where both student and PE hypothesising were matched (in counts), the student was readily hypothesising without prompting (as well as probing the PE further, in an interesting reversal of role?). See Extract P:

Extract P: Dyad 5, 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision (Context: PE giving update on new service user to be allocated to the student; the service user's main support is his grandmother ('*grandma*') and this is the 'her' and 'she' referred to in the PEs initial comments; the placement is in a hospital mental health setting)

*PE: [00:15:23] so he has his own flat, housing benefit goes straight to the Housing Association, so that is fine, that is protected, that's safe. I have told her she needs to update DWP and housing benefit that he is in hospital, and he has PIP as well, but basically, she gives him the money and he just spends it on recklessness and drugs (LAUGH). Yes, I know it's about capacity, isn't it?*

*S: yeah, I wonder if grandma feels she can't say no to give it to him?*

*PE: mm*

*S: and she is in a bit of a situation that she can't manage?*

*PE: mm*

*S: so maybe it might be worth speaking to grandma, to see about the local authority taking on that responsibility,*

*PE: yeah*

*S: if she is struggling. She might not be, it might be a choice to give it him, but it might not be*

*PE: yes*

*S: she might struggle to say no*

*PE: yeah, because it is not a good situation absolutely, I mean that is a good option isn't it, practical option*

*S: yes, if that extra pressure on her as well, and is the extra argument that you don't need to have and she could be a grandmother to him and not someone that restricts everything that he does through money*

*PE: absolutely, yes*

*S: and maybe give that responsibility over to somebody else*

*PE: yeah, and it's very powerful, isn't it, to be able to control somebody's money?*

*S: yeah, yeah, and it is not a position I would want to be in with a loved one*

*PE: no, no*

*S: so, maybe she has thought she has to say yes*

*PE: Yes, there is no other option, a good point*

*S: and maybe she doesn't know there is somebody else who could do it for her*

*PE: I think grandmother, from my brief conversation, seems a supportive and appropriate and everything, she is coming today*

*S: so, she has been identified as*

*PE: yeah*

*S: and has she, has anyone offered her any carers assessment? Has she had all that done?*

*PE: no, no. That is something to speak to the local authority about as well...*

Further, this extract indicates the centrality of dialogue and discussion as a prelude to PE (or student) direction or guidance. This was also a feature of supervision discussions within Dyad 4, where a similar pattern emerged, and the student would make suggestions and was confidently self-directing and suggesting her interventions.

A related but different example of the importance of opportunities for 'expressing opinion'; broader exploratory discussion and hypothesising, comes from Student StB (Dyad 2) during the 1<sup>st</sup> supervision session. As suggested previously (see Extract J), the PE in this dyad asked many closed, clarifying questions during this 1<sup>st</sup> supervision. In the example that follows (Extract Q), after a 5-minute discussion regarding a particular family and an unborn child, the PE asks the student '*what is your plan again?*' A further 3 minutes is then spent talking about the upcoming planning meeting (the PE asking a number of closed questions) before the PE asks the student a further closed question, about a different issue relating to the same family ('*accessing short breaks*'). This is where the following extract starts. The student chooses not to answer the PE's question about short breaks, and it is clear that the student has questions and has not finished or met a need for discussing the planning meeting or the issues raised more generally about work with the family. Through the student's dogged persistence, there is then a further 11-minute discussion between PE and student, some of which is included in the following extract:

Extract Q: Dyad 2, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision (Context: the placement is a statutory childcare team)

*PE: [00:08:30] yeah, because we have the baby coming, so we want to review the plan just before the baby comes, so are you still looking at accessing short breaks?*

*S: but obviously, I don't want to be talking about that if dad is there*  
(NOTE HERE, THE STUDENT IS REFERRING BACK TO THE PLANNING MEETING PREVIOUSLY DISCUSSED)

*PE: no, and that is fine, that is alright*

*S: so if dad isn't there and I*

*PE: go on*

*S: [and I want this DASH \* done and xcolleague or xcolleague are prepared to do the DASH, and xcolleague has said she is prepared to do it*

*PE: Ok*

*S: erm, um, if it... , do you think it would reach threshold? for...no?*

*PE: no, they might be heard at MARAC \*\*, I don't think, I don't think...*

*S: but would I still be able to get an IDVA\*\*\* or not?*

*PE: I don't know, I don't know, we haven't got, we don't have a mum here who wants to leave or anything like that*

*S: yeah*

*PE: you know she has quite a*

*S: well, a DASH can be done anyway, can't it?*

*PE: [00:11:21] and I completely agree with you, if we dragged this back to theory, you are looking at, and the whole thing we have going on here about restorative practice alright, it is drawn out of relationships, relationships are key, okay, relationships are what safeguard people and children essentially, so a good relationship with family, with children will keep them safe. So, your focus is very much on the welfare of the children*

S: Mm

PE: and I think, Xchild, does need a, there is something going on for Xchild, and Ychild, from what you have said

S: he is very guarded

PE: very guarded, I think he is very.... I think he has had a lot previously with his birth father and things like that

S: Yeah

PE: and that, even, you know, she is scared, scared, so I think your role has to be about building those relationships with the children and supporting them and assessing what they are...

(\*DASH refers to a Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence risk assessment tool, see DASH(2009) ; \*\*MARAC refers to a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference;\*\*\* IDVA refers to an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate)

Here, it is the student who has successfully drawn the PE back to hypothesising, some 'theorising' and analysis in relation to the 'welfare of the children' (although the student questions about the DASH and IDVA remain unanswered).

Within all the previous extracts, the nature of the relationship between PE and student is glimpsed. Therefore, PE5 in Extract P is comfortable giving the 'lead' to the student, acknowledging the student's thoughtful and wide-ranging thinking about potential issues that need to be addressed. Similarly, PE2 (Extract Q) and PE4 (Extract O) acknowledge uncertainty, not knowing and the presence and impact of emotions (Munro, 2011). This will be discussed further in Chapter 9, Student Interviews.

7.2.3 **PE activity** - Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight) ; and **Student activity** - Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes

PEs offered advice, guidance, direction or clarification of procedures in each of the 30 supervision sessions; and students sought clarification or advice on processes or procedures in 21 of the 30 sessions. However, what is clear from the difference in occurrence counts across the coded supervision sessions (see Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads) is that PEs often gave advice and guidance unprompted by the student, rather than in response to students. With the exception of one supervision session (Dyad 8, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision where there are 2 occurrences of the student seeking guidance and 2 of the PE offering guidance), within each Dyad and in each coded supervision, there are higher occurrences of PE activity within this category than the student seeking clarification or advice on processes, by significant margins. For example, Dyad 11, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision, there are 32 occurrences of PE giving guidance and 5 occurrences of student seeking clarification or advice on procedures; Dyad 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision there are 28 occurrences of PE giving guidance and 7 occurrences of student seeking guidance or advice on procedure.

However, given that the activities within the PE category are wider than that of the student activity category and includes ‘offering advice’, the increased occurrences of PE activity in relation to this coded activity is perhaps not surprising. In addition, the PE offering of guidance and advice differed in nature and content. For example, sometimes PE guidance was specifically procedurally lead and spoke to the particular administrative and managerial oversight function of the PE role. Thus, PE1 gave PE specific instructions to the student about the need to ‘*update the chronology...send in the matching meeting minutes to the panel*’ (Dyad 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision) and PE6 (Dyad 6) spent much of the 3<sup>rd</sup> supervision on administrative issues regarding case closure; handover and the agency checklist and

paperwork to be completed. However, at other times guidance and PE advice was woven into discussion of generalised and presenting issues, and thus was proffered more as a teaching and learning aid for the student, than direct 'advice' on professional actions for managerial oversight purposes, as indicated in Extract R:

Extract R: Dyad 11, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision (Context: student is due to chair an adult safeguarding meeting and asks about the structure of the meeting and agenda)

*S: [00:18:21] what would you suggest?*

*PE: non-confrontational*

*S: to start with maybe get them to voice their, what they think, get her to voice what she thinks, and then discuss how it went*

*PE: you could share what we have got and what we have found so far, you know, that we have had 2 people see the same thing but interpreted differently*

*S: Yep*

*PE: and we need to boil it down to what did happen, and help people see that they need to say what they saw, rather than what they believe to have happened. erm*

*S: because they have put a slant on it, that makes it look like something else*

*PE: Mm, plus suggestions that district nurses have made about how the risk could be minimised have been seen as a threat by the provider, erm*

*S: it has been given as a threat, though*

*PE: yeah*

Similarly, PE5 (Dyad 5) and PE7 (Dyads 8 and 9), used opportunities within supervision sessions to give advice and direction that was not solely focused on clarification of procedures or professional actions to be completed. In these instances, the PEs spoke about case work issues; underlying rationale for pieces of work or assessments the student(s) were completing, and thus the advice and direction offered had a greater pedagogic focus and intent. The pedagogic focus of student supervision will be analysed and discussed in detail in the analysis chapter, Chapter 6.

With such examples in mind, it is clear that the PE coding category (offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)) was too broad and conflated too many elements. Not only did this category thus lack the refinement to capture the range and intent of PE 'advice, guidance, and direction', it is complicated further by the additional element 'clarification of procedures (management oversight)'. I questioned my own constructs in conflating these elements and wonder if I expected student supervision would replicate the managerially dominated 'rule-and process-driven practice' (Munro, 2011b, p.75) supervision model noted within child and family practitioner supervision with its focus on 'institutionally accountable actions' (Wilkins et. al., 2017, p.944).

Moreover, the underpinning conceptualisation of the category 'advice, guidance and direction' and how this category is differentiated from the 'direct teaching' analytical category on the Coding Frame, also poses questions, and did so as I was coding the supervision sessions. Thus, after coding a particular exchange that took place during Dyad 9, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision, I noted my question "direct teaching or guidance?" on the coding sheet. The PE in this exchange was probing the student about her knowledge about a care plan for an adult service user living in a care home and her confidence in ensuring adequate care, or challenging inadequate care, for the service user. As can be seen in the following extract, Extract S, the PE is both prompting and suggesting actions to the student, underpinned by pedagogical intent, rather than giving direct advice. The student is



responding and discussing her plans and the PE here is both garnering and helping to extend the student's understanding:

Extract S: Dyad 9, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision (Context: student is providing advocacy for an older male, living in a care home. The placement is in a voluntary sector agency)

*PE: [00:39:13] So, I guess there is, you then have to assess his ability to ask, and if he hasn't got that ability, how can the situation be improved for him? And that might be you going back to the staff and saying can I have a look at his care plan again?*

*S: yeah, actually that is the other thing, having access to the care plan, you can't see his service user records in the care home, you can ask them but they are not obliged for you to see them, but as an advocate, I would be allowed, I could see all the records and everything?*

*PE: but I guess that you can be raising the questions, can't you?*

*S: yeah*

*PE: and presumably, if you have concerns you can raise them with the social worker?*

*S: yeah, I could do and make it as a care plan...but I was told that that is because that is all you have access to*

*PE: yeah, but I am presuming, and this is where you will know more than me, that if you have concerns about the level of service then there is some way you can raise those concerns?*

*S: yeah, because I have got, on the form, the person who did the assessment on him, the social worker, so*

*PE: so, it is about you, and again, this is about your skill isn't it... the staff might be really friendly, so how easy then is it for you to question the level of care that they are giving? You just have to get in there, like his nails were long, so would you know how often does he gets his nails done and who gets them done?*

*S: mm, so there was staff, a male nurse who said I will do them, but they are quite long, so I don't know*

*PE: so, I guess your task is to check that those things are being addressed over the longer term, isn't it?*

*S: yeah, because I raised it and he said I will get them done today and I said, before that, how often does he get them done and they said every 2 weeks, but if you have a look at the nails they have not been, so then I asked has he been refusing or anything, but they didn't say anything. But I can easily call later to ask that, are you having problem with your nails, are you refusing*

*PE: mm*

*S: and he might say no, it could be anything really, but if a staff male is doing the nails, they must have been part of the care plan...*

My questioning of the both the data and the categories (during and after coding) does exemplify Altheide and Schneider's assertion that the "investigator is continually central in ECA" (Altheide and Schneider, 2017, p.5). Thus, within ECA, numerical data and 'counts' does not 'speak for itself' and I have become aware of similar challenges and questioning that arise with other categories, that I will discuss as they arise in this chapter.

#### **7.2.4 PE activity – Feedback**

Whilst this activity was noted and coded in 18 of the 30 recorded supervision sessions, in the majority (12 of the 18), occurrence counts in each supervision session were below 5 counts. As has been noted in topic coverage (Chapter 6), both generalised and specific feedback on student progress or practice was limited – mainly under 2 minutes or less in length. This feedback included PE comments and feedback on particular pieces of work the student had undertaken, or PE comments about ongoing work with service users. The more detailed analytical coding here, indicating that frequency 'counts' occurred in 18 of the 30 recorded sessions, suggest that such 'feedback' and 'counts' were thus often single comments, scattered

within these supervision sessions, rather than sustained or significant periods of feedback.

There were a few exceptions to this pattern. For example, as noted in Chapter 6, there were two Dyads, (Dyads 8 and 9) where more detailed and sustained feedback did take place. Those Dyads (Dyads 8 and 9) where time spent on feedback (as topic area) were the lengthiest also had a (not surprisingly) high number of corresponding occurrences in the PE activity category of feedback being discussed here. Thus, code duplication is indicated and could question of the legitimacy and helpfulness of the analytical coding category of this PE activity here. Interestingly, the PE noted for both offering feedback in each supervision session and with the highest number of occurrences in each supervision session (1<sup>st</sup> Supervision, 20 occurrences; 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision, 9 occurrences and 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision, 23 occurrences) was PE3. This is a PE whose occurrences under PE activity – Expression / use of support (to follow) were also high.

The low number of occurrences; the limited time spent on feedback and the scope and nature of feedback within supervision, indicated within this analytical coding category further elucidates a similar finding within topic coverage and as discussed in Chapter 6. These findings present challenges to the place that PE feedback activity is expected to hold within student supervision. Allied to notions of student developmental learning (Bogo, 2015; Kourgiantakis et.al., 2019), the giving of constructive feedback is an essential element of the PE role. It is expected that an almost continuous feedback loop should infuse supervision, the PE offering generalised feedback on student progress and activity, punctuated at particular points for detailed feedback on direct observations, at placement interim or final assessment stages or discussing or giving feedback on pieces of student portfolio or academic work. The low counts of feedback; the limitations of time spent and the truncated scope of feedback, even allowing for code overlap, are significant and the place of feedback will be discussed and analysed in Chapter 8.

### 7.2.5 PE Activity - Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)

PE expression of support, comprising either emotional or intellectual reinforcement or support for student work or progress, was present in 16 supervision sessions, across 10 of the 11 Dyads, and was indicated in many ways. Sometimes this expression of support was offered in relation to general student progress – for example, PE4 (1<sup>st</sup> Supervision) *‘from my point of view everything is going absolutely fine, I am really happy with the way you have obviously settled into the team’*. At other times, PEs expressed their positive support for particular pieces of student work such as getting a meeting organised or for maintaining persistence when working with a young person, parent or a fellow professional. In a couple of instances, PE expression and use of support was offered in relation to a more generalised attitude or approach taken by the student, either in response to a particular issue raised during the course of their work with service users or their approach to their learning and development. For example, during a discussion and reflection on a student ‘mistake’, PE1 (Dyad 1, 3<sup>rd</sup> supervision) acknowledges that the student had not done the *‘right thing’* and thus does not minimise the impact of the mistake on the service user but offers support for the student’s understanding and learning from the incident.

PE5 offers acknowledgement and praise for the student’s approach to their learning and development:

*Plus, you are much more developed this year aren't you?...and the thing is you are really motivated because if you don't understand something, like say guardianship, you went off and you read about that didn't you, you read the code of practice, looked at it , so you are taking charge of your own development as well. (PE5, Dyad 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision)*

By far the most consistent in the expression and use of support was that offered by PE3 within Dyad 3 (18 occurrences in the 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision and 28 occurrences in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision). This PE was exceptionally and relentlessly encouraging in all the interactions with the student and

supervision sessions were littered with positive examples and specific reinforcement of the students work. The following includes a number of comments made by the PE within the 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision session:

*You had a really, really positive mid-way review yesterday, really positive direct observation and excellent feedback... [00:01:21] I noticed in the team yesterday, that was picked up by one of our supervisors and other people in the team about how well you have done, so you need to give yourself a big pat on the back, well done... [01:15:23] and well done on that because you challenged that didn't you? [01:15:48] So, you have advocated really well on her behalf, I am really pleased with the outcome of that. [01:15:52]. (PE3, Dyad 3, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision)*

**7.2.6 PE activity** - Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions; and  
**Student activity** - Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation)

PE elicitation of feelings or emotions was coded in 15 of the 30 supervision sessions and student talk about feelings, either unprompted or in response to PE elicitation was a feature of 17 of the 30 recorded sessions. However, whilst 'emotion talk' (Dore, 2019; Ingram, 2013) was present, this was limited and, as indicated in Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads, occurrence counts were low for both student and PE activity in this area. Only within one dyad, Dyad 3, were occurrences noted for both student and PE in each supervision session. This suggests reciprocity within this supervisory relationship and indicates the necessity of both 'push' and 'pull', 'permission' and 'acceptance' of the place of emotion talk within supervision.

Some PE references to feelings took place at the beginning of supervision sessions during a routine 'check in': PE6: '*coming to your mid-point, how is that feeling?*'; PE7: '*how do you feel about that...you are looking a bit worried about it?*'). As has been noted, one PE (PE7) was particularly comfortable in asking direct questions about student feelings and anxieties, as indicated previously in Extract L: Dyad 8, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision ('*so, if that comes to allocation, what would make you feel okay about doing it and what would you be worrying about?*'). However, overall, the findings indicate that PE direct

reference to emotions or elicitation of feelings were relatively fleeting, not sustained or present in every supervision session. Particular instances where the emotional content of the student's work was acknowledged were rare (and in one case quite distressingly absent) and often, fuller discussion or exploration was stunted. To illustrate, Extract T below, from Dyad 7, gives two examples from the same supervision session (time stamps indicate the beginning of the second example). In this extract, in the first instance, the PE response to student feelings about working with a particular service user (Student – *'it's just a struggle'*) was to immediately offer a solution (PE – *'staying with it and see how it goes'*). The student reaction to this is to move on to report on her work with another service user and an opportunity for further discussion was lost. Later within the same supervision session, there were (implicit) student feelings about her capabilities or managing risk (Student – *'I don't think I can do this'*) that were not used as levers to explore or discuss the students feeling of competency or inadequacy further.

Extract T: Dyad 7, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision (Context: student has regular sessions with service user; placement is in a voluntary agency offering support for young people with mental health issues)

*S: [00:22:39] but it's just a struggle sometimes during sessions*

*PE: hm, hm ,so maybe we're finding it as workers, what is it you're getting from the sessions, he's not able to identify it but obviously there is something to say he's coming , so its staying with it and see how it goes, but yeah, I think for him, there needs to be a constant reminder that you are finishing ,the work will come to an end, how does he want to use the remainder of the session and he might say, I don't' know but I guess that is something you will have to work with?*

*S: yeah, the next one is SUx. She's cancelled 3 appointments...*

*PE: [01:09:37] right, so did you self-allocate or with Xstaff member?*

*S: Went through them and there was one that was a severe case and I thought, I don' t think I can do this*

*PE: (laughs) ok*

*S: so colleague X took it, I felt that the person needed more support than I am experienced for*

*PE: right, was it intrusive thoughts, hearing voices?*

*S: sexually abused by her dad so I thought maybe someone more experienced could support her better, so yeah, I have self-allocated.*

*PE: great, so got enough work, you feel it is manageable?*

*S: yeah, I think it is alright.*

Within one Dyad in particular (Dyad 6) the absence of discussion in relation to the emotional content of the work the student was involved in and the potential impact on the student, feels chillingly remiss. This is the same supervision session (see Extract K previously) where I have previously referred to as indicating a 'curious absence of emotion'. Extract U below is a later extract from this supervision session:

Extract U: Dyad 6, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision (Context: student is giving an update on a young person she has recently been allocated)

*S: [00:27:59] Erm, this one was a self-referral for a guy who is 24, erm... his self-harming is impulsive, he likes to cut and burn himself, he's had suicidal thoughts which he calls dead thoughts and he wants to cut his throat with a blade, so I want to find out more about his suicidal talk, and so another risk assessment to start this one off as well*

*PE: yeah, so there was a crisis management plan, risk assessment done at the initial meeting stage?*

*S: yeah.*

*PE: so review those and do another one, just to ensure when they meet in the session they have an idea of what they would like to do, if things get difficult in between sessions...*

*S: yeah, erm and that's really, he's got a plan to end his life and he wants to cut his throat but he describes it as a small plan, so his low mood and depression is very low so*

*PE: right, right (silence)*

*S: erm, young woman is 16*

*PE: mm*

*S: mood swings, punches walls, overdoes on paracetamol, which made her ill. It was impulsive, there's no suicide plans, she's got trust issues with mum, erm, yeah*

Here, the PE response is very organisational and ignores the emotional context and content of the student's update regarding the first service user, and the student moves on to give another 'update' on another service user.

In contrast to this however, other PEs (PE1, PE3, PE8, PE10) were confident in eliciting emotions or asking about feelings in supervision, even if this was not within each supervision session. In the examples and extracts that follow, Extract V and Extract W, the discussions have their roots in recent 'difficulties' experienced by the students, but the PEs were comfortable in introducing discussion of these with the student, showing empathy and allowing the student to voice their emotions and feelings.

Extract V: Dyad 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision (Context: student is preparing a permanence report for three siblings and dealing with a family contact issue (between uncle X and foster carers), alongside intervention (and some felt 'pressure') from the foster family's social worker)

*PE: [00:54:39] I know you have had a few difficult things over the past weeks. haven't you?*

*S: yeah (small laugh)*

*PE: different things and different difficult conversations and things, what do you think has been the most difficult thing that you had to deal with?*



*S: uncle X, definitely*

*PE: uncle X, go on*

*S: I don't know, it's not that I found it difficult, well, I did find it difficult, I did, I felt torn*

*PE: yeah*

*S: so, I was a bit torn, and I was like what do I do, but then, I don't know, I do feel like we made the best decision for the children and that is the main thing, I did feel like, one of the main things I did feel, was that it is really important that uncle X got his side of the story, got his views across as well*

*PE: and that is quite right*

*S: and he cancelled a couple of meetings, didn't he, so it was a bit, but I felt it was really important to get those views*

*PE: it was important because what I could see happening was people pushing you for a decision on this.*

Extract W: Dyad 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision (Context: student is working with a homeless 16-year-old where there are continuing disruptions and breakdowns in accommodation for him and the student and the team are struggling to find new accommodation)

*PE: [00:00:21] Ok lovely. So, we will start off with your wellbeing, how are things going?*

*S: yeah, okay (laugh)*

*PE: okay, I know you have had a very difficult week this week*

*S: yeah, it's been a bit mad*

*PE: yeah, what have you found most difficult?*

*S: I think it is knowing every day that it is going to crop up again, and that there is nothing that I can sort of*

*PE: in regards to blame?*

*S: blame (said at the same time) yeah, I just feel like there is no sort of, it doesn't even look like there is a bit that might work out, it is just looking like there is nothing we can do, and that is really, really frustrating, it's*

*PE: yeah, and I totally get that*

*S: but I am not the only one, there are so many on the team at the minute, isn't there, like this week especially has been a bit, a bit mad, so seeing everybody else kind of dealing with it as well, its*

*PE: yeah, I suppose that helps?*

*S: it does help in a way, but then it*

*PE: it doesn't take away that frustration, does it?*

*S: no, (laugh), no*

In other instances, students responded to PE elicitation of feelings or emotions and volunteered their emotional responses to practice. For example – StB (Dyad 2, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision) noted her feelings:

*[00:01:34] sometimes I feel like I don't know what I am doing  
[00:01:48] well obviously,, when you are working on cases like that first case, I feel like people are questioning what, you know, [00:02:04] Yeah, it does make you think, oh right, they are all thinking what the hell does she think she is doing? (StB, Dyad 2, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision)*

StA (Dyad 1, 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision) outlines her responses (initially prompted by the PE, but much of what follows in the extract below is unprompted) and indicates the emotional toil and practical toll of social work:

*[00:55:39] at the minute I've got quite a small caseload but I think once you get a bigger caseload , that could be a potential problem, that might drift, so I think it has made me think you have to be proactive, and be organised and make sure you keep on, [00:56:48] well for me, what has helped is keeping , writing a list of things I need to do and having a checklist of the day of things I need to do, [00:57:12] and I also think it is about switching off as well , having the ability to switch off , so I have set myself, when I get in the car, I have set myself, that's why I like parking a bit further down ,because it gives me, when I get in the car, I have to switch off. (StA, Dyad 1, 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision)*

Further, sometimes the emotional impact of the student's work was implicitly suggested within student responses during discussion of case work, as StC suggests when talking about her work with a homeless 16-year-old:

*[00:07:07] yeah, and this is something not really covered in uni as well, the child in need and homeless between 16 and 18, I think you usually think about child in need, as they are at home with their family and it is the parents, and the working with that, you don't think of it as homeless at 16. [00:07:25] it has been eye opening to see it happening [00:07:29] it is just not something that is publicised (StC, Dyad 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision)*

However, beyond the presence of 'emotion talk' directly related to student feelings and/ or prompted by the PE (and whether implicitly or explicitly referenced), within most dyads there was the acknowledgement, and often exploration, of the emotional states engendered in service users as a consequence of the issues in their lives. Elements of preceding extracts indicate this – for example, Extracts N, O, P and T – where service user situations and the emotional toil and impact on their lives are discussed empathetically and with sustained focus and compassion. I noted this in my initial thoughts after coding a number of supervision sessions (such as Dyads 1, 3, 4 and 5). Thus, after coding all the supervision sessions for Dyad 1, I noted: "PE relentless focus on the children/ their needs, thoughts feelings, direct questions and gently prodding for enhanced student focus on this; so by last supervision this had clearly impacted on the student as her focus was clearly on the child and child's perspective". With Dyad 3, after

coding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision session, I noted “Student also reflecting on practice and feelings (e.g., PE eliciting feeling and student responding, PE encouraging the emotional space; PE relationship and PE setting the environment?”. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

**7.2.7 PE activity** – Elicitation/reference to reflection - thoughts, feelings and values; and **Student activity** - Reflection – discussing practice, thoughts, feelings and values

PE activity in this area was present in 14 of the 30 coded supervision sessions. Occurrences were low and not present consistently in each supervision session. So, in three Dyads (Dyads 2, 4 and 9) this activity was not coded at all, and four Dyads (Dyads 3, 6, 7, and 11) only coding this activity in one supervision session each. However, there was one exception to these low occurrences, and this was Dyad 10. Within each of the supervision sessions for this Dyad, occurrence counts for both PE and student were high, and in particular, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision, where the students completed ‘critical reflection’ was discussed in detail. The particular focus on critical reflection enabled a wide-ranging discussion, about the Care Act and societal view of older people, and the PE specifically elicited and referenced reflection and values. The presence of such “value – talk” (Timms, 1989, p.12) is indicated in extracts taken from a discussion that took place during this supervision - see Extract X below:

Extract X : Dyad 10, 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision (Context: placement is within a statutory older persons team)

*PE: [00:15:57] does that tell us something about how we value older people?*

*S: I think so and because the Care Act, some of that act, when for I've read it, like my interpretation, it is like strengths-based things underlying it. So, it talks about like what someone can offer their Community even though they might be disabled or you might have dementia. But I don't know if that really happens in practice ... So even though say, that policy makers may have acknowledged this, in that didn't happen and try to include some of its values in the Care Act, in practice it doesn't work.*

*PE: [00:16:42] Yeah, and like you say that might be about social structure....and also then about values may be about older people.?*

*S: Yeah and people's view of older people....and even our media, like everything's aimed at younger people.*

*PE: It's that everything is set up for the younger generation, even though statistically there are more older people than there are other social groups.... just thinking about this job. Have you seen anything? About kind of older age, inequalities or anything like access to services, or access to health provision, or is there anything that's kind of jumped out at you as being different? .... I was thinking, reflecting the other day and I don't know if this is right or not. But I was talking to X Colleague, and she was describing her experience of going into hospital , because she's had this brain bleed and how she'd been inundated with specialists and she now has a specialist nurse that phones her once a week and she's got quite an intense amount of service and people were very responsive , and I thought, I don't know, in my experience if that's what's happened when older people have had the same...Like if think about SUx, , I know that she had dementia and that's made the whole thing much more complicated. But if a younger person had had that experience. I don't know that we would be so dismissive, that it was all normal practice. As in, she's in hospital and then she's passed away and everybody's like well she would have passed away, Anyway, she was old, there's like a little bit of undertone of that attitude knocking around there.*

Some PEs did elicit or make reference to reflection and examples of this have been indicated within previous extracts. For example, Dyad 8, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision, PE7 directly asks the student 'you've reflected on...is that anxiety?'. PE8 also asks about student feelings in relation to a safeguarding referral that had been received – 'how did you find sort of having to listen to X's perspective when, because you knew a lot of the background and all the other concerns that we had, did it, did you feel like you were biting your tongue or thinking, that is not...' (Dyad 10, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision). Further, there were a few instances where PEs acknowledged or referred to student 'reflection' and reflective capabilities, and that would therefore suggest that 'reflection' was a feature of student practice, whether it was coded in supervision sessions or was evidenced via other medium. For example, PE5 referred to 'log, PCF, reflective practice.... we do a lot of reflective practice in discussing things, don't we?'(Dyad 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision), and referenced the

student's reflective capabilities within supervision sessions. PE7 also spent some time referring to and discussing the reflective log that the student had submitted to her previously – for example, '*you say you were using skills.... if you can actually specify what they were?...I like this, your awareness that despite the fact that this appears to be a big supportive family , that she felt alone*'. (Dyad 8, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision).

For students, this coded Student activity was present in 17 of the 30 coded supervision sessions, and although present amongst each Dyad, it was not always present consistently in each supervision session. Thus, this Student activity was coded in each supervision session only within Dyad 10 and in two of the three supervision for Dyads 3, 5 and 7 and 8.

There were examples of students reflecting on their learning and the impact of particular experiences on placement for them, and these were coded as 'reflection' under this category. Thus, StE comments on her experiences of attending a meeting where people were using sign language, with interpreters' present, and she is non- signing:

*I just felt this is how people must feel in the hearing world. In the break, because the interpreters don't work in the break, everyone was signing and I was the only hearing and non-signing person in the room, and obviously everyone forgot, there was one hearing person in the room and it is not her job to make sure, and I thought I can't even get involved because I didn't know what was going on, and I thought now I know how it feels (StE, Dyad 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision )*

Similarly, StH reflects upon her learning from carrying out some direct work with a young child who disclosed a safeguarding issue and the student had to instigate the agency safeguarding procedures. The placement is in a voluntary agency:

*It literally has been the biggest, one of the biggest learning curves so far in my placement... when it comes to this, it just felt so much more different and I just thought, it is just like a different type of*

*responsibility on you isn't it really? It is what do I have to do, and if I don't, what are the consequences?* (StH, Dyad 7, 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision)

However, since coding the transcribed supervision sessions, I now question the usefulness of this as a coded activity, both as a separate coded activity of 'reflection' but also because code overlap is clearly indicated in the descriptor feature of 'thoughts, feelings and values'. For example, there is some code overlap with the previously discussed category (**PE activity** - Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions; and **Student activity** - Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation) as reference to 'feelings' is duplicated, and how and where 'feelings' and 'emotions' are differentiated is not clear. I also now question the inclusion of 'values' as part of the descriptor sentence, as it is not explained and therefore is almost meaningless in this context. I meant 'social work values', (framing my stance at the time within the values and underpinning ethical principles offered by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) (2014) Code of Ethics), and thus including an understanding of the principles of anti oppressive and anti discriminatory practice, power issues and equality and diversity, but this is not clear in the coding category. The BASW definition of 'social work values' refers to "a range of beliefs about what is regarded as worthy or valuable in a social work context (general beliefs about the nature of the good society, general principles about how to achieve this through actions, and the desirable qualities or character traits of professional practitioners)" (BASW, 2014). Whilst *explicit* talk or reference to such values and understanding of equality or discrimination issues was really only a feature of supervision sessions and discussions within Dyad 10, and in particular the 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision (Extract X above), I suggest that *implicit* acknowledgement of such issues was a feature of some discussions within supervision and are indicated in previous extracts within this chapter.

In a similar vein, I also now query the usefulness of reflection as a separate coded category in itself and the "elusive concept" (Ruch, 2009a, p.23) of reflection and its contested meaning has become apparent. I suggest that findings and extracts relating to other coded activities indicate that students

were reflecting upon and discussing their practice, thoughts and feelings, particularly in some of the more discursive and wide-ranging discussions about case work. However, such 'reflections' or indications of student thinking or 'reflective practice' may have been coded under different categories, such as 'feelings, emotions' indicated above, or indeed under the category of 'expressing opinion or hypothesising' discussed earlier in this chapter. Thus, whilst only one supervision session (Dyad 10, 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision) utilised a formal reflective model (Kolb, 1984; 2015), it is clear that reflection on practice and learning and thinking about practice, including implicit values and emotional responses, was indeed a feature of student hypothesising and PE and student conversations during many of the recorded supervision sessions. Holland (2011) uses the term "critical thoughtfulness" (p.93) to incorporate notions of reflection about practice events, and this seems a more fitting description of some content and discussions within the supervision sessions.

In some cases, it was evident that there was a clear 'reflective stance' (Ruch, 2012, p.1326) within supervision, often co-facilitated by the PE and the student. For example, within Dyad 10, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision (see Extract M previously) there was a lengthy and very 'critically thoughtful' discussion about an adult safeguarding referral and a recent meeting the student had attended at a care home. This discussion included overt reflection on the student's part – on the nature of intuition, bias and reflexively managing her '*working hypothesis*' in order that she remained open to alternative hypotheses and explanations.

Overall, therefore, whilst there was little overt or formalised reflection within the coded supervision sessions, it can be argued that supervision was often used as a 'reflective space' (Ruch, 2009a). The nature of the reflection created within such a 'reflective space', whether at the level of technical, practical, process or critical reflective practice, (Ruch, 2009a) will be explored further in Chapter 8.



**7.2.8 PE activity** - Reference to theory / research; and **Student activity** - Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading

This analytic coding category refers to theory, research, and, for Student activity, the addition of reference to their own knowledge base or reading. The requirement to incorporate theory into considerations of practice has long been a feature of the PE role, identified in the PEPS (BASW, 2013) Domain B, and the expectation that the PE ‘teach the learner using contemporary social work models, methods and theories’ (p.7). Thus, whilst the use of these terms within this coding activity category are somewhat inelegant, both PEs and students participating in this study would have been familiar with, (and expected to use and refer to) ‘theory’ or ‘theories’ underpinning or impacting upon practice. The current PEPS (BASW, 2019) Domain B requires that a PE ‘teach and support the learning of relevant social work knowledge and research, and the integration of theory and research in practice’ (p.9).

Reference to theory or research as a PE activity was coded in 13 of the 30 coded supervision sessions. The Student activity included reference to theory, research and broader elements such as own knowledge base or reading undertaken, and this was coded as taking place in 7 of the supervision sessions. Both sets of coded activities were differentiated further into ‘limited’ reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research, or ‘explicit/ elaborated’ reference to theory/research. The limited amount of time spent, alongside the narrow focus and underdeveloped arc of discussion relating to theoretical considerations, has been discussed within Topic Coding, in Chapter 6. There it was noted that opportunities provided by student’s academic work, portfolio preparation or their CAPs to introduce and explore the student’s theoretical understanding were not taken, or were underexplored, and earlier Extracts A, C and E provide examples of this. Further, within three Dyads, (Dyads 6, 7 and 11) there was no reference to theory or research at all. Overall, where either PE or student activity was noted in this category, occurrences were low and were mainly limited to

oblique reference to theory or models, rather than involving explicit or elaborated discussions about related theory, with two exceptions discussed further below.

In relation to both Student and PE activity, one exception to this was activities within Dyad 4, where explicit and elaborated discussion of theory (and some research) took place in each of the 3 supervision sessions. This took place at the end of each supervision, the student had prechosen and prepared a theory or theoretical model to discuss and then the student introduced it. Periods of time within the supervision session were given to this theoretical discussion (8 minutes in the first Supervision; 15 minutes in the second Supervision and 14 minutes in the third Supervision session. Given the latter, the discussions in this Dyad under this category was coded in minutes, rather than occurrences. A previous extract, Extract B (Dyad 10, 1<sup>st</sup> Supervision) illustrates a section of supervision where a discussion of the student's CAP took place, but this discussion then widened into a discussion focused on the topic of assessment. The PE (PE8) introduced this as a planned topic for discussion and made a few specific and detailed references to theoretical approaches – such as naming and discussing Milner and O'Byrne's (2009) five steps of assessment and the 'exchange' model of assessment (Smale et al., 1993).

In relation to coding under these PE and Student categories, two interesting issues offer riders to the discussion so far, suggesting coding overlap, but also omission. Firstly, within the Student activity category, I included reference to 'own knowledge base or reading', as a further descriptor of this category. I included this in recognition that 'knowledge' incorporates formal and informal knowledge, including practitioner knowledge (Pawson et. al., 2003) and emotional and practice wisdom (Munro, 2008; 2011a; 2011b). Thus, formal knowledge - theory, models, policies or approaches to practice - are not the sole source of contributory knowledge to social work practice. Indeed, current considerations of 'evidence informed practice' (McLaughlin and Teater, 2017) reminds us of the contribution the social worker's

experience makes to knowledge formation, along with the importance of service user and carer knowledge. Given the students who contributed to this study were final year students, I assumed a level of experience and knowledge base (based on at least the first placement; their general teaching and academic study to date and some work/life experience) and that this may be indicated in their supervision discussions. This has only been indicated to a small degree, within elements of the topic and analytical coding so far, and student incorporation of learning, practice and emotional wisdom into their practice has been illustrated within some extracts. For example, StE (during the first supervision) acknowledges her reading around DoLS (Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards, Mental Capacity Act, 2005) and later, her learning from a training course attended (see Extract F) and in the same supervision session, PE5 later acknowledges the student's reading around guardianship. StC acknowledges her knowledge gaps regarding homeless 16/17-year-olds and StJ refers to articles and research she has read as preparation for her extended case study (Dyad 10, 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervision). There was also the lovely example of StE, in Extract P, where the student exhibits emotional and practice wisdom in her probing of the PE and the new referral. However, overall, there was very low-level student activity suggested by this descriptor and student reference to their prior knowledge or practice wisdom has been limited. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

Within this PE activity category and reference to theory/research, I believe there is some level of category overlap with the next PE activity category of 'direct teaching', although as will be discussed, this 'direct teaching' category also presents issues. For example, within Dyad 8, PE occurrences under the 'explicit/ elaborated' element of the theory/research category featured particularly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> supervision, where there was a 4-minute discussion, led by the PE, about the differences between CBT and person-centred theory. This was more a PE lead and delivered explanation, where the student contributed to a degree, as a short extract from the discussion, Extract Y, indicates:

Extract Y: Dyad 8, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision (Context: the student had sent a completed CAP to the PE and the PE is giving feedback and discussing the content with the student, prior to the CAP being sent to the student's tutor)

*PE: [00:52:43] So, in terms of this child, what were your thought processes?*

*S: person centred just because of working with her, obviously, she takes the lead and CBT, because I just, I mean, I am not a therapist but it might... I don't know, it is dealing with thoughts and feelings*

*PE: right, so would you be using, so if you like, the person-centred bit, yes, she is leading. CBT would be you coming along with perhaps a worksheet or saying I have spotted you doing this, I think it might help if you thought in a different way*

*S: mm*

*PE: and I think you can combine the two, well, I know you can, because I often do, but somebody that doesn't know much about them might see those as too very contrasting ways of working*

*S: mm*

*PE: and I think you will be looking at that person centred, that being very much, letting her take the lead, erm, being non-judgemental, doing lots of your paraphrasing and stuff like that that you have learnt on the course with xcolleague*

*S: mm*

*PE: and maybe later on, once you have got a much clearer picture of her specific issues or perhaps because, we go back up here, where you say she gets angry and frustrated, well you might do a piece of work using CBT methods to look at managing anger*

*S: mm*

Here, the PE is indeed making explicit references to particular theories, with limited student involvement in the discussion (*mm...mm*) but is doing so in relation to student direct work and making suggestions for future work, so to an extent, this could or should be included under a 'direct teaching' category? The pedagogical focus of the student placement and the educative function of the placement is implied here and is clearly framing the PEs intervention, albeit with limited involvement from the student.

#### 7.2.9 **PE activity** - Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tools

Evans (1999) asserts that teaching within the practice learning setting can be conceptualised in two ways – teaching as something that is 'done' by the teacher to a learner, with a focus on the *content* of teaching (although with no guarantee that student learning has occurred as a result) or secondly, teaching as 'facilitating' student learning. The latter has a focus on *process*, conceptualised both as processes within the learner and the process adopted by the teacher. Further, Evans (1999) notes that for PEs working within the latter paradigm, 'their stock sentence is a question, not a statement' (p.34). Many of the extracts and examples of PE practice discussed so far within this chapter indicate use of a wide range of questions with pedagogic intent, and examples where PEs have been key to extrapolating student learning, such as PE7, Dyad 9, in Extract S. However, Evans (1999) also cautions against the prioritising of one paradigm over the other as 'there are many times a student simply needs to be told' (p.34). This was also a feature of some supervision sessions, when procedures, processes and elements of law were being explained. An example of this is given below, Extract Z:

Extract Z: Dyad 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision. (Context: Mental health placement setting and the PE is explaining the process and legal situation regarding a tribunal report the student is to complete)

*PE: [00:18:45] yes, and it is really important about the deadline because there is no leeway. So, I suppose in terms of casework that would be your focus, wouldn't it?*

*S: at the minute, yes.*

*PE: Excellent*

*S: I spent a good hour on it yesterday*

*PE: right, as you go through the headings, because you know that if somebody is on a restriction order, a 41 they legally don't have any nearest relative?*

*S: oh, I didn't know that*

*PE: yes, it is only people on civil sections or more of 3 to 2 or 4 to 37 but not a 35 or a 36 because that is a court order, but a restriction order, you don't have the nearest relative*

*S: oh, right*

*PE: so in other words, you don't have somebody there who could ask for a discharge, it is the Ministry of Justice who decides if you can discharge or not. Even if the consultant wants to discharge you may still need permission from the Ministry of Justice, which is what we are doing with XX. But, part of the section of the social circumstances report is the nearest relative's views, so you are to get that, and then further down it says views or significant others. Now XX significant other would be his father, who is actually, I have spoken to him on the phone and he is really nice, you just need to ask his view really  
[00:20:26]*

*S: okay, yes*

*PE: in relation to his care, because I don't think XX has the capacity to do that*

*S: no, but would I still speak to XX though?*

*PE: oh yes, still interview him yes. He won't understand the process*

*S: or will that be stressful for him?*

*PE: interviewing him? He won't understand the process because he lacks capacity, you would just, from my experience he would understand there is an important meeting*

*S: okay*

*PE: about whether he stays here not. I don't know how he will respond to that because he might say he wants to go back to XX*

*S: I was just thinking that (both laugh)*

*PE: it is a very thorough piece of work*

*S: so, are we okay to spend some time together to go through it?*

*PE; yes, yes, because you need to print of one of mine and then compare because the headings will be exactly the same and some will be the same anyway in terms of finance*

*S: yes, I read through XX yesterday that you did recently and that gave me more of what understanding of what needs to be done*

*PE: yes, it seems overwhelming because it is a seven- or eight-page report but when you break it down, its actually okay*

The PE activity of 'direct teaching' was included in the Coding Frame as, at the time of creating it for this study, such activity was a prescribed element of the PE role. According to the PEPS 2013 (BASW, 2013) that pertained at the time of this study, elements of Domain B (Enable learning and professional development in practice) specifically noted that the PE must:

(1.) Teach the learner using contemporary social work models, methods and theories relevant to the work, powers and duties, and policy and procedures of the agency

(4.) devise and deliver an appropriate, cost-effective teaching programme (BASW, 2013, p.7)

The PEPS were 'refreshed' in 2019 and Domain B (Teaching, facilitating and supporting learning and professional development in practice) now states:

(B2): Using a range of learning methods, including modelling good social work practice. Teach and support the learning of relevant social work knowledge and research, and the integration of theory and research in practice. Knowledge taught should include the powers and duties, and policy and procedures of the agency.

(B4) Discuss and plan with the student the learning and assessment programme (BASW, 2019)

It can be argued the revisions to the PEPS echo Evans (1999) conceptualisations of teaching within the practice placement – with the PEPS 2013 expectations focusing on the *content* of teaching, and the PEPS 2019 revisions encouraging a greater facilitative intent, with a greater focus on *process*. Thus, whilst teaching is still a focus, there are subtle differences for consideration. The refreshed 2019 standards acknowledge the range of methods to be used (although specifically mention is made of one method only, that of modelling) and adds 'support the learner' to the teaching function as part of the wider facilitative remit of the PE. The 'cost effective teaching programme' in the 2013 PEPS now becomes the 'learning and assessment' programme' (BASW, 2019). The teaching of 'social work models, methods and theories' in the 2013 PEPS (BASW, 2013) becomes incorporated into a wider consideration of social work knowledge and research alongside the integration of theory and research in practice in the 2019 PEPS (BASW, 2019).



At the time of devising the Coding Frame, the PE activity of direct teaching was also included as PE ability in this area could contribute significantly to the assessment of PE status. For example, during their training and whilst supporting a student on placement, PEs are observed in their practice with a student (BASW, 2013; BASW, 2019). This is usually during a supervision session, and will often include PE direct teaching, around issues of law, policy or procedure. Further, some PE training programmes require the PE to produce a 'learning and assessment plan or programme' for the placement, based on the focus or work of the agency and the relevant legislative framework, theories, models and procedures that guide the work of the agency.

Thus, the 'teaching' imperative implied within the placement and the educative function of the PE role is clear, whether in relation to the 'teaching' requirement clearly specified in 2013 PEPS (BASW, 2013) (and thus the requirements that pertained to the PEs involved in this study) or to the 2019 PEPS (BASW, 2019) where teaching is also specified, but within a context of greater facilitative intent. Here, I should also acknowledge, that teaching is not always 'direct' and it can be (and has always been) carried out as a subtle and tacit element of the PE role (for example, role modelling). I also acknowledge that as Evans (1999) suggests, there are a number of opportunities for student learning on placement that can happen 'without explicit teaching' from the PE (p.32) and that the practice placement offers numerous opportunities for informal and incidental learning (Eraut, 2004) that are unrelated to teaching or the presence of a 'teacher'.

Nevertheless, this coded PE activity had the lowest number of occurrences of all PE coded activities and was only coded in 7 of the 30 supervision sessions. As was noted in topic coverage, Chapter 6, the use of particular learning tools was not a regular feature of the recorded supervision sessions, although PE and student interviews did reference use of some tools. The low number of occurrences under this category, alongside the previous (theory/research) category and the limited discussion and narrow exploration

of theories, reveals little sense of the existence of an overarching 'teaching programme' (as referred to within the 2013 PEPS (BASW, 2013)), nor of an explicit 'learning and assessment programme' as required within the refreshed PEPS (BASW, 2019). The data also suggests that, amongst all Dyads, PE participation in 'direct teaching' was almost non-existent, particularly in relation to the 'contemporary social work models, methods and theories' outlined in Domain B of the 2013 PEPS (BASW, 2013).

As has been suggested previously, there may have been some code overlap and thus 'direct teaching' not coded appropriately. Therefore, whilst 7 of the 11 Dyads had no PE activity coded under this category at all, two of these Dyads were Dyad 4 and Dyad 8, which have been heavily referenced in the previous category and other topic and activity categories. Thus, whilst PE4 in Dyad 4 was not coded for 'direct teaching', reference to theoretical approaches and application to practice were a key feature of discussions in supervision, and thus consistent with a pedagogical focus for supervision. This was coded under the 'reference to theory' category above. This contrasts with PE1, who was coded for this 'teaching' category, because the PE, at the end of two supervision sessions, the PE gave the student articles to read. Significantly however, the contents of the article were not discussed in the supervision session or subsequent sessions, or their applicability related to the student's knowledge, practice or understanding, thus an opportunity clearly missed for wider theoretical exploration. The student in her interview, unprompted, later mentioned this.

I have also already questioned the nature of the differentiation between this 'direct teaching' category and the 'advice /guidance' category discussed previously and have asserted that many PE and student exchanges and dialogue during supervision had clear pedagogic features, focus and intent, but could have been coded under the 'advice/guidance' category (see Extract R, Extract S and Extract Z). Thus, PE teaching in some instances may therefore have been more indirect than direct, but could still be considered 'teaching'?

I noted this conundrum particularly within Dyad 10 supervision sessions. As has been noted previously (Extract M), PE 8 in this session skilfully prompts the student to hypothesise further; to acknowledge feelings and consider the role of intuition and asks direct questions about the students thoughts and understanding of those issues. Within that supervision session, the PE also uses examples from her own practice regarding safeguarding responsibilities and uses a particular example to 'wonder' about social worker responsibility. Here, whilst the focus is not on explicit or direct teaching, the invitation to wonder and consider the limits and responsibilities of the social worker role clearly has a facilitative intent.

### 7.3 Chapter Summary

Within Chapters 6 and 7, I have presented an array of findings in relation to the topic coverage, content and activities of social work student supervision. The bespoke Coding Frame provided some assistance in helping to manage the large data set and identify discrete and particular elements of topic coverage and activity that took place within supervision. There were also areas of coding overlap within the frame – that surfaced readily during the coding process - and I have identified these within Chapters 6 and 7 where they arise.

Through listening to, transcribing, reading and coding the supervision sessions. I have gained enormous insight into the complexity and messiness of social work, the nature and variation of PE practice and skills and into some corners of the PE and student relationship. The PE role is hugely multifaceted and some elements of PE and/or student activity have been particularly highlighted within this Chapter 7.

The findings detailed in Chapter 6 and 7 have pointed to areas of student supervision that are 'expected', but there have also been aspects of student supervision that are 'assumed' but that appear to be significant areas of

omission. In Chapter 8, these elements will inform the analysis of the findings in relation to how they illuminate the impact of direct work discussion; how learning can be facilitated and supported and how the pedagogical focus of the student placement can be promoted.

## **Chapter 8 Analysis of the findings from the coded supervision sessions**

### **8. 1 Introduction and Context – the ‘educative’ purpose and functions of student supervision**

This chapter presents the analysis of the findings from the coded supervision sessions presented in Chapter 6 (Topic Coverage) and Chapter 7 (Analytical coding of PE and student activities). Rather than considering each set of findings separately, I have chosen to synthesise the findings and present the analysis of them under headings as below:

#### Case work – framing supervision

- Case work as ‘managerial capture’ of supervision
- Case work as gateway

#### Facilitation of learning for professional practice

- The art of questioning
- Theory – less practice?
- The role of reflection and reflective spaces
- The place of feedback and review
- Emotions and the emotional space

This chapter also includes the documentary data analysis of the written supervision records received.

The analysis that is presented in this chapter is framed by the expectations of social work student supervision, as outlined in Chapter 2. Whilst the totemic and customary elements of support, management and accountability oversight, and education should be present (Tsui,2005; Kadushin and Harkness, 2014; Doel, 2010), the educative aspect and function of supervision is foregrounded within social work student supervision (Doel, 2010; Shardlow and Doel 1996; Parker, 2010) and the primacy of student learning is acknowledged. Thus, student supervision should provide a safe and encouraging environment for learning, where the integration of theory and practice is considered, values and professional practice issues can be

discussed and the supervisory experience provide space for exploration of knowledge, student understanding of practice and the social work role. Such an exploration should also inevitably entail and offer opportunities for reflection on practice. My choice of the term 'educative' is deliberately chosen and in this I concur with Butler and Elliott's (1985) use of the term (and with their preference for this term instead of 'teaching'), 'as a wider term incorporating the notion of facilitating learning and of self-directed learning' (p.66). This also aligns the educative focus of the placement and the role of the PE within it with both the 2013 PEPS (BASW, 2013) and the 2019 PEPS (BASW, 2019).

The pedagogical emphasis of the social work student placement is enshrined within the 2019 PEPS (BASW, 2019), as it was in the previous 2013 PEPS (BASW, 2013) and is key within the literature. The analysis of the coded supervision sessions that follows will draw on these expectations of student supervision and provides the framework for the analysis within this chapter.

## 8.2 The analytic process – looking for the 'golden key'?

The extensive amount of data generated and coded within the Coding Frame (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 7) contributed to my keenly felt sense of responsibility to the data. Indeed, the issue of how to present the range of naturalistic data collected and to ensure that data was not overlooked, downplayed or obscured were issues that initially overawed. As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, the development of the Coding Frame was a complex task, the application of it to each of the 30 recorded and transcribed supervision sessions was also challenging, and there were (inevitably) areas of coding overlap and omission.

My sense of responsibility to the data continued into my considerations of presentation of this analysis. My 'impressions' of the data after such close involvement with it (listening, transcribing, coding each supervision session and then re-reading each supervision session transcripts a number of times) were in my thoughts. The vast range of the data inevitably meant that some

impressions foregrounded over others, and my written reflections and memos immediately after coding (and thus the beginnings of 'analysis?') also loomed significantly.

I spent some time searching for the unattainable 'golden key' (Colley, 2010, p.183) that would 'unlock the data' for me and that would help analysis. Bathmaker (2010) alludes to the conflicts inherent in 'search of the analytic process' (p.202) but concludes that analysis must be understood as 'a combination of close engagement with data, interpretation of data, and theorising ...it is clearly, at times, useful to think about these aspects of analysis separately...However, in the final account of the research, it is the interaction of data-analysis-theory that is important' (p.202). Whilst it may be axiomatic that 'theorising' is part of the analytic process, this reminder did help allay some of my anxieties regarding analysis of the data. Thus, I reminded myself that I had chosen ECA (Altheide, 1987) as the method and a coding frame as a tool for collection of numerical data. Whilst my assertion - that numbers of occurrence (or minutes spent) does not necessarily equal significance – still applied, I considered that for a study of supervision *content*, numerical counts could initially serve to support my theorising and analysis. Thus, in the analysis that follows I have chosen to concentrate on synthesised areas of content and topic coverage that were numerically significant (high or low) in occurrence or minutes. As suggested by ECA, this data does not 'speak for itself' and I as the researcher am 'continually central' (Altheide and Schneider, 2017, p.5). Thus, the 'questions' that abounded during my search for the 'golden key' and my initial theorising did impact upon my thinking, so whilst the analysis that follows originates in numerical 'counts', the areas of focus for analysis are constructs of my own derived from the data and my theorising.

### 8.3 Analysis of the findings

#### 8.3.1 Case work\* – framing supervision

(\*A note on terminology here. I have deliberately chosen to use the written term 'case work' and not 'casework' to differentiate the term from the earlier usage of it in the social work literature. For example, in the 1960s the terms 'casework', 'casework practice' and 'casework skills' were the foundation of social work skills and intervention (Timms, 1964; 1968) and indeed some authors specifically wrote about the teaching of such casework skills to social work students during the practice placement (Heywood, 1964; Young, 1967). The notion of 'casework' during this period was heavily influenced by psychological and psychodynamic theories, a consequence of the 'psychiatric deluge' influencing social work after the Second World War (Harris, 2008, p.668). The social worker's role in casework was for the purpose of 'study, diagnosis and treatment' (Heywood, 1964, p.48). Much of the foundations and principles of 'casework' are still evident within contemporary social work practice – the influence of psychological and sociological theories, the impact of 'social conditions' (Timms, 1964); the importance of the relationship and the 'application of casework principles of acceptance, self-determination, client participation' (Heywood, 1964, p.46). However, for the purposes of this chapter and thesis, case work is the preferred term, referring to discussion of work with service users, whether update or analysis, that does not imply a psycho dynamic or a diagnosis/treatment focus).

The reporting of work with individual service users predominated and framed most of the discussions within supervision sessions. This is coded within Chapter 6 (Topic Coverage) as direct work/practice discussion and is detailed in Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads. As indicated, direct work and practice discussion took up between 61% and 97% of the time in 18 of the 30 of supervision sessions, and almost a third of the 30 sessions (9 supervision sessions) involved practice and direct work discussions that took up over 80% of the time in each session. As stated in Chapter 6, this broadly



named category of direct work / practice discussion included discussion of individual 'case work' but was also intended to include other student activities and learning opportunities undertaken on placement that were not directly related to 'case work'. As the findings indicate, there was limited discussion of the latter and the focus of all supervision sessions was discussion of service users, with students providing an update of their work with service users in every supervision session. Within all supervision sessions, discussions began with an update on activity and work with service users, often referred to as 'cases'. I have thus termed this 'case work' and it is this term that features in this section of the analysis.

The predominance of such case work discussion within the findings of this study replicates the findings of Brodie (1993) and Nelsen (1974), studies into the content of student supervision discussed in the literature review. In Brodie's 1993 study, most supervision time was given to 'casework discussion' (sic) (64%) and he concludes that this was 'minimalist supervision...generally characterised by the student 'telling the case'(p.84). Whilst this was focus on casework discussion was replicated in the later 2013 Brodie and Williams study, there was greater emphasis on analysis of practice and theoretical discussion. Similarly, Nelsen's (1974) earlier study found that supervision sessions included a large amount of case discussion - 70% of the 68 recorded supervision session were spent predominantly in case discussion. However, Nelsen (1974) considers that Field Instructors (FIs) engaged in an 'active teaching style', (p.150) suggesting a degree of analysis and extrapolation of talk and ideas between FI and student had been present. Thus, while 'casework' (sic) and 'case discussion' (sic) dominated in these studies, as in this study, the authors use of the terms are underpinned by differing understandings as to the focus ('telling the case' or discussion and analysis). It is clear that the implications of the term 'case work' needs further discussion.

### 8.3.1.1 Case work - 'managerial capture' of supervision?

Within the wider supervision literature there are concerns raised about the 'managerial capture' of social work supervision (Wilkins et al., 2017, p.942). This transformation is considered to exemplify the impact and influence of managerialism within statutory social work (Lawler, 2015; Broadhurst et al., 2010; Broadhurst and Mason, 2014; Bourn and Hafford- Letchfield, 2011; Hafford-Letchfield and Engelbrecht, 2018; Beddoe, 2010) and for some, the wider dominance of a neoliberal paradigm within social work practice (Featherstone et al., 2014; Fenton, 2016; Fenton, 2019).

Many authors point to the prevalence of a managerial model within supervision that affects its content and practices (Munro, 2011b; Bartoli and Kennedy, 2015; Davys and Beddoe, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2017; Lawler, 2015; Beddoe, 2010; Wilkins, 2017; MacAlister, 2021). These authors consider that management oversight of case work directs social work supervision and a focus on 'task and target', a 'tick box' approach (Bartoli and Kennedy, 2015) dominates, rather than discussion and analysis or critical reflection on the complexities of the work being undertaken with service users. The few empirical studies that have been carried out into what happens in supervision (Bourn and Hafford-Letchfield, 2011; Wilkins et al., 2017) also attest to the supremacy of supervision being used for management oversight, the supervisee 'reporting back' for the purpose of managerial overview, and the predominance of accountable actions and 'things to do' arising from such discussions, with the focus on 'what and when' things happen and not enough on 'how and why' (Wilkins et al., 2017, p.942).

The predominance of case work discussion noted within the findings of this study could imply that a simple 'managerial model...the default model of practice learning' (Shardlow and Doel, 1996, p.44) is evident. However, I argue that this implication is not fully borne out by the findings and further, the notions of 'managerial model' and 'managerial capture' needs further examination when applied to student practice placements in general.

Social work students on practice placements carry out direct work with service users within a range of practice agencies and contexts. They are expected to meet standards and domains of practice outlined within the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (BASW, 2018) Further, social work students are accountable for their practice in accordance with the requirements of the social work regulator, Social Work England (SWE) (SWE, 2019a). Whilst social work students are not required to register under the new regulator, they are required to 'make sure that during their course, including while they are on placement, they do not do anything that contravenes the professional standards or the policies and procedures of their course or placement provider'(SWE, 2019b, p.18). Thus, expectations regarding safe and accountable practice are key to the practice placement and involve student responsibilities, but also place expectations on the PEs who supervise, monitor and assess students on placement.

This aspect of the PE role is identified as the administrative or 'managerial' function (Doel, 2010; Walker et al, 2008), described by Walker et al., (2008), below:

As a practice educator you have the responsibility to make sure that standards are identified and maintained to ensure the protection of service users and carers. Your responsibility also includes ensuring the development of the student and their ability to understand and conform to the agency standards and procedures necessary to comply with these standards. This includes national, organisational and team standards highlighted in legislation, policy documents and the policy and procedures of the agency. Supporting the student in understanding and using relevant systems and processes, and completing the relevant paperwork, such as case records, will be a key part of ensuring that the student is accountable for their practice (p.103).

The responsibility and accountability of the PE role is very clearly highlighted and echoes Brown and Bourne's (1996) earlier assertion of the supervisory 'enable and ensure' (p.9) duality of task. Studies have confirmed the sense of responsibility felt by PEs in securing student's safe and accountable practice (Stone, 2016; Bates, 2018) and in this respect, I would expect PEs in this study to be no different. Further, students in this study were all final year students, on the verge of professional qualification, thus their placement setting would have been allocated in order that they could meet requirements regarding greater complexity of assessment, intervention and planning with service users (SWE, 2020a). Increasing responsibility and enhanced levels of autonomy for students within the final year practice placement is thus expected and required (under the supervision of a PE) and thus PEs awareness of their responsibilities in relation to assuring and ensuring the student's safe and accountable practice could be heightened. The interviews with both the students and PEs also referenced an awareness of this responsibility – the students indicating a concern with 'getting things right' and the PEs commenting on the student's 'readiness to practice' as being informed by having gained a sense of how 'things really are' whilst on placement. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 9 (Student Interviews) and Chapter 10 (PE interviews).

Further, I would argue that supervision on placement is a particular 'situated practice' (Beddoe, 2015, p. 153), and, allied to the complexities and range of the elements of the PE role, PEs are thus performing supervision within 'situated practice' within a number of contexts and in a number of ways. All PEs, as registered social workers need to abide by regulatory professional standards and ensure safe and effective practice (SWE, 2019a). In representing the placement provider, to meet their own registration requirements and to meet the requirements and values within the PEPS (2019) it would be a wonder (and poor practice) if the PE did *not* feel a keen sense of responsibility to promote and ensure the student's safe and accountable practice!

Thus, there are ethical and regulatory imperatives that necessitate that PEs maintain a watch on student practice and intervention. Inevitably then, there will always be an element of 'managerial oversight' and a focus on the 'what and when' (Wilkins et al., 2017, p.942). One of the ways to do this will be through discussion of the work the student is undertaking with service users and to offer advice and guidance on this (although there are also other and complementary ways, such as direct observation, to be discussed later within this chapter). Within this study, the attention of PEs to procedure, standards and ensuring accountability of practice was clearly indicated in the findings, as PEs offered advice and guidance to students in each of the 30 recorded supervision sessions, often unprompted by the student rather than in response to a student request.

However, the nature and content of this advice and guidance differed. Some of the advice and guidance given by PEs (Dyads 1, 2, 6) was specific and procedurally lead - for example, clarification of procedures to be followed; what (or how) agency records or forms were to be completed; concrete actions to be undertaken or professionals to be contacted. However, other PEs were skilled in weaving guidance into more exploratory discussions of student practice and their work with service users and thus advice and guidance was proffered contextually and within wider discussions. Thus, in Chapter 7, Extract R, Dyad 11, the PE uses prompts and suggestions to help the student plan for next steps and in Chapter 7, Extract S, Dyad 9, to encourage student thinking and understanding as a precursor to action. These examples of PE practice and of student and PE interaction suggest that advice and guidance can be, and was, used as teaching and learning aids with confident pedagogical intent, rather than methods with the singular intent of securing managerial oversight of practice. The discussions amongst some Dyads (for example, see Chapter 7, Extracts H; Extract I and Extract L) where this was evident certainly spoke more to the 'how and why' imperatives than the 'what and when' (Wilkins et al., 2017, p.942). A focus on the educative function of supervision and the pedagogical purpose of the practice placement was demonstrated, rather than a sole focus on the

managerial and accountability function. This suggests that a binary approach or assumption – that case work discussion implies or invites managerial oversight only – needs to be considered with caution and an alternative construct, case work as gateway, is offered.

### 8.3.2.2 Case work as gateway

The construct and possibility of case work as ‘gateway’ is proffered as the findings did suggest that, even within a ‘case work framing’ of supervision, such discussions could and did provide a gateway for wider deliberations and exploration within supervision sessions. Within some Dyads this was limited (for example, Dyads 6, 7, 11), but within other Dyads, much case work discussion opened doors and provided opportunities for dialogue and discursive exchange. There were also ‘teachable moments’ (Domakin and Curry, 2017, p.177; Noble, 2011, p.315) and some of these moments were grasped by both PEs and students and more expansive explorations ensued. For example, Extract Z (Chapter 7) where the PE is teaching and explaining mental health law and requirements for the tribunal report the student is to write, or Extract L (Chapter 7) where the PE is gently prodding the student to consider both her ‘worries’ about working with a young girl newly allocated to her alongside exploring what the young girls ‘worries’ might be. There were also occasions where such ‘teachable moments’ were lost or not pursued – for example, Extract A (Chapter 6) where the opportunities to discuss the student’s use of specific theories or methods or the areas of work with the service user she was reflecting upon were not pursued during the PE and student exchange.

Some of this identified practice within the coded supervision sessions – where PEs were inviting hypothesising, reflection, and wider thinking - finds resonance within wider contemporary social work practice. Within supervision, the primary managerial focus on process rather than practice, highlighted by Munro (2011b) and more recently noted by MacAlister (2021), is being challenged on policy and practice levels, within both adult and

children and family social work practice arenas. For example, the post qualifying standards for supervisors of social workers within both settings (DHSC, 2018; DfE, 2018a) and newer training opportunities for supervisors endorsed for supervisors (RIP, 2018; DHSC, 2018), specifically focus on the promotion of 'excellent practice' (DfE, 2018a; DHSC, 2018). This identifies the need for supervisors to promote reflection; to assist social workers in developing their 'professional curiosity' (Munro, 2011b); to hypothesise and 'facilitate constant reflective thinking' (DfE, 2018a, p.4); to foster a 'reflective and curious approach' (p.5) within supervision and 'create a culture of focussed thinking' (p.5) that promotes 'confident analysis and decision making' (p.5). Supervisory standards for both adult and child and family practitioners also promote the necessity of 'emotionally intelligent' supervision (DfE, 2018a, p.6) whilst also maintaining a focus on accountability and the judicious use of supervisory power and authority. Within the arena of practitioner supervision then, a renewed emphasis is placed upon hypothesising and thinking through of practice – and social workers being open to reflexivity, reflection on their practice and assumptions underpinning their decision making – alongside supervisors using skills of inquiry to assist social workers to explore multiple and moving explanations.

Within children and family social work practice in particular, the demands for increased professional curiosity, and for challenge and debate, is an acknowledgement of the quest for 'certainty' that has pervaded practice. 'Certainty' could be alternatively characterised as the 'problem of certainty' (White, 2013, p.45) in the midst of the 'reality of uncertainty' (Munro, 2019, p.124). Theorising about uncertainty within social work practice is not new – Fook (2007) defined 'the paradox of professional practice is the certainty of uncertainty, and the corresponding need to provide certainty within uncertainty' (p.33). However, the current emphasis and expectations enshrined within contemporary (practitioner) supervisory practice, signified within the post qualifying standards for supervisors for child and family practice supervisors (DfE, 2018a) as discussed above, does signal a retreat

from a position of seeking (improbable, elusive and unhelpful) certainty or a 'quick fix' (Morrison, 2005) to complex problems.

Within this study, some of the content of the recorded sessions spoke to notions of uncertainty and 'not knowing' on the part of the PE and student. For example, Extracts M, N and O, and Extract Q (Chapter 7) where the PE is pulled back (by the student) to a discussion about a DASH assessment (2009) and the possibility of an IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) being appointed (the PE, '*I don't think, I don't think...I don't know, I don't know...*', leading to wider discussion). Further, PE activities of 'Use of exploring, questioning and prompting' and 'expressing opinion or hypothesising' and Student activity of 'Expressing opinion, hypothesising, providing analysis of practice' were present in all supervision sessions (see Chapter 7) although to different degrees between each Dyad. Within those Dyads where 'Student expressing opinion or hypothesising' and 'PE expressing opinion or hypothesising' counts were high, I have referred previously to the 'distinct conversational tone' of those supervision sessions and the discursive discussions that were present. The conversational nature of these supervision sessions is supported by the description of supervision as a 'narrative experience' (Bartoli and Kennedy, 2015, p.242) in which a 'range of narrative transactions take place' (p.243). Notwithstanding the dominance of case work and case work updates, there were thus clear examples of what Kadushin and Harkness (2014) refer to as 'zigging and zagging' (p.132) and opportunities for broader discussions about issues raised within case work. In relation to qualified practice, White (2013) has suggested that organisational environments within which decisions are made need to 'facilitate debate and dialogue...they need to be oriented to conversation and communication' (2013, p.44). The findings within this study have indicated that, within the environment of the practice placement supervisory encounter, conversation and dialogue was present and thus case work as gateway and as an invitation to conversation, communication and wider 'conceptualisation of practice' (Bogo et al., 2013, p. 262) is indeed possible.



Nonetheless, this does not deny the positive opportunity that supervision offers to talk about direct work (at all stages of professional development) – and to begin that discussion with the concrete experience of recent and real service user contact. As studies highlighted in the literature review (Chapter 3) have suggested, students value the opportunity that the placement offers for ‘real’ and ‘hands on’ work with service users, and within this study, the depth and breadth of student learning on placement is further revealed in their interviews (see Chapter 9). However, for students, as for qualified practitioners, working with vulnerable people and intervening in their lives is serious business and involves engagement with a potentially vast array of emotions and challenges – such work can be complex, untidy, emotional, daunting, joyous, confusing, satisfying, overwhelming, scary, or affirming. Working with the complexities of practice, alongside regulatory and professional imperatives for ethical and accountable practice, means that the use of supervision as an occasion to ‘report back’ on work undertaken or to seek either confirmation, or advice and guidance on practice, must not be dismissed lightly. Further, this argument is supported by theories of professional development and knowledge and skill acquisition (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986; Benner, 1984; Fook et. al., 2000). These theories suggest that the growth of skill, understanding and professional expertise is developmental and that each stage of development is characterised by a particular way of thinking and orientation to practice. Thus, generally, for those at the ‘advanced beginner’ stage (Benner, 1984; Fook et. al., 2000), such as students, whilst ‘rule based’ approaches guide their actions, they can begin to apply previous knowledge and wider contextual and situational understanding to their practice. Fook et. al., (2000) suggest that, in developing professional expertise in social work, the additional ability to develop and apply this contextual thinking and an awareness of the value base of the profession, is essential. This staged view of professional development has been critiqued (Eraut 1994; Taylor and White, 2000) and Bogo (2006) has suggested that, whilst her review of field instruction did not fully support a staged view, there is support for a ‘greater focus on conceptual and self-assessment activities at later stages’ (p.178). Applied to

the student placement and the PE role within it, these developmental imperatives require the PE to not only understand their role in facilitation of student development, but also to have a number of enabling and facilitative skills that can support and foster this development. This also requires the foundation of a conducive environment, and the supervisory encounter must provide a context where views can be articulated and the discussion and sharing of opinion and views is valued. This speaks to the centrality of the student/ PE relationship, a theme highlighted within student and PE interviews.

In contrast to the construct of case work as the 'managerial capture' of supervision and a bounded activity dominated by managerial and accountability concerns, the findings from this study suggests that an alternative construct - of case work as gateway - is possible within student social work placement supervision. Moreover, such a construct is desirable and consistent with contemporary expectations of qualified practice and the requirements of the PCF (BASW, 2018) and Knowledge and Skills Statements (DoH, 2015; DfE, 2018b), and also compatible with notions of developing professional expertise (Fook et al., 2000). However, as recent studies have suggested in relation to qualified practice (Wilkins and Jones, 2018; Hafford-Letchfield & Engelbrecht, 2018), the challenge lies in how supervision is balanced, managed, and enacted. Supervision - within the practice placement and within practitioner supervision - needs to be enacted so that technician, managerial and accountability demands do not dominate or serve to exclude or diminish reflective, analytical, or more focused thinking in relation to skills, knowledge or values underpinning student work. This tension was certainly evident in this study and is of particular significance given the assumed and presumed educative focus of student supervision. Thus, whilst case work as gateway is possible within student supervision, this requires vigorous validation of the educative function of supervision and a focus upon PEs wider understanding of their role in the facilitation of student learning.

### 8.3.2 Facilitation of learning for professional practice

As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, the findings from the recorded supervision sessions suggested little evidence of a robust or visibly coherent 'teaching programme' within each placement, as was required by the 2013 PEPS (BASW, 2013). However, it has also been acknowledged that the facilitation of learning for professional practice involves more than PE direct 'teaching' and incorporates facilitating and enabling student learning within a wider remit and use of the 'active' and 'responsive' facilitation skills referred to by Rawles (2018). As also suggested in Chapters 6 and 7, some of the extracts and examples of PE practice indicate purposeful pedagogic intent on the part of PEs.

The place of student learning as both *function* and *consequence* of the practice placement is acknowledged. However, to ensure and sustain a focus on the educative purpose of student supervision, I suggest that the place of student learning as a specific *function* of the placement needs to be foregrounded. This could help enable case work as 'gateway' to be more readily realised, but also attend to other areas of learning available within the placement, learning opportunities and activities carried out by students that are not related to direct work or case work. In Shardlow and Doel's (1996) seminal text, they refer to the need for each placement to have a 'practice curriculum', an explicit written curriculum with detailed, structured, and sequenced learning activities offering the 'opportunity for guided development through a range of experiences...delineating the knowledge, skills and values to be addressed' (p. 98).

Within contemporary placements, the PCF (BASW, 2018) details levels of attainment and requirements for differing levels of student learning and assessment (e.g., end of first/end of final placement requirements). Further, there is a Learning Agreement completed at the start of each placement, detailing the range and sequencing of learning activities and learning opportunities the student will undertake during the course of the placement. However, to realise the full potential of the list of 'learning opportunities' and

the 'to do' activities which populate many Learning Agreements, consideration of a more formalised 'practice curriculum' has much to offer. This could incorporate a specific learning/teaching programme on particular topics or areas of student placement work, which ensures 'guided development' on particular areas of learning. This could entail opportunities for student involvement and contribution along with clear guidance as to how and which activities are being assessed, and thus aid transparency in assessment (Stone, 2018; Jasper, 2017).

Of course, as discussed briefly in Chapter 7, the promotion here of a formalised practice curriculum or a detailed learning plan, does not preclude self-directed learning; incidental, tacit or informal learning (Eraut, 1994, 2004) or learning from and within communities of practice, teams or groups (Wenger, 1998). Further, the discussion here does also not begin to address issues of deep or surface learning or non-learning (Gardiner, 1989). However, consideration of elements of a more formal 'practice curriculum' widens discussions of the role of the PE in the facilitation of student learning, aspects of which are considered more fully below.

#### 8.3.2.1 Use of questioning, exploring and prompting by the PE

As discussed previously, expansive dialogue and a distinct conversational tone were present in most of the recorded supervision sessions, both PE and student hypothesising and expressing opinion. Further, whether this was PE lead or student initiated, there were some clear examples where this led to broader and more exploratory discussion, meaningful analysis or student self-critique – for example, Extracts P and Q (Chapter 7). However, coding also indicated that limited, closed, clarificatory or 'process driven' nature of questions were used by some PEs and these types of questions did not promote student curiosity or wider exploration of issues (for example, Extracts I and J, Chapter 7).

The presence of discussion and dialogue accords with the requirement that social work students need to develop as critical thinkers (as indicated within

the PCF (BASW, 2018). As critical thinkers they should be able to explore and question their beliefs and the assumptions underlying their actions; appraise knowledge claims; be self-aware and open to self-evaluation and be able to provide reasoned judgements for their actions (Brown and Rutter, 2008; Brookfield, 1987; Jones 2013). There are numerous books and models that can assist students in developing this criticality (Fook and Gardner, 2013; Brown and Rutter, 2008) and which offer a range of 'critical questions' students can ask of themselves in order to develop this ability (Jones, 2013; Fook, 2007). However, within the practice education textbook literature, there is limited focus on the range and types of questions that can be used by PEs within supervision to foster and promote student criticality and wider student thinking overall. There are some suggestions and short lists of questions that PEs might ask – for example, found within Williams and Rutter (2019), p.84; Walker et al., (2008), p.67 and Showell Nicholas and Kerr (2015), p.29. These texts also include references to a range of reflective tools and models (for example, Gibbs, 1988), that include questions, aimed at promoting student critical reflection and thinking and there are other texts that specifically make use of activities that PEs can use with individual students or student groups, in order to generate student thinking (Doel and Shardlow, 2005).

However, broader consideration and knowledge of the range, purpose and functions of questions is scant within the literature, an absence implied within PE practice in the taped supervision sessions in this study. As noted in Chapters 6 and 7, there were marked differences amongst PEs in respect of the range and types of questions and prompts used, and thus the nature and extent of exploratory conversations that ensued. Some PEs used a narrow range of questions (see Extract K and Extract T, Chapter 7). Other PEs were more able and confident in asking a wider range of questions, and more softly challenging or 'critically supportive' questions (O'Sullivan, 2010, p.72) - for example, PE7 (from Dyads 8 and 9 and as indicated in Extract S, Chapter 7) and PE 8 (from Dyad 10 and as indicated in Extract B, Chapter 6). Within the data set, reasons that may account for the variation in PE practice are

not easily discernible. For example, it could be the case that PE experience may have influenced skills and the range of questioning used and this might account for the skilled questioning of PE7 (Dyads 8 and 9) who had been a Stage 2 PE for a number of years and had been PE for 16 students. However, PE6 (Dyads 6 and 7) was similarly experienced but used a markedly less agile range of questions. PE1 also used a range of questions and this PE was a Stage 1 PE in training and student StA her first student. Placement setting and whether the placement was in a statutory setting or a voluntary agency may also have impacted, given the pressures within statutory practice identified in the 'managerial capture' of supervision (Wilkins et al., 2017, p.942) referred to previously. However, whilst the interactions and questioning skills of PE2 (Dyad 2), a statutory setting, may have exemplified some elements of this, there were a number of other PEs also in statutory settings (PEs 1,3,4,5,8 and 9) who were more able to utilise a range of questioning skills and to use these as an invitation to discursive discussions.

It could be argued that the findings demonstrate the influence of time constraints and the domination of managerialism and the quest for certainty within professional practice, and thus on PE practice (as outlined previously). Thus, such a managerial model could be advancing a surreptitious, yet pervasive idea that the purpose of questions is solely to gain answers, to ascertain what happened and thus direct future actions. However, Grint (2008) reminds us that in conditions of complexity and 'wicked problems', the role of the leader is 'to ask the right questions rather than provide the right answers' (p.13), as it is through collaborative problem solving and 'reflecting upon rather than reacting to Wicked situations' (p.14) that issues of complexity are addressed. Within the context of the practice placement and a supervisory environment with an educational purpose, Grint's (2008) understanding of the purpose of questions and questioning becomes even more relevant.

Dore (2019) considers that PE 'curiosity' is essential to enabling and facilitative conversations with students and that PEs use a number of 'discrete enabling actions' as part of their practice (p.849) For Davys and Beddoe (2010), the "art of asking good questions" is inexorably linked with facilitative interventions and ...the skills of good listening' (p. 149). I suggest that PEs need to be encouraged to think more deeply and broadly about the range of questions they use and to consider their purpose and intent and thus their place and role in facilitative conversations within student supervision. Questions can be used for a range of purposes - for example, to disrupt ways of thinking and patterns; to challenge ; to consider different perspectives; to foster / introduce thoughts of change; to develop/encourage curiosity ; to develop hypotheses ; to stimulate wondering; to encourage deeper thinking; to clarify elements of the situation; to consider patterns of behaviour ; to consider knowns and unknowns ; to slow down thinking ;to focus thinking; to dig into reasoning; to formulate rationale; and to uncover assumptions. PEs and students can be invited to consider Socratic questioning and 'open question enquiry' (Davys and Beddoe, 2010, p.148), that eschews questions that invites or presumes factual answers, in favour of questions that probe for further explanation, interrogate assumptions or invites exploration of a variety of viewpoints. Use of such questions could also help students' critical thinking. Recently, I have been introduced to the work of Tomm (1988) and his typology of questions that can be used to define issues, and through conversation, can invite change. Tomm is a psychiatrist and systemic / family therapist, and his typology is underpinned by circular thinking and systemic theory and intent (Cecchin, 1987). He describes four main types of questions – lineal, circular, strategic and reflexive questions – that have differing functions and purpose. Consideration of Tomm's (1988) typology of questions, as ways of opening up thinking and further dialogue with students within supervision, may be helpful for PEs in the facilitative aspects of their role. Rawles (2018) suggests that PEs need to be skilled and confident in both 'active facilitation' and 'responsive facilitation' and the findings within this study have indicated that some PEs were skilled in both 'active' and 'responsive' facilitation. For

example, PE8 (Extract L, Chapter 7) was particularly skilled in active facilitation, indicated by her use of questions to encourage curiosity and reasoning behind the student's thoughts – *'what are your views...what kinds of emotions is it eliciting?...what do you think?...how do we use those feelings?...what do you do once you have noticed it? What do you think?'*.

Significantly, and as noted in the findings and shown in Appendix 7:

Supervision coding – All Dyads, within this Dyad 10, the coded activity of Student 'Expressing opinion/ hypothesising/ providing analysis of practice' offered counts that were consistently higher in each supervision session than within other Dyads. The consistency of these findings could suggest that student StJ's assertiveness in expressing opinion, hypothesising or offering analysis and thus offering a 'professional view', was premised upon her confidence in the PEs 'responsive facilitation'. Similarly, in Extract O (Dyad 5) (Chapter 7), where the student (StE) is both hypothesising about 'Grandma's' situation regarding her carer role and confidently self-directing and suggesting interventions, the student expectation and assurance of PE 'responsive facilitation' is also suggested.

Overall, the findings within this study suggest that enabling PEs to develop skills of active and responsive facilitation and to consider the 'art of the good question' is a crucial learning need. This is not to prescribe skills in a technician fashion, but to use questions to help foreground curiosity, encourage the reflective learning process, widen thinking and discussion, and thus enhance both student and PE learning. Evans (1999) suggests that development of questioning skills can assist both PE and student in developing 'reflective hooks' (p. 78). He describes the process and the skill thus:

It is easy to present practice as a complete, inviolable entity, without inviting the listener in to consider aspects which may not yet be totally completed. 'Reflective hooks' give permission, as it were, for others to analyse and evaluate our own practice. By learning to ask questions of other people, it is hoped that students can ask similar questions of



themselves and develop self-reflective techniques (Evans, 1999, p.78).

#### 8.3.2.2. Theory less practice?

This section analyses the combined findings indicated within Chapters 6 and 7 relating to 'Reference to theory/ research' (PE and students) and Direct teaching (PE) and the Topic coverage category of Academic work, including discussion of portfolio content. The focus of my analysis here is on explicit reference to theory, research or knowledge underpinning practice, not the particular or overarching pedagogic intent of the student / PE interaction or 'theorising' about practice (Thompson, 2010), which I suggest was indicated at times during the coded supervision sessions. I also do not visit the debates and discussions about the nature and forms of 'knowledge' or 'knowledges' (Pawson et al., 2003; Trevithick, 2008; Eraut, 1994; Ruch, 2009; Taylor and White, 2000) or and how knowledge(s) is generated or acknowledged (Schön, 1983; Taylor and White, 2000).

The findings indicated a very limited focus upon, and scant elaboration of, theory or research across the entire data set, with the notable exception of Dyads 4, 5 and 10. Generally, theoretical avenues remained woefully underexplored and three Dyads, Dyads 6, 7 and 11 did not refer to theory or research at all. The student's portfolio, use of CAPs or direct observations or academic work and tools, models, or activities to promote thinking, reflection or theoretical considerations were all habitually underused. Within the analytical coding of PE and Student activities (Chapter 7) 'reference to theory/research' was the second lowest PE coded activity and the lowest coded Student activity within the data set. Three Dyads, Dyads 4, 5 and 10, were the notable exception and the findings indicate that within these Dyads, discussion of theory and research did happen, either through using the elements of the academic portfolio to initiate, discuss and integrate theory and practice, or through the specific allocation of the supervision agenda to discuss a particular theory (Dyad 4). Further, student reference to their own

knowledge base or application of their practice wisdom was limited and there was no overarching indication of either 'teaching programme' (PEPS, 2013) or overall focus on PE participation in 'direct teaching' (beyond the exceptions of Dyad 5 and 10, although the impact of possible code overlap was explored in Chapter 6).

These findings echo Brodie's (1993) study where only 9% of time in supervision was spent discussing theory. The later study (Brodie and Williams, 2013) indicated a significant increase in references to theory and it was the 6th highest recorded activity (in terms of occurrences). A highly positive picture is painted, Brodie and Williams (2013) concluding that the PE was (more) 'able and ready to bridge the gap between the academic and practice 'worlds' of the student' (p.519). This finding was not borne out within this study. However, the Brodie and Williams (2013) study referred to 8 single supervision sessions, one from each of 8 Dyads, and each supervision session was taped towards the end of the placement. The difference with this study – where 11 Dyads recorded two or three supervision sessions across the course of a placement (see Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All Dyads) may have significance for a direct comparison of supervision content.

The 'fallacy of theory- less practice' is well documented within social work (Thompson, 2010; Garrett, 2013). The integration of theory and research in practice is not simply a requirement for PEs (BASW, 2013; BASW, 2019) , but also points to a further well documented contention within the wider social work literature, that 'theory' and 'practice' are not separate islands (Thompson, 2010; McLaughlin and Teater, 2017). Thus, theory should inform practice and practice should inform theory and are very much in a 'dialectical relationship' (Thompson, 2010, p.16).

However, the findings of this study indicate that the theory – practice connection that the placement is expected to fulfil, and the aspiration towards evidence informed practice this should support (McLaughlin and Teater, 2017), has been underserved. It has been suggested (Gordon, 2017; Nixon

and Murr, 2006) that too often writing on theory and practice speaks of 'applying theory to practice' in a deductive way and this was evident in this study. For example, Extract A, Chapter 6, suggests that theories are something to be 'fitted in' and applied (retrospectively in this case), rather than being an integral part of the student's understanding and analysis of the work she was undertaking with SU X. Smeeton (2017) offers a critique of the limits and helpfulness of theory as 'recipes for practice' or when used in hindsight deployment. He views theory (in the tradition of Arendt) not as a tool to be applied, but as a 'region of thought' (p.19) that can serve as 'electron-microscopes' to be used to increase reflection and analysis. The limitations and flaws of the 'application' model are noted elsewhere (Thompson, 2010; Timms, 1968) and are more generally supported by wider understandings of the limitations of 'technical rationality' (Schon, 1983) and the generation of knowledge in practice.

The overall limited focus and scant elaboration of theory or research found within this study confirms some clear tensions evident, and the existence of such tensions are supported by other studies, as indicated within the literature review. Thus, students in other studies (Knight, 2001; Smith et al., 2015) indicated that they did not regularly link theory to practice within supervision. However, studies regarding student satisfaction with placement, suggest that students highly value the opportunity that the placement gives them to relate theory and practice (Bogo, 2006; Fortune et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2008; Flanagan and Wilson, 2018). In particular, the recent Flanagan and Wilson (2018) study of 100 students (including 1<sup>st</sup> and final year MSW students) found that 'guidance on theory use contributed most strongly to ratings of practice teachers(sic) and levels of learning on placement' (p.572). Further, 78% of students within their study considered their PE to be helpful or very helpful in 'guiding student' navigation of the link between theory and practice' (p.572).

There thus appears to be conflicting research and contradictory findings in relation to placement experiences regarding the integration of theory and

practice. Students welcome and value opportunities to discuss theory-practice connections within the practice placement, and some PEs clearly do this. However, not all PEs pursue or provide such experiences regularly or confidently (as was indicated in this study), and there are some clear and dynamic tensions present. Fenton's differentiation between 'occupational' and organisational 'professionalism (Fenton, 2016) may have some relevance here. Fenton (2016) suggests that conditions of neoliberalism and managerialism, has influenced and affected the concept of professionalism. She suggests that a focus on 'occupational professionalism', imbued with values, service user focus and 'the critical-theoretical underpinnings required to understand social injustice and to work with oppressed and disadvantaged people' (p. 202), has been supplanted by 'organisational professionalism' and prioritisation of organisational and agency procedures and processes. This requires 'little recourse to bodies of theoretical social work knowledge and values' (p.203), characterised as it is by 'accountability to the agency, rather than to the service user, as its priority' (p.203). Considerations such as these may have impacted on the PEs during the supervision sessions.

During the time of data collection of the recorded supervision content within this study (2015 - 2017), three of the Dyads were working within local authorities that had adopted particular practice frameworks, and the proliferation of practice frameworks further within UK social work since that time has been noted (Stanley et al., 2020; Baginsky et al.,2021). The definition of a practice framework is beset by issues of definitional clarity and is considered by Stanley et al., (2020) to be a 'largely misunderstood construct' (p.2) but practice frameworks are expected to 'integrate expertise, skills and theory and act as a guide for practitioners' (Baginsky et al., 2021, p.6). However, the research carried out by Baginsky et al., (2021) suggested that practice frameworks in use (referring to one practice framework in particular) was predicated mainly on the utilisation of prescribed tools. Theoretical underpinnings were not articulated, and 'concepts and principles guided intervention activities rather than driving theory-based activity' (p.9). If practice frameworks are organisationally adopted and used in a manner that

is not concerned with explicit understanding and demonstration of theoretical underpinnings, then this may trouble the place of 'theory' within social work practice and also have a de facto impact on the integration of theory-practice within the placement.

However, presently, it is still the case that the role of the placement in providing opportunities for 'theory – practice connections' is axiomatic within the practice education literature. Both PE and student have clear professional obligations to develop and demonstrate their professional knowledge through the application of research and theory (PCF (2018) (end of last placement/completion, Domain 5 expectations: PEPS (BASW, 2019) Domain B2). The findings of this study suggest that this is not an easy task and the strains and dynamic tensions outlined above may be relevant and underlie the limited presence of 'theory – practice' connection found within this study. This may be due to several reasons affecting both PE and student alike. Both, or either, may lack an interest in pursuing such discussions – 'you won't need any of that theory nonsense' is what Shah (2017) reports s/he was told on her final placement, later asserting that 'frankly, nobody cared or was interested in developing theoretical ideas on placement' (Shah, 2017). There may be a limited understanding of the place or relevance of theory and research within social work practice, or a narrow view of theory that does not extend beyond the 'tokenistic plastering of clichés...using theoretical buzzwords' (Shah, 2017). Trevithick (2012) acknowledges the vast array of knowledge and theories that exist within social work practice – her Knowledge and Skills Framework refers to 'adapted theories' developed or borrowed from other disciplines; 'role and task' theories and 'practice' theories. This may contribute to difficulties in choosing and 'applying' formal theory to work undertaken - Thompson (2010) talks of the possible demoralisation that can arise within practitioners when aspects of applied theories don't 'fit' with service user and practitioner experience, and Smeeton (2017) suggests that theories tend to become 'sledgehammers' that minimise opportunities for wider discussion and analysis. Osmond and O'Connor (2004) studied social worker knowledge use in practice, finding that

practitioners had difficulty in formally articulating the basis for their practice, although their 'knowing' was often implied or tacit in their 'practice language'. However, they assert that this 'practice knowing' needs to be articulated in order that underlying assumptions can be explored and such knowing extended. PE and student may also be afraid of articulating or exposing their own knowledge and theory in use, or they may have a limited understanding of how theory could (or should be) introduced and discussed within supervision. There were opportunities to do this – for example, through discussion of the student portfolio or written work; within the planning, preparation and feedback stages of direct observation; or having such theoretical discussions as a regular agenda item – but generally, these opportunities were not taken.

In particular, the absence of discussion of the student's Critical Analysis of Practice (CAP) was marked within this study, the CAP having been introduced into the student portfolio to specifically evidence a student's ability to critically reflect on their work with a service user, link theory to practice and consider issues of power, oppression and diversity. It was suggested that the CAP be used on an ongoing basis, as the student's work developed with a service user and as the basis for discussion in supervision.

The CAPs requirement in the portfolio was newly introduced in the academic year 2014 - 2015 and there was training given to both PEs and students on their purpose. Their lack of use as envisaged could be due to their newly introduced status within this particular social work programme, but the opportunity they provided (in the words of a PE from another university who had used a similar CAP with a student) for 'an active conversation each week in your (sic) supervision' (Jasper and Field, 2016, p.1646) was clearly lost in this study.

It could be that the lack of use of CAPs and portfolio requirements within this study simply echoes McSweeney's (2017) findings regarding PEs views of their role. All of the data set of 20 PEs in her study concurred in their view

that the students' 'college work' (for example, 'provide advice about college work' or 'assist with college assignments') were the least important aspects of their role. This also speaks to longstanding debates about the nature of the relationship between the academy and the practice placement within social work education and the 'split between the classroom and the field' (Clapton et al., 2008, p.335) that still appears to exist. An additional impact on this study could also be that students were final placement students working with significant levels of complexity, and each Dyad included an onsite PE (deliberately chosen, see Chapter 4). Thus, time constraints and lack of workload relief afforded to the PE role, alongside accountability imperatives, may have impacted. The long history of neglect in relation to recognition and resourcing of the PE role is well documented in the literature (Bell and Webb, 1992; Collins et al., 1992; Moriarty et al., 2010; Bellinger, 2010a and 2010b; Jasper, 2014). This is an issue further elucidated within PE and student interviews.

However, if the placement is to enhance student's 'practice thinking' (Taplin, 2018, p.10), then the structure and content of student supervision cannot be 'theory less'. What is clear from this study is that if theory – practice connections are to be realised rather than assumed within the placement, the subject of 'theory and practice' (or 'practice and theory') has to be foregrounded and at the very least given space and / or be 'named' on the agenda within the supervisory encounter. Notwithstanding the limitations of the theory to practice 'application' model referred to earlier, and the further bolstering of the 'theory/practice divide' (Hicks, 2016; Doel et al., 2002) that may be served, I suggest that unless there is deliberate time and space given to discussion of research and theory – practice connections, then it will not happen, or will be marginalised. The student's academic work or placement portfolio provides ready-made opportunities to do this, and this should be encouraged within the placement.

Of course, it may be that theory – practice connections were discussed in other supervision sessions that were not shared with the researcher. To

address this and to aid complementarity (Maxwell, 2012) students and PEs both commented during interview on this issue, and this will be discussed in Chapters 9 and 10.

### 8.3.2.3 The role of reflection and reflective spaces

The findings in this study confirm and add weight to the contested nature of reflection (Ruch 2009a; Ruch, 2007b; Gould and Taylor, 1996) but also trouble ideas of how it is operationalised within practice and more particularly, within practice supervision and the practice placement setting (White et al.,2006; Ferguson, 2018a; Wilson, 2013).

The importance of reflection on practice is a key tenet in social work, originating within Schon's (1983) challenge to the dominance of 'technical rational' approaches to practice. For Schon (1983), professional practice within conditions of uncertainty and complexity does not adapt readily to the application of rules and knowledge to problems. Rather, professional activity is characterised and served by reflecting 'in' and 'on' action, experiences thus helping to shape thinking and advance the development of practitioner and professional knowledge. Reflective practice is a concept that is acknowledged for 'elusiveness' of definition (Ruch, 2009b; Fook and Gardner, 2013), but remains a term and a concept that has wide traction within social work practice and education. In contemporary practice, the necessity of reflection and reflective practice is the bedrock of the heightened focus and appeal for 'reflective supervision' within social work practice (Munro, 2010; 2011b; Davys and Beddoe, 2010). However, the ubiquity of reflective practice and the pursuit of reflective supervision have been recently challenged in the social work literature. Ferguson's (2018a) ethnographic research found that some social workers could not articulate the emotions they felt immediately after a home visit. He feels that many had 'limited' their reflection 'in action', deliberately 'splitting' reflection and responses to emotional and sensory experiences 'in' action, in order not to be overwhelmed by them. He suggests that whilst this 'non-reflection' state



might be 'healthy' in that moment, it should only be temporary 'and needs to end with supervisors providing containment and enabling critical thinking on what has been experienced' (Ferguson, 2018a, p.42). However, herein lies a further difficulty, noted previously in discussions of the 'managerial capture' of practitioner supervision within this chapter and noted by many (Beddoe, 2010; Bourn and Hafford-Letchfield, 2011), and questioned further by Wilkins (2017). Wilkins (2017) offers a riposte to the 'received wisdom about the value of reflective supervision'(p.164), which he refers to as the 'conceptual bedfellow' (p.165) of reflective practice. Wilkins (2017) suggests that reflective supervision is besieged by 'definitional complexities' that renders it a practice that both places too great a responsibility on the individual supervisor or supervisory dyad and is also hard to achieve. He contends that a 'sizeable proportion of local authority child and family social workers in England do not receive reflective supervision and many never have' (p.166), a view confirmed by the recent publication of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (MacAlister, 2021, p.53). Thus, both the premise and promise of reflective practice is challenged and the ongoing tensions between 'what should be' and 'what is' – 'the fracture between the espoused and the actual' (Patterson, 2019, p.53) - are highlighted.

As Chapters 6 and 7 indicate, there was PE and student activity coded under 'PE - Elicitation/reference to reflection - thoughts, feelings, values and Student - Reflection, discussing practice, thoughts, feelings or values. However, occurrences were low, not present consistently for either PE or Student activity and only within one Dyad (Dyad 10) were occurrence counts for PE and Student present (and high) in each supervision session. I have noted possible code overlap with another category (elicitation or discussion of feelings). I also questioned the usefulness of reflection as a separate coded category in itself, as findings and extracts presented throughout Chapter 6 and 7 do indicate that students reflected upon and discussed their thoughts, feelings and values in relation to their work, often as a feature of student hypothesising, and thus such activities may have been coded under different categories.

However, it was apparent that there was no overt formalised reflection and use or reference to particular tools or frameworks for assisting reflection was not present (with the exception of Dyad 10). This finding does counter many accepted and expected tenets relating to the student placement and student supervision (Beverley and Worsley, 2007; Williams and Rutter, 2019). Students from the social work programmes in this study are required to maintain a 'reflective log', which is not part of the portfolio nor assessed as part of the placement. Students can share extracts from their log with the PE prior to supervision to aid 'reflective discussion' in supervision. One PE, PE8, refers to discussing the student's 'critical reflection' within the supervision session, and used the Kolb model for reflection and discussion in supervision (Kolb, 2015), and PE5 had a regular section on the agenda for '*log, PCF, reflective practice?*', but the findings indicate that these PEs and Dyads were the exception. The indication that students' reflective log was not completed nor used during the placement as a learning tool is supported by Wilson's (2013) study into students' experiences of reflective practice on placement, which also found that many students did not use a reflective learning log, nor did they consider it helpful.

If the broad definition of reflection offered by Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) is adopted – that 'reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations' (p.19) - then many of the discussions within the supervision sessions met this criteria. The dialogue and discussion during many supervision sessions thus did support the notion of 'critical thoughtfulness' (Holland, 2011, p.93) and were 'reflective spaces' (Ruch, 2009a, p.20), even if these discussions were not coded as 'reflection' within the bespoke Coding Frame or were not part of a more deliberate reflective process. However, if we apply Ruch's (2007a; 2009a) four broad levels of reflective practice - technical, practical, process and critical –to the reflective discussions that took place then it is possible to conclude that most of them remained at the level of technical reflection. A few discussions met the practical reflection

level, which Ruch describes as “what did I do and how’ but crucially ‘why?’” (2009a, p.24), but reflection at the process level was very limited indeed. Ruch (2009a) describes this level of reflection as incorporating awareness of the influence that unconscious processes and relationship dynamics have on how practitioners respond to differing situations.

A rare example of reflection at the process level was indicated during the discussion in Dyad 1 regarding a student ‘mistake’. The student here had been working with a group of fostered siblings (preparing them for permanence) and had received a long-awaited letter from a recently adopted sibling (their first letterbox contact). The letter arrived on a day she was due to see one of the siblings (8-year-old boy) at his foster home, so the student printed the letter and took it to the visit and shared it with the child. The student did this without first preparing or discussing with the PE (the PE was on leave, although the anticipated arrival of the letter had been previously discussed in supervision) or the foster carers, and she shared it with the child but whilst the foster carers were out of the room. Although the letter was both anticipated and desired, the child became overwhelmed and highly emotional and broke down in tears. The foster carers were angry and castigated the student for not anticipating the potential emotional effect on the child; for not sharing her intentions with them in order that they could have had further preparatory conversations with him and considered how they might increase the scaffold of support for him during the aftermath. This visit took place on a Friday late afternoon, left all involved emotionally upset, and the student sought telephone support from a senior social worker after the visit (as the PE was on leave). The discussion at the beginning of the supervision session the week after, when the PE had returned from leave, began with the student reflecting deeply on this situation and her ‘*difficult day*’. In the discussion that ensued, the student reflections and comments indicated awareness of how her own felt excitement and relief that the letter had finally arrived had influenced her lack of thought and preparation, and consequently how this had influenced the interactions. During the conversation with the PE, the student further reflected upon whose or what ‘needs’ the (hasty)

sharing was premised upon and she also reflected upon the various levels of 'power' within the situation. The student pondered on the 'power' implicit in the child and the foster parent relationship – for example, what if they had said he was not 'ready' to receive the letter? Whose voice should / could / would she hear or prioritise? - and between the foster parents and her as the social worker – for example, the foster carers live with the child and know his emotional state; could they/ should they be able to dictate when the letter was shared? Was her student status an issue? The student was talking and reflecting on these issues, not as justification for her actions, but rather as an act of deeper thinking, discovery and consideration of broader unconscious 'process' issues.

The final level of critical reflection, identified by Ruch (2009a) but calling upon and allied to wider understandings of reflexivity (Fook and Gardner, 2007; Taylor and White, 2000) is reflection that explores the dynamics of power and the impact of and underlying assumptions and thus moves beyond a process of passive 'looking back'. It 'involves the unsettling and examination of fundamental (socially dominant and often hidden) individually held assumptions about the social world, in order to enable a reworking of these, and associated actions, for changed professional practice' (Fook and Gardner, 2007, p.21). Critical reflection as indicated by this definition was not found in this study.

The findings from this study thus trouble understandings about how reflection is operationalised within the practice placement, contradictory forces are indicated, and some accepted orthodoxies are challenged. Therefore, while the absence of the use of tools and formalised reflective processes is noted, this does not mean that 'reflection' (at some level(s)) is absent or that learning from reflection has not been achieved or indicated. Interestingly, many students in Wilson's study (2013) indicated frustration with the use of reflective tools and 'overly prescriptive and 'routinised' approaches to reflection in supervision, which they felt had inhibited their learning' (p.168), thus perversely upsetting the intention of reflection. On the other hand, as

has been suggested previously in relation to theory-practice connections, interaction within student supervision that has a specified focus or spotlight on 'reflection' (however defined and whether a particular model is used or not), can serve to illuminate areas of thinking, practice and values that might otherwise have remained underexplored, and thought and analysis thus extended.

Therefore, ways to prompt thinking and reflection, using students experience and interventions and in non-formulaic ways are required. The positioning of the theory-practice connection within student supervision and how PEs can enhance their skills in active facilitation, via the use of questioning, has already been stated. A more general reaffirmation of the central importance of experiential learning is also required, positioning reflection as a key element. Kolb's assertion that 'learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb, 2015, p. 49) remains central. It is proposed that a (re)focus on the Experiential Learning Cycle as a foundation for social work student supervision (1984; 2015) can address both the content and process of student supervision and the process of reflection within it, and this will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

#### 8.3.2.4 The place of feedback and review

I have conflated feedback and review here for the purpose of analysis of findings. Both topic coverage within Chapter 6 and analytical coding of supervision content in Chapter 7 indicated that feedback and review of learning and progress were not significant or sustained features of supervision. Potential code overlap within topic coverage in relation to generalised/ informal and ongoing review and (more formalised) Placement Review category was detailed in Chapter 6.

Feedback has been described by Ford and Jones (1987) as 'the process of relaying to a person your observations, impressions, feelings or other evaluative information about that person's behaviour for their use and

learning' (p.74). Formal or informal review of the placement and of ongoing learning would have incorporated feedback of course, and the more detailed PE activity of Feedback (within Chapter 7) indicated that feedback and counts were present. PE feedback in the form of comments about work undertaken by the student and comments from service users and team members were noted in Chapter 6. However, as was also discussed within both Chapter 6 and 7, little time was spent on feedback activities, occurrences were low, and the scope of feedback and review was narrow. As a reminder, the lengthiest and most significant examples of PE feedback were held in Dyad 8 (feedback on the student's reflective log and in a further supervision, on a direct observation) and Dyad 9 (feedback on direct observation). Significantly, both Dyads have the same PE (PE7). In relation to review of student learning or progress, such discussions took place in Dyads 7, 10 and 11 in respect of upcoming Interim Reviews, and in Dyad 5 in relation to reviewing induction processes and progress.

The findings present a conundrum but perhaps also indicate the presence of some hitherto hidden assumptions and uncomfortable realities. Within the practice learning literature, feedback for, and upon, student performance has long been considered an essential element of the learning process (Evans, 1999; Williams and Rutter, 2019), its role and place closely aligned to the process of assessment, and in particular the importance of student self-assessment. Much of the literature is concerned with the principles regarding the giving (and receiving) of feedback by PEs and suggests that feedback needs to be regular, constructive, and offered as an invitation to dialogue (Beverly and Worsley, 2007). Students are expected to reflect on the feedback, using and enhancing their emotional intelligence in the process and use the feedback to assist them in self-assessment (Williams and Rutter, 2019). As numerous studies in the literature review attest, students consider feedback to be particular aid to their learning and development (Bogo, 2006; Baretti, 2009; Cleak et al., 2016; Kourgiantikis et al., 2019; Wilson and Flanagan, 2019), particularly when it is specific, constructive and offered in

the context of a supportive and secure supervisory relationship (Fortune et al., 2001; Lefevre, 2005; Bogo et al., 2007; Heron et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, some literature challenges the received wisdom and smooth progress of feedback and review within the practice placement. Thus, whilst Brodie and William's (2013) small-scale study noted that PEs made significant use of positive feedback, both in relation to directly observed practice and overall progress over the course of the placement, a larger study by Cleak et al., (2016), a cross sectional study of 396 students, found that 21% of students did not receive regular feedback about their progress. How 'feedback' is conceptualised within studies is also a factor. For example, the Wilson and Flanagan (2019) study of 100 social work students in Ireland notes that a majority of students received feedback from their PEs on a daily or weekly basis, but this study also notes the most common aspect of the PE feedback was 'advice on ways of working or how to take the next step' (2019, p.8). In this PhD, such advice would have been coded under 'advice' and not as feedback (particularly as indicated in the above definition from Ford and Jones, 1987). Further, whilst Evans (1999) drew attention to PEs limited positive praise for students, more recent literature has focused upon the PE role within contexts where a student is perceived to be struggling with practice (Bogo et al., 2007; Finch, 2017; Finch and Taylor, 2013) and thus more constructive or challenging feedback is required. This type of feedback is an emotional and difficult task that is sometimes avoided by PEs and whilst acknowledging the 'role strain' (Finch, 2017, p.80) between the elements of the PE role that is often apparent, PEs are advised to have 'courageous conversations' (Beddoe and Davys, 2016, p.193).

Further, the findings in this study indicated little presence of feedback being used in a more evaluative fashion, either with a specific focus on a piece of work undertaken or a direct observation of practice; or feedback as a 'progress marker' within an informal or more formalised review of student progress. Feedback on observation of student progress was also noted as being less frequently available to students in the Wilson and Flanagan (2019)

study. As discussed previously, only two supervision sessions included in depth discussion and feedback after a direct observation of the student's practice (Dyads 8 and 9). There was 'observation talk' in other supervision sessions across the data set, but these were brief mentions in relation to planning and arrangements and/ or completion of the template and who was to send, or had sent, which completed 'bits' or 'boxes' of the template to the other. Only one Dyad, Dyad 8 again, spent time planning an observation (12 minutes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervision session), and discussing the service user/scenario with whom the student would be observed and spending some time on student anxieties about the observation.

The omission of feedback after a direct observation of practice was a particular surprise, and I spent time rereading some transcripts and checking coding to see if I had missed any significant discussions. Over the course of the 11 placements (each of 100 days) each PE would have been the observer on at least 22 occasions, and it is possible that feedback on direct observations – or other forms of more evaluative feedback – took place in other supervision sessions and these were not recorded or sent to the researcher. I suggest however, that the absence of discussion, feedback and overall focus on direct observation of practice indicated a notable pattern of omission within the findings.

This pattern points to several interesting and concurrent paradoxes. Firstly, direct observation of practice has been an unassailable feature of the student practice placement since it was first made a requirement under the Diploma in Social Work in 1989 (Neal and Regan, 2016; Scrine, 1989). The direct observation of (live) student practice with service users is said to 'occupy a pivotal role in social work education as a teaching, learning and assessment intervention' (Neal and Regan, 2016, p.161). Ruch and Holmes (2015) further assert, 'direct observation is the optimal method for assessing professional skills because it is closest to 'real practice'' (p.38). Scholars from other countries lament that direct (live) observation of practice is not routinised in the practice placement (as it is in the UK) and is not used as



part of a regular pattern of 'learning activities' within placement (Smith et al., 2015; Bogo et al., 2011).

At the same time, there have been issues raised in relation to the operationalisation of direct observation of practice. For example, direct observation of practice can cause anxiety and concern for students if not properly and carefully integrated into the placement and discussed with students openly and at an early stage (Doel et al., 1996; Williams and Rutter, 2019). The potential for assessor bias and leniency (when observations are carried out by those who have a pre-existing relationship with the student, such as a PE or supervisor) has been noted (Bogo et al., 2011; Domakin and Forrester, 2018). It has also been argued that the pedagogic intent and the quality of feedback is affected by the professional qualification (such as PE status) of the observer (Neal and Regan, 2016). Several (anecdotally and experientially based) concerns have also been raised by the author of this study (Jasper, 2017), suggesting that direct observation is not used as a teaching and learning tool to the fullest extent, and thus wider areas of student learning and information contributing to the PE assessment is not mined fully. The collaborative approach to direct observation developed by Kowproska et al., (1999), involving joint planning prior to the observation and dialogue, feedback and reflection on knowledge, skills, and values after the observation, both infuses PE training and provides the basis for direct observation templates. A more recent model proposed by Davys and Beddoe (2015; 2018) incorporates many of the same elements as the Kowproska et al., (1999) model, focussing on collaboration and with feedback ('the learning') at its heart. Within this study, the limited place of feedback and the lack of focus and discussion relating to student direct of observation suggests that the promise and use of either (or any) model was not realised.

Paradoxically however, within qualified contemporary practice there is an increasing focus on direct observation of practice, both 'real' (live) and 'simulated'. Thus, within field education in North America, Bogo and colleagues (Bogo et al., 2014; Bogo et al., 2011; Bogo et al., 2013) have

developed and researched the use of 'OSCE' (Objective Structured Clinical Examination) for social work practice, using simulated activities and interviews to observe and rate student practice. An essential component of the OSCE process is the reflective discussion post observation, considered essential for the assessment of 'meta competence' (Bogo et al., 2014, p. 6). The concept of 'meta competence' is contrasted to 'procedural competence' (p.6), 'meta competence' referring to 'higher order, overarching qualities and abilities of a conceptual, interpersonal and personal/professional nature. This includes students' cognitive, critical and self-reflective capacities (Bogo et al., 2014, p.6). In this model, the feedback from the observer must encourage this critical reflection and thus feedback and reflection must extend beyond a sole focus on 'procedural competence'.

Within contemporary qualified practice in England, there is also an enhanced focus on simulated observations of practice, but also on live observation of practice. Observations of Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) practice with service users are required within the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and specific and helpful guidance on such observations in post Covid and virtual environments has recently been published (Skills for Care, 2021). The Post-Qualifying Standards for Social Work Practice Supervisors in Adult Social Care (DHSC, 2018) require supervisors to 'make specific use of practice observation...to reflect on and improve the social worker's practice' (p.9). Further, within the National Assessment and Accreditation Scheme (NAAS) (DfE, 2019) children and family practitioners and supervisors, simulated observations of practice – followed by opportunities for written reflection and for reflective discussion with an observer – are an essential element. For children and family practice, these developments sit alongside an increasing portfolio of research studies and evaluation reports, which focus upon practice skills and the use of observational methods of social worker practice as a key component (Forrester et al., 2020; Ferguson, 2018b; Forrester et al., 2017). However, Wilkins and Antonopoulou (2017) have noted difficulties with normalising direct observation within social work practice and for these to be used 'as the

basis for skills-based feedback and development' (p.839). In their study, observers were nervous and reluctant to take on the observer role (even with training) and social workers were also reluctant to be observed in their practice and home visits 'as a distinctive activity with the aim of learning and development' (p.841).

The findings within this study add weight to the research and issues noted above and suggest that, at the very least, the 'pivotal role' (Neal and Regan, 2016, p.161) of direct observation within the practice placement cannot be assumed. Further, a clear antinomy of practice is indicated. The findings challenge the enduring perception of direct observation as a helpful teaching and learning tool within the practice placement yet are nestled within a wider direction of travel for qualified practice that promotes the utility of observation of direct practice. I argue that a refocus on the purpose and practice of direct observation within the practice placement is required. Thus, the place of direct observation within the placement needs to move beyond viewing them as 'snapshots of practice' (Jasper, 2017), an aspect of the placement that is tolerated and beleaguered by template and 'box filling'. Rather, a refocus (and reminder) on the use of direct observation to discuss and deliberate practice and harness wider theoretical, conceptual understandings of practice that addresses 'meta competence' (Bogo et al., 2014) is required.

#### 8.3.2.5 Emotions and the emotional space

Emotions are an intrinsic feature of social work practice, their wide range, presence, and impact acknowledged throughout the profession (Ingram, 2013; Grant et al., 2014; O'Connor, 2020). Social workers are expected to be emotionally aware, have the capacity to regulate their emotions and develop and sustain emotional resilience. The PCF (BASW, 2019) directs that social work students (final placement) are able to 'with support, take steps to manage and promote (their) own safety, health, well-being, self-care and emotional resilience'. However, the emotional demands emanating from work with vulnerable people, sometimes in highly fraught or complex situations, is

not always adequately acknowledged within day-to-day practice (Ruch, 2012; Munro, 2011b). Ingram (2013) refers to this as the 'uneasy alliance' (p.8) between technicist approaches to practice and the understanding and legitimisation of emotional knowledge and skill. Such dissonances find further expression within the practice placement and the PE/student relationship as a site of additional emotional intricacies. For example, the PE/student relationship is intrinsically linked to power and authority differentials, related in part to the PE assessment function, and this can cause anxiety or a sense of vulnerability in students and a reluctance to voice emotion or uncertainty (Barlow and Hall, 2007; Litvack et al., 2010). For PEs, their role in assessment, allied to the supportive and educational function can also cause 'role strain' as previously suggested (Finch and Taylor, 2013; Finch, 2017). The educational focus of the placement can invoke student (or PE) past feelings of educational failure or inadequacy and learning can be 'resisted' by students for a number of reasons (Beverley and Worsley, p.2007, p.178; Finch, 2017). For these reasons, the important role of the supervisory relationship in providing support and space for the 'safe expression of emotions' (Davys and Beddoe, 2010, p.114) and an 'accessible space' (Dore, 2019, p.853) is widely acknowledged and promoted. It has been suggested that the 'field instructor' relationship can serve as 'either a risk or a protective factor...the absence of a potentially helpful person appeared to exacerbate students' negative reactions, whereas the presence of a caring field instructor appeared to soften or diminish the students' discomfort and distress' (Litvack et al., 2010, p.237).

In relation to the presence of emotions, coded supervision content (Chapter 7) suggested emotions were present and referenced in various ways. Thus, students often volunteered emotional responses to practice— e.g., StC talking about her work with a homeless 16year old or StD talking about a young person and her relationship with professionals. Alternatively, PEs introduced discussion of recent issues or difficulties experienced by the student (see Extract V and Extract W, Chapter 7) which clearly involved charged emotional issues. At other times, students implicitly and explicitly

acknowledged the emotional states of service users, discussing their situations with compassion and empathy (see Extracts N, O, P, Chapter 7). Although coding counts for both PEs and students were low in these activities, their presence in most supervision sessions suggested that there existed an implicit 'accessible space' (Dore ,2019, p.853) that allowed for the expression of emotions.

More worrying concerns arise where neither PE nor student had any counted activity under elicitation or discussion of feelings or emotions (Dyads 2 and 11) and where the emotional impact of the work was not acknowledged or explored or student feelings of inadequacies not discussed (Dyads 6 and 7 and Chapter 7, Extracts T and U). I have noted (within Chapter 7) the 'curious absence of emotion' in relation to the exchange in Extract K, Dyad 6. This was very procedurally led by the PE, and as the student reeled off a list of the things affecting a 16-year-old service user - bullying; being kidnapped; having PTSD; being low and isolated – the PEs response was 'okay' and then 'oh dear' and then inviting the student to move on' *so, who else have you got?* 'The same PE responded in a similar fashion during Extract U (Chapter 7) and there was no discussion prompted after the student update (about a young man who self-harms, cuts and burns himself, has had suicidal thoughts, has a plan to end his life and has low mood and depression). Barlow and Hall (2007) note that all of the field instructors in their study (n=35) agreed that they can underestimate the emotional impact of 'client pain' on students, one field instructor reflecting on 'becoming "comfortable with the uncomfortable"' in the course of her work, and sometimes being 'complacent about its emotional impact' (p. 403). This concept of becoming 'comfortable with the uncomfortable' may have affected the dynamics of Dyads 6 and 7, both PE and student becoming habituated to the work and the 'routine' nature of working with highly vulnerable and complex young people with mental health issues. This lack of emotion talk or reference to the emotional impact of the work also evokes other studies into practitioner supervision (Wilkins et al., 2017; Wilkins and Jones, 2018) where a similar 'general absence of emotions' (Wilkins et. al., 2017, p.946) is noted.

To counter this tendency, Nelsen's (1974) study suggests that PE direct elicitation of student feelings is essential (but within a context of an emotionally supportive supervisory relationship) as it can act as an invitation to student volunteering of emotions. Nelsen (1974) suggests that 'students' volunteering of feelings often appeared after FIs had elicited feelings and had offered support, suggesting that students gained courage for such exposure following the FIs affirmation of interest and benign intentions' (p.153). This would suggest that PEs need to seriously consider their role and confidence in 'inviting' emotions into the supervisory encounter, and as extracts in Chapter 7 indicate, some PEs (PEs 3,7 and 8) were confident in this endeavour.

Within the context of the practice placement, I was curious and troubled by the absence of emotional response of the PE within Dyads 6 and 7 and returned to the coded supervision sessions from those dyads. The coding sheet for each supervision noted the PE routinely spent between 2 - 4 minutes at the start of each session with a 'check in', which attended to student feelings, how things were going, and if there were any issues in or outside the placement that needed discussing. This accords with the findings from the Wilkins et al., (2017) study, and their observation that the absence of emotions did not imply that 'managers were uncaring. In almost all recordings, 'managers 'check in' at the start, asking how the worker is, how they are coping with their work and so on. However, once the discussion focused on particular families, emotional references were largely absent although managers did sometimes ask how the social worker was feeling' (Wilkins et al., 2017, p.946).

Unfortunately, of the 11 Dyads, the only two students who did not respond to my request for an interview, were the two students with PE6 as their PE, StF (Dyad 6) and StG (Dyad 7) and their views and experiences are therefore missing from this study.

#### 8. 4 Content of supervisory written records

As discussed in Chapter 5, although written and anonymised supervision records were requested from all Dyads participating in the study, only four Dyads sent written supervision records, and 7 supervision records were analysed overall (see Table B).

The 7 records were initially analysed separately, and the documentary analysis undertaken considered both the content and focus of the records and if and how the written record differed from the audio recorded and transcribed supervision session. Areas of content and focus and differences with the transcribed supervision session are discussed below.

##### 8.4.1 Predominance of work with service users

The predominance of work with service users was a key feature of the content of the records (with the exception of the 2 supervision records from Dyad 9, which will be discussed later). However, the focus of the work with service users differed, as did the depth and detail of the notes and / or actions recorded.

Thus, the focus of the records from Dyads 4 and 10 (both statutory placement settings), were on actions and tasks to be completed in relation to service users. These were records of supervision sessions where between 3 and 6 service users had been discussed (see Appendix 7: Supervision Coding: All Dyads).

The supervision record from Dyad 4, Supervision 2, was one side of A4, not using a proforma and included single line and very short descriptive actions to be undertaken under each service user name , such as '*SU1, professional meeting needs to be organised*' and '*SU6 - personal budget, StD to check if it went through*'. These actions align with the discussion and actions identified in the transcription of that 2nd supervision session and the 21 minute discussion of 6 service users (Appendix 7: Supervision Coding: All Dyads).

However, whilst these noted actions describe the outcome of the discussion within the supervision session, they do not do justice to some of the nuanced and exploratory discussion within the session and other areas of risk and need identified during the session. For example, in relation to the action of *'SU6 - personal budget, StD to check if it went through'*, this was the first issue mentioned during the supervisory discussion, but the discussion then explored risk and safeguarding issues in relation to this young person. His position as a newly arrived young and trusting refugee who spends a lot of time in a particular part of the city was considered by StDs to suggest a need to be *'aware... of how people are groomed, especially young people, young males in particular, in that area'*. The PE agreed that *'ongoing work needs to continue'* with SU6 in this regard; however, the nuanced understanding and detail of this ongoing work is not reflected within the supervision record.

In contrast, the 3 records received from Dyad 10 were longer in length (3 to 4 pages of A4) and although they shared a similarity in the focus on actions to be undertaken with individual service users, they also included increased detail and depth. Thus, these records included notes about wider discussions held during the supervisory discussions; notes about the situation of the service user or included the reasoning behind decisions and actions proposed. For example, Supervision 1 records that for one service user *'StJ attending Transition meeting tomorrow. Considered what to expect in the meeting and StJ considered what the potential role for adult care might be. Discussed options around social opportunities; eligibility and building independence using informal /existing support'*. These records again align with the details of the supervisory discussions heard on the audio recordings and give a much fuller flavour of both actions and how they relate to discussions and thinking through of practice. As has been discussed previously in this chapter and in Chapters 6 and 7, the content of supervisory discussions in Dyad 10 have indicated high counts of reflection, PE and student responsiveness, and the skills of PE8 in questioning; eliciting emotion and feelings and encouraging reflection and 'values talk' (for example, see [Extract M](#) and [Extract X](#), Chapter 7). The 3 records from Dyad



10 reflect the depth and range of content within the supervisory discussions to a greater degree than the record from Dyad 4.

The one record received from Dyad 6 differed completely from those received from Dyads 4 and 10 in that they recorded one sentence and very short updates of work with individual service users, and only one record of actions noted (*SU6: plans for StF to do a positive traits list with SU6*). In this record, 11 service users were discussed and updates were recorded, such as *'SU1: doing well, struggling with social phobia; SU2: still struggling with break up, but is engaging and StF after social worker handed over'*. Although this is not a record that corresponds with a recorded and transcribed supervision session, I have noted in Chapter 6 that this Dyad consistently discussed the most service users in each supervision session and the highest number of service users overall (18 service users discussed in Supervision 2). I have also noted elsewhere (see Chapter 7: Extract K) that PE6 asked a high number of 'process type' questions during the supervision sessions and the sessions consisted mainly of student responses and updates of work undertaken. Thus, this supervision record would appear consistent with the content of the other supervision sessions received and transcribed.

The exception to the predominant focus on work with service users were the two records provided by Dyad 9. These records are one side of A4 and whilst some actions are recorded, e.g. *'Stl aims to close 2 cases by the end of this week'*, these are not recorded as actions against individual service users or prompted by discussions about individual service users. Rather the areas of 'items discussed' on the proforma place a greater focus on student development - e.g. *'discussed Stl's analytical writing for the direct observation'* and an 'action' *'Stl to work on this area by talking about her feelings, her work, rather than the service user'*. Again, these two records are consistent with the content of the transcribed supervision sessions; as noted previously in Chapters 6 and 7, this Dyad 9 discussed the lowest number of service users across the data set but spent the most amount of time on

feedback after a direct observation. Previously within this chapter (and Chapter 7) I have also noted PE7's skillful prompting of discussion within supervision and the pedagogical intent and focus of the supervision sessions this suggested (Chapter 7: Extract S). The two records from this Dyad 9 appear to be reflective of this focus.

#### 8.4.2 The format of the records

It is evident from the seven records that, for most, the format of the record has been devised or adapted to reflect that it is a record relating to a student placement. Whilst the two records from Dyad 9 have only two columns (Items/ areas discussed and Actions agreed/comments) the other records include additional areas such as: Check in; review of evidence towards meeting assessment criteria (Dyad 6); Development needs: skills/training/learning; Academic work/PCF (Dyad 10) and Theory discussion (Dyad 4). Whilst the record from Dyad 6 is skimpy in areas and only note actions completed (e.g. *Direct observation: two booked; Assignments: handed in today*), the records from Dyad 10 include lengthier completion of these student related additional or adapted areas. Thus, records from Dyad 10 include written notes on the student's reflections on their CAP and the discussion in supervision; discussions regarding the student's academic Case Study and a discussion about safeguarding. This again is consistent with the content and focus of the transcribed supervisory discussions within Dyad 10.

#### 8.5 Analysis of the supervisory written records

Within the practice learning literature there is a significant dearth of discussion regarding the written recording of student supervision sessions, and neither earlier texts (Butler and Elliott, 1985; Shardlow and Doel 1996; Danbury, 1979; Ford and Jones, 1987) nor more recent texts discuss this in any detail. Within the more recent texts, reference is made to 'practical arrangements' (Showell Nicholas and Kerr, 2015, p.21; Williams and Rutter, 2019, p.150; Field et al., 2016, p.41) and responsibilities for recording and

sharing supervision notes and records between PE and student, but there is nothing written about what should be recorded or included in placement supervisory records. Further, there is little written on the purpose and function of these supervisory notes or records, and this does not extend beyond reference to rudimentary accountability or assessment purposes. So, Williams and Rutter (2019) note the importance of recording discussion of concerns about student practice and the recording of supervisory discussions as a source of 'evidence' for the assessment of the student (Williams and Rutter, 2019; Field et al., 2016).

This absence is reflected within the records received from the Dyads in this study. If PEs or students are not aware of the purpose, expected form or function of student placement supervisory records then it is little surprise that there a lack of uniformity and little similarity in the written records sent.

There is some significant contrast between the records /sets of records sent by the participants in this study and overall, this contrast is consistent with the content and analysis of the recorded and transcribed supervision sessions from these (see Chapters 6 and 7) and the preceding analysis of the data within this chapter. For example, Dyad 10 had some of the most reflective, wide ranging and discursive discussions during supervision and these discussions are reflected in the supervisory records. Similarly, with Dyad 9, the focus of supervisory sessions centred more closely on student learning and extrapolating their learning, with the discussion of the student's work with one or two service users providing the springboard for this, and the records sent reflect this. The single line update for each service user in the record from Dyad 6 appears consistent with the content and focus of supervision sessions within this dyad, wherein supervision sessions were dominated by high counts of PE direct questioning and student description and update of their case work and thus even the (surprising ?) absence of agreed actions is consistent with the content of the sessions.

Whilst the format of the seven records acknowledge the status and different nature of the student placement to a degree, there is predominance within the records of recording of work with service users (whether update or agreed future actions or both). This again is consistent with the focus of the supervision sessions, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 and previously analysed in this chapter. This predominance is further suggestive of PE accountability concerns, also discussed in this chapter. Such accountability imperatives are replicated within qualified practice and the focus upon formal written supervisory records for accountability purposes is echoed within many statutory and voluntary agency supervision policies (Wilkins, 2017b; Wilkins et al., 2018a). In particular, the function of supervisory records as a repository of recorded and agreed actions and to meet audit demands in relation to record keeping is highlighted, particularly within statutory children's services (Wilkins et al., 2018a).

In the only study available, Wilkins et al., (2018a) analysed ten pairs of supervision audio recordings and their corresponding written records, the authors noting that these were 'fortuitously' identified from within a wider study encompassing 200 written records and 35 audio recordings of supervision, thereby contributing to a 'much richer sub-set of data than we had initially anticipated' (p.95). The suggestions and contentions within the Wilkins et al., (2018a) study have significance for many of the findings in this study, both in relation to the content of supervision and to the supervisory records analysed. Thus, Wilkins et al., (2018a) note that the supervisory records often had a narrow focus on actions and that panoramic discussions where there had been 'probing' and 'pondering' and where reflection and analysis were present were often not recorded. They suggest that the activity of supervision, and the layers of complexity and nuance imbued within it, 'does not lend itself well to the written word' (p.97). The study's concluding hypothesis is that the intended or expected audience (particularly Ofsted Inspectors and senior managers) and the need to provide 'evidence of management oversight' (p.105) influenced the content and nature of the supervisor's written record.

This cautionary reminder, that documents such as written supervision records need to be analysed within the context in which they were produced and with the implied readership in mind, aligns with the ontologically realist and epistemological constructivist philosophical approach of subtle realism pertaining to this study. Silverman (2014) also contends that such content analysis of documentary data is not an exercise in making judgments according to 'apparently objective standards' (p.280) but aims to analyse how such records 'work to achieve particular effects - to identify the elements used and the functions these play' (p.280). The term 'supervision record' implies an objective quality, and Silverman's reminder (2014) of the subjective and impartial nature of records is served well by Wilkins et al., (2018a) suggestion that the term 'reflective impressions' (p.97) rather than 'record' might be a more accurate term to apply to written supervision discussions. This further indicates the relevance and impact of language and terminology in establishing perimeters of understanding. For example, writing in 1996, Shardlow and Doel deliberately use the term 'practice tutorial' (p.106) to describe the regular and formalised meeting between PE and student, rather than the term 'practice supervision'. They suggest the latter connotes managerial accountability concerns, whereas 'practice tutorial' 'firmly locates this event within the orbit of teaching, by using language conventionally associated with learning' (p.106). This focus on the educational purpose of supervision underpins the analysis throughout this chapter although, lamentably, the term 'practice tutorial' is not a term used within contemporary practice learning.

Given the few records analysed in this study; their contrasting content and nature, and the lack of theoretical knowledge or literature regarding the required purpose or function of student supervisory records and their intended audience, it is difficult to fully analyse their function and how and why they strove to achieve effects in their written records. Further and more detailed clarificatory understanding and research is needed into the purpose

and function of student supervision records as an aid to invigorating the woeful knowledge base in this area.

#### 8.6 The educative (re) purposing of student supervision – the role of Experiential Learning

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the analysis of the findings from topic coverage and analytical coding of supervision activities is predicated on the educative function and purpose of student supervision. Within the case work framing of supervision, the construct of case work as gateway has been offered and its viability demonstrated. Dialogue and discursive exchange - the 'zigging and zagging' (Kadushin and Harkness, 2014, p.132) between PE and student - enabled exploration and wider 'conceptualisation of practice' (Bogo et al.,2013, p.262), indicating both pedagogical intent and student learning. However, in order that case work discussion does not founder on the bedrock of managerialism, and to realise the pedagogical purpose of student supervision, a refocus and educative (re) purposing of student supervision is required. The enabling and facilitative function of the PE role needs to be purposefully aligned with the content and process of student supervision. Within this chapter, suggestions have been made as follows:

- PEs need to consider the creation and delivery of a teaching and learning programme for the placement, or for aspects of the programme and in relation to particular learning opportunities
- Widen PEs active facilitation skills through the expansion of their questioning repertoire
- Foreground consideration of 'theory and practice' connection within the supervisory encounter; use of tools and models can be explored
- Consider ways to prompt thinking and reflection that ask questions beyond self and / or technical reflection
- Reassert the use of direct observation as a primary tool for learning and assessment and as a deliberate location for feedback
- Promote and encourage emotional thinking within supervision

- Consider the function and purpose of written supervisory records within the practice placement

It is proposed that this educative (re) purposing of student supervision is ably assisted by a (re) focus on the role of experiential learning and in particular, the use of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984; 2015).

### 8.6.1 Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb describes learning as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). The role of experiential learning and the Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) is well documented in both the practice education and supervisory literature. Kolb (2015) premises his experiential learning theory on the 'foundational scholars' of learning (p.55) such as Dewey, Lewin and Piaget, but also acknowledges the influence of 'liminal scholars' such as Vygotsky and Freire on the theory. All of these scholars and the theories of learning they espouse, place subjective experiencing at the heart of the learning process and Kolb suggests they share similar characteristics, which have influenced the development of his Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). Briefly, Kolb's ELT incorporates the following elements:

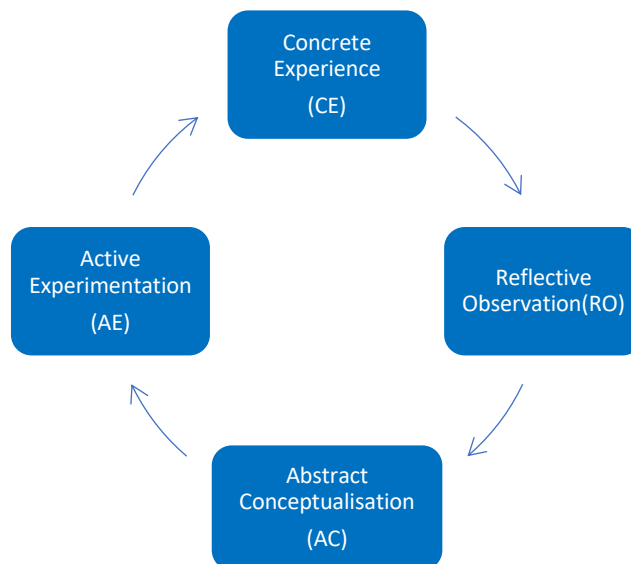
1. Learning is best conceived as a process rather than an outcome. Ideas are not fixed but are formed and reformed through experience. This contrasts both with what Freire termed the 'banking concept of education' where ideas are deposited in learners' heads' (Kolb, 2015, p.38), as well as behaviourist approaches to education.
2. Learning is thus not about 'content' but is a continuous, adaptive process, grounded in experience – 'knowledge is continuously derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner' (Kolb, 2015, p.38). Most importantly, the 'simple perception of experience is not sufficient for learning; something must be done with it' (p.113).
3. The process of learning is a process imbued with conflict and tension. The four modes of experiential learning and the Experiential Learning

Cycle (ELC) - Concrete Experience; Reflective Observation; Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation – exist in dialectical tension with each other and thus learning is a 'holistic adaptive process' (Kolb, 2015, p.84).

However, the acknowledgement of dialectical opposition and tension implicit within the ELC is important and is an area of discussion that has not been developed widely within the practice education or supervisory literature.

Diagram 8.1 represents the Kolb ELC as usually illustrated and used within the literature:

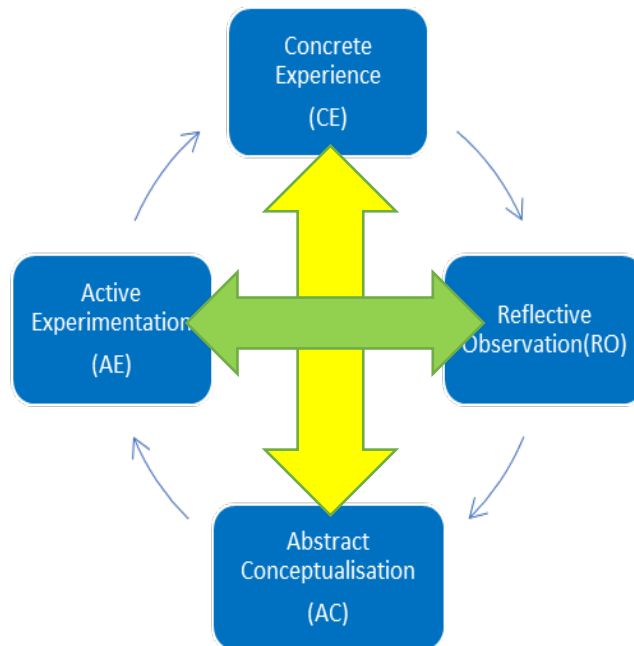
Diagram 8.1: Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 2015)





However, more detailed reading of the theory highlights Kolb's attention both to the dynamic nature of experience, but also to the two dimensions of the learning process. He refers to these dimensions as the 'two dialectically related dimensions of *grasping experience* via concrete experience and abstract conceptualisation and *transforming experience* via active experimentation and reflective observation' (Kolb, 2015, p.98), as illustrated in Diagram 8.2:



Diagram 8.2: Kolb's ELC (2015) and dialectically opposing dimensions



*Grasping experience*  and *Transforming experience* 

Thus, the ELC explicitly acknowledges the tensions between different abilities required for learning, suggesting 'new knowledge, skills, or attitudes are achieved through confrontation between four modes of experiential learning' (p. 80). In particular, the tensions represented by the 'polar opposites' (p.80) within the two primary dimensions of learning – that of 'grasping' experience and 'transforming' it - are signposted:

The first dimension represents the concrete experiencing of events at one end and abstract conceptualising at the other. The other dimension has active experimentation at one extreme and reflective observation at the other. Thus, in the process of learning, one moves in varying degrees from actor to observer, and from specific involvement to general analytic detachment (Kolb, 2015, p.81).

Kolb (2015) refutes critiques that the ELC is an oversimplified and sequential model although he does identify that the cycle is an 'idealised learning cycle where the learner 'touches all the bases''(p.51). Indeed, whilst there is a simplicity to the model – and this becomes clearer when Kolb (2015) explains the cycle as enabling a 'holistic process of learning and development that includes experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting' (p.57) – the dialectical tension between the experiential and the conceptual – remains resolutely at the heart of the Experiential Learning Cycle. It is my view that this element of Kolb's ELC – the tension, contrast, oppositional pulls and dialectical relationship between the experiential and the conceptual – needs to be resurrected and foregrounded and has particular relevance to the findings of this study, and the practice placement overall.

#### 8.6.2 Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle –re(focus) on application in student supervision

Within practitioner supervision, the Experiential Learning Cycle is the basis for the well-known 'Supervision Cycle' (Morrison, 2005; Morrison and Wonnacott, 2010; Wonnacott, 2012). The four elements of the Experiential Learning Cycle – that of Concrete Experience; Reflective Observation; Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation – are incorporated into the Supervision Cycle. The practitioner (or student) recalls a practice experience and, put simply, is encouraged to "tell the story"; to reflect; to analyse and understand; and to identify further goals and plans' (Field et al., 2016, p.92). However, the limited use of Kolb's cycle and the tendency of the "short circuit" or 'quick fix" (Wonnacott, 2012, p.56; Wilkins et al., 2017) has been identified (Wonnacott, 2012; Wilkins et al., 2017). As studies referred to within this chapter have indicated (Wilkins et al., 2017; Wilkins and Jones, 2018), the 'quick fix' is the process whereby the update and telling of the story (the experience) is swiftly followed by plans and action (Active Experimentation) and space for reflection, analysis or critical thinking is minimised.

Within practice education, the Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle has been adapted for use in student supervision - for example, the Integration of Theory and Practice (ITP) Loop Model (Bogo and Vayda, 1998; Bogo, 2010) and the Reflective Learning Model, developed by Davys and Beddoe (2009). These models share a common understanding that reflection is necessary for learning and propose that an activity or event needs to be recalled; attention paid to exploration of feelings, impact, and implications (Davys and Beddoe, 2009) and for there to be opportunities for 'linkage' (Bogo, 2010, p.46) to theories and knowledge.

However, the findings from the recorded supervision sessions within this study and the dialectical tensions inferred by the case work focus and potential 'managerial capture' of student supervision, suggests that Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (2015) and its application to student supervision, needs revisiting and reasserting. An educative (re)purposing of student supervision is required, formulating the supervisory encounter as one that pays attention to the dialectical tensions present and purposefully provides space for discussion and deliberation of experiential, reflective and conceptual issues. This may provide opportunity for case work within student supervision as 'gateway' to be realised and for wider student experience to thus be both 'grasped' and 'transformed'.

### 8.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the analysis of the synthesised findings from the coded supervision sessions presented in Chapter 6 (Topic Coverage) and Chapter 7 (Analytical coding of PE and student activities), with additional content analysis of the 7 written supervision records received. The situated practice of student placement supervision has been explored and the notion of case work discussion and its predominance in supervision discussion has been interrogated. The construct of discussion of case work as 'gateway' to wider discussions and explorations within supervision has been proposed. To enact and facilitate this 'gateway', the educative repurposing of supervision is required (based on an understanding of Kolb and experiential

learning) and PEs understanding of their role in the facilitation of student learning needs to be understood and promoted within placement supervision. Specific suggestions have been made regarding what the features of an educative repurposing of supervision could entail.

## Chapter 9 **The Student Interviews: perspectives on placement supervision**

### 9.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the analysis and themes arising from the student interviews, using Template Analysis (TA) (King, 2012).

After the student placements had ended and after the student's final mark was confirmed at the Examination Board, all students were contacted by email and invited for an interview. Nine of the eleven students responded and were interviewed. With eight of these students, face-to-face interviews took place at the university, in a private room, and one phone interview took place (StE). Two students, StF (from Dyad 6) and StG from (Dyad 7) did not respond, thus they were not interviewed for this study. These were students with the same PE (PE6). The student Interview schedule developed for use in the interviews can be found in Appendix 6.

The interviews lasted for approximately one hour, except for the telephone interview (StE) which lasted for 48 minutes. The Student interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher transcribed four of the interviews and a transcription service transcribed five of the recorded interviews. NVIVO 11 Pro was used to code the data.

Where I have included quotations from participants, I have always used the term 'she' when referring to the PE. Two of the nine PEs were male, but identification of them as such would jeopardise anonymisation.

Analysis will follow the presentation of the themes, and this will include reference to the findings and analysis of the coded supervision sessions, where appropriate.

## 9.2 Using Template Analysis and development of the Coding Template for the Student Interviews

As outlined in Chapter 5, the method used to analyse the data from the student semi structured interviews was Template Analysis (TA)(King, 2012). This involved a series of steps, including familiarisation with the data, firstly reading and re reading the transcribed interviews a number of times. Then, the themes and Coding Template was developed and refined over a number of further steps, resulting in the Final Coding Template. In this study, the development of the themes from the student interviews resulting in the Final Coding Template are indicated in tables as follows:

Table 9.1 Initial Coding Template

Table 9.2 First Revised Coding Template

Table 9.3 Final Coding Template

As Chapter 5 outlines, TA allows the researcher to identify apriori themes and these were identified on the Initial Coding Template – see Table 9.1. These apriori themes had influenced the creation of the interview schedule and were based on my conceptual understandings of the elements of student supervision. Once apriori themes are established, they are then applied to a sub section of data, coding to these themes and adding new ones or revising the codes, in an iterative process. TA also allows for ‘integrative themes’ to be identified, themes that ‘cut across the main themes’ (King, 2012, p.432). See Chapter 5 for fuller discussion.

Table 9.1. Initial Coding Template

Initial Coding Template			
1	PE and student relationship	1.1	Qualities in the PE
		1.2	How supervision makes the student feel

2	Use of supervision	2.1	Getting things right
		2.2	Advice
		2.3	Not just practice
3	Being assessed	3.1	The role of the PE
4	Prepared for practice	4.1	Expectations

Following the steps of TA, this Initial Coding Template, whilst still tentative, was applied to two student interview scripts, using NVIVO 11 to code, using parent and child nodes. This process identified a further theme and some sub themes, and the Initial Coding Template was modified – see [Table 9.2](#) for the First Revised Coding Template.

Table 9.2. First Revised Coding Template

First Revised Coding Template			
1	PE and student relationship	1.1	Qualities in the PE
		1.2	How supervision makes the student feel
		1.3	PE Skills
		1.4	Reciprocity in the relationship
2	Use of supervision	2.1	Doing things right
		2.2	Advice
		2.3	Support
		2.4	Not just practice
		2.5	Theory to practice
3	Being assessed	3.1	The role of the PE
4	Prepared for practice	4.1	Confidence
		4.2	Ability to challenge
5	Perspective on supervision	5.1	First placement

This template was applied to a further two interviews and was revised further into the Final Coding Template, found in [Table 9.3](#). This Final Coding Template was then applied to all interviews.

Table 9.3 Final Coding Template

Final Coding Template			
1	PE and student relationship	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4	How supervision made the student feel Qualities in the PE PE Skills Reciprocity in the relationship
2	Use of supervision	2.1 2.2 2.3 2.4 2.5	Doing things right Advice Support Not just practice Theory to practice
3	Being assessed and the role of the PE		
4	Perspectives on supervision	4.1 4.2	First placement - what was different? Prepared for practice 4.2.1 Confidence 4.2.2 Prepared for challenge
5	Team environment	Integrative theme	

The themes and sub themes in the Final Coding Template are outlined below.



## 9.3 Student interview themes and sub themes

### 9.3.1 PE and student relationship

#### 9.3.1.1 How supervision made the student feel

Students commented on how they felt about supervision and how they felt about the PE. Eight of the nine students made very positive comments about their supervision or their placement, as the following extracts suggest:

**StH:** *I wouldn't have got through placement without supervision, I really wouldn't.*

**StE:** *It really opened my eyes to what supervision was and it was very important to PE, supervision, which then became important to me,... I was like, oh it's alright, I have supervision tomorrow, where's before I never felt like that and it made me feel looked after (laugh), rather than being just left to it, so yeah, it felt good.*

Students referred to a number of feelings in relation to their supervision. These included: feeling comfortable (StB and StE); feeling understood and not feeling stupid (StC); being able to be honest (StK; StA; StH); not feeling judged (StH); not feeling judged for not knowing or being worried about something (StB; StH and StD); being able to trust the PE (StD); feeling they could be open (St B); feeling supported (StA and StC) and feeling relaxed within supervision (St J).

Some students referred to supervision as feeling *'like a conversation'* (StJ and StA) and a place where the PE made them feel *'they have time for you, and you are not feeling you are interrupting'* (StC). StH's comments that *'it really was a safe space to kind of talk through your work and it didn't feel judgmental at all'* encapsulated many of the feelings referred to during the interviews. Further, StE's felt sense of 'ownership' of supervision is clear:

**StE:** *I got a sense that it was my supervision, it was my time to say anything that I had issues with or caseload or anything I needed to, whereas in supervision in the past...you know, I didn't feel I owned it.*

The only student who did not speak with wholehearted positive emotions or feelings in relation to the PE was StI. This student still referred to the PE as 'educationally supportive' (StI) and did refer to the PE as 'smiley and approachable, her body language was positive'. This student was the outlier and her comments and issues will be referred to in more detail later in this chapter.

#### 9.3.1.2. Qualities in the PE

All students referred to positive qualities in their PEs, which contributed to their feelings about supervision. Some of these qualities directly related to the PEs attitude or approach to the supervision session itself. Other qualities were personal or professional qualities that infused supervision and the PE/student relationship. For example, many students appreciated the organisational qualities of the PE – comments included that that the PE was organised (StA), efficient and prompt in relation to supervision sessions (StE) and StH appreciated that supervision sessions were reliable and predictable. There were other numerous qualities mentioned, although the most commonly used term was 'supportive' (mentioned by seven of the nine students and by a couple of students repeatedly during their interview), for example:

**StA:** *she was really supportive throughout and I could speak to her about anything. She'd support and guide me.*

The qualities that students attributed to PEs were: approachable (StI; StK; StC); helpful (StC); supportive (StA; StB; StC; StD; StE; StH; StJ; StK); encouraging (StE; St A); welcoming (StJ); positive (StE); calm (StE; StJ; StB); inviting and engaging (StH) and reassuring (StA; StJ; StK).

### 9.3.1.3 PE Skills

PE qualities and skills were divided into separate sub-categories after application of the initial coding template to two interviews (See [Table 9.2](#). First Revised Coding Template). In the interviews, students referred to qualities of PEs but also other elements of PE practice and knowledge – in their role as practitioners with service users or with other team members – and these seemed important for student learning. Throughout the interviews, students spoke of the PE skill in prompting and ‘stretching’ them, in a fashion that they found comfortable and where support, encouragement and challenge appeared to be skillfully balanced by the PE:

**StH:** *She challenges, in a really appropriate way though.*

**StE:** *you know and prompt me to, she would ask me what's your understanding of that, and I would explain it and she would say, right, go off and do a bit more reading, so, yeah, she was very encouraging in supervision.*

Students also recognised the dedication of some PEs and thus the positive impact of PEs as role models. Thus, StJ observed her PE was ‘*the sort of social worker who would always go above and beyond for service users*’. StD contrasted her experience from her first placement as follows:

**StD:** *After the second placement, or during the second placement, it was really nice to know it doesn't have to be that way...I saw the other side of social work where people do enjoy their work and they do like their jobs and I am not frustrated or not burnt out and they see the positive things and they can encourage you to think positively and like going to work.*

Students also spoke warmly of other PE skills (in response to a general question about their learning on placement) and their knowledge,

communication skills and empowering approach with service users and team members:

*StB: PE was really knowledgeable about the whole, the legal (side) of social work, if certain practice was oppressive. Everybody used to ask her questions on the team, always asking for advice, the best way of doing it... she would always break stuff down quite, you know, if something's quite complicated in your head, you could see her and talk through things with certain people on the team and they'd go, 'Oh, it's so clear now. Thanks, PE'. And also, she was so lovely when you went on duty visits with people, because obviously duty visit can be a really stressful situation when people are really, emotions are high, people are like, 'Why are you getting involved?', social services knocking on your door is not ideal for anyone, and she would always, always, make someone feel at ease. It was unbelievable.*

There was a clear sense of learning from the PE, learning from either the PEs experience, their general approach or demeanor, or learning from particular elements of PE supervisory practice:

#### 9.3.1.4 Reciprocity in the relationship

Reciprocity within supervision was noted as a sub theme and coded on the Final Coding Template ([Table 9.3](#)) used for analysis across the data set of student interviews. Many students indicated an understanding that certain qualities and approaches were required from both PE and student within the supervisory relationship. Thus, StB spoke of the need for PE and student to '*respect each other's values and understand them*'; StH noted that '*we as a supervisee have to engage but I think that reciprocal kind of relationship is how we progress*'. Students spoke about preparing for supervision, through making notes on their cases, writing down questions and making sure they had read what the PE had given them, thus indicating a reciprocal

respect for supervision. Alternatively, this could have suggested a fear of supervision but indications of this were not borne out in the data. The only student whose comments suggested a lack of reciprocity within the relationship was StI. However, as has been previously noted, whilst this student considered the PE to be *'smiley and approachable'*, she did not have a positive relationship with the PE. This student felt unheard in supervisory sessions and her response was to keep her contributions to the supervision sessions brief and to seek guidance and advice from other team members rather than the PE. StI's effective non engagement within the supervision sessions seems to be motivated by feelings other than fear, such as not being listened to or heard.

Reciprocity and collaboration within the supervisory relationship was also noted in other ways. For example, in relation to the content and focus of supervision, StJ liked the 'give and take' approach of the PE to the focus of supervision:

**StJ:** *she (PE) might say, "Oh, I'd like you to do this for the next one" or I say, "I want to focus on this", so it was good in the fact that it was like give and take.... sometimes she'd lead it more, sometimes I'd lead it more.*

A few students referred to the collaborative nature of supervision in relation to the educative focus and that the PE and student relationship was not a one sided *'teacher relationship'* (StH) where the student was told what to do or learn, but one where they were encouraged to think for themselves or be guided to consider options. Thus, StH:

**StH:** *she worked with my learning needs and she kind of got me to look at what I wanted to do, and it not be a teacher relationship, you need to do this, this, what is it that you want from this, and getting you thinking, what do I want from this? And that is helpful because then I go away with the skill of*

*seeing what I need, rather than being told and relying on someone else.*

StK referred directly to the educative relationship and the creation of a 'learning space':

**StK:** *It was a really free kind of learning space and even that, "you can let me know", that means we can learn from each other.*

Overall, the students' acknowledgement of the importance of a positive supervisory relationship between PE and student was marked. It was clear that PE qualities, skills and reciprocal approaches impacted upon students' feelings and overall experience of placement, and in some cases appeared transformative:

**StH:** *I know I keep saying support, if I ever, she was someone I could go to and she would help...I wouldn't have got through placement without supervision, I really wouldn't (laugh)*

For StH the relationship made her feel '*held, in an all-round package kind of way...I feel like I have come out a different person*'.

### 9.3.2 Use of supervision

#### 9.3.2.1 Doing things right

The use of supervision for reassurance and guidance as to whether they were 'doing the right thing' or 'doing things right' was significant and many students used this phrase or a similar phrase:

**StE:** *is this right, am I going down the right path?*

**StA:** *I had it (supervision) mainly to make sure the work I was doing was right...I was doing all these things on my own, all these safeguardings and capacity assessments and things, it was making sure I was on the right track.*

**StC:** (supervision) *for guidance and also a sounding board I guess, just to make sure what you are thinking is right...make sure I was doing things right*

**StJ:** *it's like reassurance, that you've done the right thing... you are doing the right thing*

Thus, even though supervision for the majority of students was comfortable, a 'chat...a conversation' (StA) (and as noted in Chapters 5, 6 and 7) the dialogic nature of supervision was significant) there was a sense of responsibility and acknowledgement of seemingly 'high stakes' involved. For example, StD felt that supervision was not solely focused on case discussion, but her sense of responsibility was evident:

**StD:** *casework, accountability of course, but it didn't, it wasn't the only thing discussed...I would say it was about 50:50, I didn't feel it was just about cases, but cases were quite important to make sure that when I work with them on my own that I was clear about what I was doing and what needs to be done.*

Sharing case work updates within supervision and receiving reassurance about 'doing things right' aided confidence – 'it was nice to go through the caseload to kind of say, yeah, I did all right...it went well, to give a summary, that was nice' (StA).

Two students noted the necessity and importance of supervision for 'case management' discussion and update, although with different emphases. StJ noted the necessity but acknowledged the balance required:

**StJ:** *it has to be case management because it's really useful. If it didn't, I think that a lot more things would go wrong.... yeah, I think it was balanced, I think it was balanced, and I think that the focus*

*on case management some weeks , if it has to be more focused on that, is important. I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing.*

For StB, the overriding focus on case management was also acknowledged (*'it's a shame that it is like that'*) but the potential tension between student supervision and 'reality' was an issue for her:

**StB:** *Well, I think it's a shame that it is like that anyway. But I do think, in a way, I think it has to have an element of that if that's the reality of it in practice. You'd get such a shock to go from really nurtured, like, 'Let's talk about all these lovely things', and then to suddenly not have that, you'd think, 'Oh what, you're a really bad supervisor' and they might not necessarily be a bad supervisor.*

#### 9.3.2.2. Advice

A number of students mentioned the place of supervision for seeking guidance and advice. For some students, the fact that this was their first statutory placement, and their knowledge of policies and procedures was limited was key. Thus, alongside the reciprocity acknowledged and welcomed within the supervisory relationship, the role of the PE in providing 'answers' or guidance relating to procedures or next steps (at least initially), was also essential:

**StB:** *If I needed certain things clarified, she could always do it.*

However, many students spoke about the role of the PE in providing guidance, often in the context of dialogue and a collaborative approach:

**StD:** *PE was asking me about my opinion, what I would do rather than telling me what to do*



**StC:** *PE didn't take over; she was guiding me to make the decision...*

### 9.3.2.3 Support

As previously indicated, eight of the nine students interviewed indicated they received a great level of support from their PEs. These students recognised support as a perceptible element of the PE role. However, although their understandings and unarticulated use of the singular and generic term of 'support' may have differed, it is clear that feeling supported infused the placement and the supervisory relationship. Thus, as the following extracts indicate, for some students feeling 'supported' meant not feeling alone in their work or decision making or feeling reassured; for others, it was the wider emotional support offered by the PE that contributed to feelings of being 'supported':

**StH:** *you are not coping on your own...when you have that support, it is not that you depend or rely on it, it is knowing it is there is even enough.*

Feeling supported was also implied in students' recognition of the qualities in PEs and the impact of these on the supervisory relationship. Thus, students spoke about not feeling judged for not knowing and the importance of honesty in the relationship:

**StB:** *if I was worried about something or struggling with something, I felt like I could really ask her, I wasn't scared she was going to judge me that I didn't know certain things.*

Students indicated support was available in relation to work undertaken with service users, but also acknowledged the wider emotional support that supervision and the PE offered. Some students specifically noted the

concerns of the PE in relation to their emotional wellbeing and using supervision to process emotional issues:

**StH:** *the support was emotional support, wellbeing...like PE would be, how are you finding that, because there was a safeguarding issue there...so it was about how I am dealing with it in the practical sense, like what we are going to do, and how am I coping with it myself, am I in panic mode, or am I calm, what are my reflections upon it*

The one student who specifically said that the PE was 'emotionally not supportive' was StI and this student was very much the outlier. During the interview, the student referred to not being listened to and being shut down by the PE and being told not to 'argue':

**StI:** *but it should be a dialogue between the PE and student, but this PE at my last placement, when you go in there, she might ask why did you take these actions and then when it's your turn to say 'I did this because...' and then she doesn't want to hear, she'll be like, 'I don't want arguing', but I'm not really arguing.*

The experience of this student is significant for the light it shines on the importance of feeling comfortable and listened to within the supervisory relationship, as the student describes the impact on how she used supervision, what she brought and her discussions within supervision:

**StI:** *Obviously, this time in the end, I stopped, then the whole point is you go there saying 'I had a home visit, I felt like this or I did this'. Something, anything that you're not sure about, but in the end with this PE I stopped doing that, I would get answers from my colleagues...I kept it as brief as I could...we couldn't build that relationship.*

This student was the only student to specifically mention the power imbalance in the supervisory relationship although the student did refer to the PE helping her in other ways, and this is referred to later in this chapter.

#### 9.3.2.4. Not just practice

Within the supervisory relationship, support existed beyond that offered in relation to work service users or the emotional impact of work and the majority of students acknowledged that PEs were interested in and supportive about issues that might exist for them outside of placement. As already noted, StE felt “*really looked after*” and StH referred to supervision as a “*safe space*”, and there was a sense within the interviews that these understandings applied beyond practice issues. Thus, if students had issues affecting them in their family life or issues outside of placement, many commented that they could share them in supervision:

**StA:** *if you came in and looked upset, you'd have a conversation about personal life or anything...I never felt it was always about the caseload and things like that, no.*

#### 9.3.2.5 Theory to practice

During each interview, students were asked to consider Doel's (2010) four elements of supervision (Education, Support, Management and Assessment) and cards with these titles were laid out in front of students as visual reminders and prompts. Students were also asked to comment on Bogo's (2006) understanding that the placement should include opportunities for 'theorising' about practice as part of the supervisory experience. Every student acknowledged that 'theories' and 'theorising' about practice were part of their supervisory experiences, sometimes in relation to the completion of CAPs or direct observation templates. However, their experiences were different and the extent to which discussion of theory was integrated into supervision was mixed. StB noted that discussion of theory was not applied routinely:

**StB:** *it's quite easy to skip over theory...and it's just easier to talk about the cases and you just want to hear "What shall I do next?", and that's it and don't think about it deeper. But PE was really good at always being like, 'We need to talk about theory'...so, maybe it was like every other one or every third one we talked about theory.*

Similarly, StJ commented that her PE encouraged her to name theory within case work discussion:

**StJ:** *even when we were looking at case work, then she'd ask me what theory I'd have used...she'd ask me questions to make me still use my uni knowledge rather than it just being practice. I did feel put on the spot sometimes but that's the only way you get to think about it....so I think I needed to be put on the spot.*

For StH, discussion of theory '*was an essential part*' of her supervision and something she had shared with her PE was a development need that she wanted to address. For this student, '*as I talked through things or cases or experiences or interventions, PE would be probing, what method was that, what else could you use, this is something that could be used, was it helpful?*' The retrospective application of theory was noted by StC, and StD, StI and StE commented that discussion of theories happened in relation to discussion of CAPs or preparing for direct observations '*more around observation time ...more about the written work for uni*' (StE). For StJ, talking about theory in supervision '*was really helpful to sort of unpick things...it helped me link academia and practice. It also helped me think deeper about my own practice and things that I was doing or saying*'.

When asked if they would change anything about their supervisory experience, the suggestions made indicated that more opportunities for thinking through practice were required, as indicated by the following suggestions:

**StA:** (PE gave articles) *which I was able to read, but actually talking through it with her and unpicking it might have been a bit better so I had clearer thinking about it*

**StJ:** *Maybe more theorising, and maybe more hypothesising and exploring different avenues before acting.*

### 9.3.3 Being assessed and the role of the PE

Students were asked how they felt supervision contributed to the PEs overall assessment of them. It was clear from the responses that the students were aware they were being assessed and that supervision, their response and their role within it, played a significant role. In response to the question, StB noted some irony in the supervisory situation particularly in relation to the tension between the support and assessment element of the PE role:

**StB:** *Yeah, of course, because I was going in thinking 'This is the time for me to get some support on what I'm doing', but actually she's looking at me thinking 'Does she understand what she's doing and does she get it?'*

StK felt supervision kept her PE *'up to date as to what work I was doing'* but also knowing what her *'thought process was'*. Similarly, StA noted *'her thinking behind things'* helped form the PEs assessment". StH felt that her PE *'did that in the back, kind of...I feel like she was kind of assessing me in supervision but not overtly'*. Similarly, StC was conscious of being assessed but *'discretely'* so:

**StC:** (assessment) *was done very, discrete is not the right word..I knew I was being assessed, but when you came out you know that there have been questions that PE has asked ..like what would you do?..what are you going to do? ..it wasn't very formal , it was slipped into conversation but it was definatley assessing that I was doing the right thing...*

As contrast, StE was very clear about the contribution supervision played in her PEs assessment of her:

**StE:** *I think it was quite big really because I did feel like I was in a test sometimes (laugh), you know in certain cases she let me do the talking and was like, 'well , what do you think?'.and there weren't any room to just agree, I had to come up with things (laugh).*

Students were also aware that their written records, case notes and assessments were read by PEs and contributed to the overall PE assessment. StK, StI and StJ noted that their portfolio and reflective logs were used by PEs to aid their assessment – as StK comments '*PE read my reflections, she'd ask for them and then we'd discuss it because she was kind of assessing them at the same time*'.

#### 9.3.4 Perspectives on Supervision

##### 9.3.4.1 First placement - what was different?

This final theme of Perspectives on supervision incorporates elements of the interviews where students referenced contrast with their first placement, alongside aspects of their development that they were taking forward into qualified practice.

Although the question of contrast or similarity with the first placement was a potential prompt question on the interview schedule, four of the nine students interviewed introduced this issue at the very beginning of the interview, without prompting. The main focus of the student responses was the difference in relationship between the student and the first placement PE and their different approaches to supervision and supporting the student. Both StD and StH commented on stark differences between their first placement supervision and their current (final) placement supervision experiences and both felt that they didn't fully understand the purpose of supervision until this final placement:

**StD:** *I didn't really realise that it was bad supervision, or I didn't realise it was as bad as it was.*

**StH:** *I actually didnt really know what supervision was about in my first placement and I really didn't get a grasp of how it could be used or anything.*

StD felt her previous PE was not supportive and was too busy to support her and StC said her previous PE '*didn't think supervision was important either, she just didn't value it at all*' and commented as follows:

**StC:** *She'd just shout things across the office to me, like "Have you done this? Have you done this? Have you done that?"...I did think it was a bit strange but I didn't realise how strange until the second placement, which, if it had been the other way round, I would have been like 'This isn't how we do it'.*

A sense of a developed understanding of the purpose of supervision and an enhanced awareness of the impact and management of both supervisor and supervisee actions and interactions was indicated.

#### 9.3.4.2 Prepared for practice

As part of the interview schedule, students were asked what they thought preparedness for practice meant. Students indicated an awareness that supervision once qualified would be different, but most indicated a sense of efficacy and confidence in entering practice, whilst acknowledging that learning was never completed:

**StA:** *Yeah, I do feel prepared but I also feel like it's a constant learning journey. I'm never going to know everything about social work.*

Two interrelated themes arose regarding student preparedness for practice, student confidence and preparedness for challenge.

#### 9.3.4.2.1 CONFIDENCE AND EFFICACY

Many students noted the increase in their learning and their confidence and this contributed to their feelings of being prepared for practice. StC felt the impact of this final placement was *'oh, massive, just with my confidence and with my learning'*. There was a clear sense (and some comments) that the placement and their experiences had 'changed' them. For example StA saw a link between the growth in her confidence and her confidence in supervision and how she would use it in the future:

*StA: I think now that my confidence has grown, I am more confident in supervision..like I said, making sure I do talk about my theories and linking theory to practice and really unpicking things further....Id' like to remain mindful of the theories and maybe bring in theories to supervision and say 'this is the theory i'm thinking about, what do you think?', and trying to unpick it further.*

There was a clear perception that supervision in qualified practice would be different, in relation to its frequency, caseload and focus. StK felt supervision in qualified practice would be *'task centred'* and StA commented it would be *'case, case, case'*.

There was also an understanding that confidence in practice meant a willingness to acknowledge *'not to know the answer, and it's alright to have to go and find out....no one knows everything and that's alright'* (StJ). Similarly, StD felt she would have *'the confidence to say that I dont' know something'*. Beyond a confidence in skills and knowledge as preparation for qualified practice, comments from some students indicated their experiences of placement supervision and learning had instilled a sense of confidence in their ability and willingness to challenge and it is this I turn to next.



#### 9.3.4.2.2. PREPARED FOR CHALLENGE

Student preparedness for challenge was indicated in a number of ways during the interviews. For example, whilst there was an awareness that supervision as a qualified social worker would be different, a few students indicated that this would not be meekly accepted by them. As StA indicates above, she would be proactive and 'bring in theories into supervision' and StE commented further and forcefully on how proactive she would be:

**StE:** (before placement) *I didn't feel like I had an entitlement to supervision, I wasn't going to ask for it or seek it...whereas now, I would be like, no, I need supervision, I am entitled to it, I want it and I think I would be more proactive in regards to it.*

Similarly, in relation to the content and focus of supervision, students recognised that they may have to challenge and 'shift' the focus within supervision, once in practice:

**StK:** *rather than thinking it's just about my caseload, I know that other things can be discussed in there, so even if I don't get asked by my team manager, I know that I can still ask about this and I can still discuss whatever I feel like discussing, like my improvement.*

**StJ:** *possibly I'll have to push for education to be included, I don't know, but this is what I think might happen.*

Two students spoke of instances on placement where they had (successfully) challenged decisions by senior managers, and were supported in this by their PEs. These were interesting for the light they shone not only on the student's values, their willingness to challenge and advocate on behalf of service users, but also their working relationship with their PE. Both of these students were on placement in children statutory social care settings and the instances raised reference the contemporary pressures within the sector, such as

increasing referrals to childrens social care and increasing numbers of children being taken into care, particularly those aged over 16 (NAO, 2019).

Working with a homeless 16 year old, StC fought for the service user to be accommodated (Children Act 1989, Section 20), firstly putting forward her arguments with her PE and later, with the senior management team. See extract below:

**StC:** *one case, there were decisions from managers that didn't sit right with me, and I think if it was my other (previous) PE, I don't think I would have been able to say..but with PE3 ..I was able to say why it doesn't sit right with me...but she didnt take over, she was guiding me to make the decision, and she was like, we will speak to the team manager, and when we were in the meeting..PE3 didn't take over, she let me, becuse I had worked with him the most, let me say it.*

For StC, this had a clear impact on her confidence to challenge and voice her opinions:

**StC:** *I think I learnt that it was okay to voice your fears to a manager...knowing that it is okay to say, this is your opinion, and it wasn't just my opinion, it was because of the knowledge I had ,and that is what PE3 reinforced....so it was like I, do actually know what I am talking about and it is okay to voice that ,and if the manager doesn't agree then you have not lost anything because you have put it out there and you have tried.*

Towards the end of her placement, another student, StB, argued successfully with her PE and team manager for a family case to remain open once she had left the placement. The student felt concerns still remained and the mother required further support and she discussed this quite forcefully with her PE in supervision - *'I thought, "Well, we can't close this case now, this is ridiculous, she needs support with this"*. The student acknowledged that her PE was under pressure to

close the case but the student persisted with her concerns and views in supervision, and the case remained open :

**StB:** *if I hadn't have felt so comfortable with PE2 maybe I would have just been like, 'OK, I'll stop talking about it'. But I knew that PE2 was the kind of person who's like 'I'm not going to judge you for keeping asking', so I'm going to get my point across...So, on the last day, I said to the manager, because she'd been away, 'Who's going to have my case by the way?', and she said, 'It's going to close, I thought it was closing, you need to close it'. And I said, 'Well, it's not closing, PE2 said don't close it'. So, then she looked really annoyed, not annoyed but frustrated, she was thinking, 'Well, I haven't got space for four more kids'.*

#### 9.3.5. Integrative theme – team environment

This theme was included as an integrative theme (King, 2012) as mention or reference to 'team' appeared in eight student accounts and these mentions either supported other themes or illuminated them through contrast.

Many students commented on the supportive nature of the team:

**StK:** *the team itself, everyone chipped in if PE9 wasn't there.*

**StJ:** *I think I was really lucky to be part of a really supportive team, then to have really good supervision*

Some students noted the PEs influence upon, and role within, the supportive team environment. This was suggestive of PE experience but also personal and professional skills and qualities that were acknowledged by other members of the team, and indicative of the PEs role modelling. Thus, as noted previously (see 9.3.1.3. PE Skills) StA and StB commented on their PEs role in the team as a knowledgeable resource for other members of the team . Similarly, StK (whose PE was also the team manager) commented as below:

**StK:** *I don't know if it is PE9 herself or if it is just the way the team works... but even with all the other members of the team, she has had regular supervision, even every day they constantly come up to her and sit and have a ten-minute chat to discuss something or a case or personal life or anything...it's not all about work with PE9.*

The team environment also impacted upon student's understanding of their preparedness for practice and their views on what they needed or considered key to future practice. Thus, StC's views were as follows:

**StC:** *I found that if I have got the right support and the team around me, I am quite capable... So, I think that when I start in the workplace I would like to think I could go straight in...you need a supportive team and managers, and you need to know that you are able to do your own stuff but that you have somebody who has got your back. I can't imagine being on a team that, where you haven't got anybody who you can speak to.*

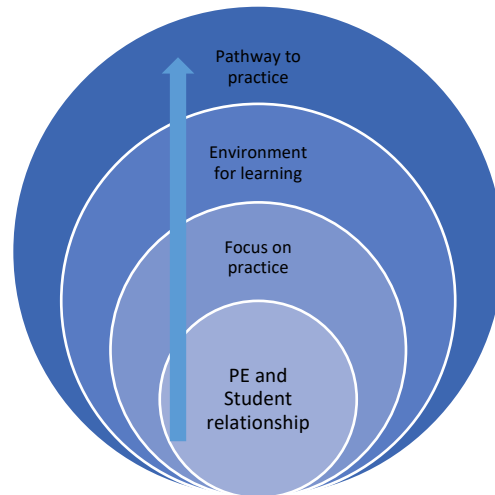
As has already been discussed, for StD, it was the contrast with her previous experiences of team members that was significant and her different experiences on her final placement clearly enhanced her expectations and enthusiasm for entering qualified practice.

#### 9.4 Dimensions of supervision - analysis of the student perspective

The themes outlined indicate that, from a student perspective, supervision within the placement incorporated a number of dimensions. These are nested within each other, but with the centrality of the relationship at its heart and infusing and interacting with other dimensions. The pedagogic and relational aspects of practice learning have long been entwined (Parker, 2007; Bogo, 2006; Gardiner, 1989) and the dimensions of supervision outlined below acknowledges these connections. The diagram and these dimensions of supervisions will

form the basis of the analysis that follows – see Diagram 9.1  
Dimensions of Supervision – Student Perspective.

Diagram 9.1 Dimensions of Supervision – Student Perspectives.



#### 9.4.1 PE and Student Relationship

The themes emerging from the student interviews indicate the centrality of the PE and student relationship within supervision and the practice placement. This has been noted in numerous other studies, noted in Chapter 3, the literature review (Parker, 2007; Bogo, 2006; Lefevre, 2005; Fortune et al., 2001; Kourganiantakis et al., 2019; Flanagan and Wilson, 2018; Yeung et al., 2019). Within this chapter, particular elements of the relationship will be explored, particularly:

- the relationship as a ‘*safe space*’ (StC) and the site for support and emotional containment
- the relationship as the site of “human interchange” (Bogo and Wayne, 2013) and the impact of positive role modelling

##### 9.4.1.1. The relationship as a “safe space”

As has already been discussed in the literature review, a number of studies have noted that positive student experiences of placement are often predicated upon a positive, encouraging, supportive and mutually

respectful PE and student relationship. Analysis of student interviews in this study indicated similar positive experiences to the Lefevre (2005) study where feelings of being supported featured strongly. Within the interviews there were also a number of student references to feeling “safe” and being able to open up, ask questions and explore responses without feeling “judged” and this clearly impacted upon student feelings of confidence, both to enter qualified practice but also face the challenges within it. This theme is further underlined by the findings and the analysis of the recorded supervision sessions (Chapters 6, 7 and 8), which outlines that emotions were present and referenced in many ways during the supervision sessions, thus suggesting that supervision was an 'accessible space' (Dore, 2019, p.853) allowing for the safe expression of emotion and the concomitant expectation of support.

Students in this study also appreciated the PEs professional approach and their organizational skills, contributing to feelings of safety within the relationship and the placement. Thus, students appreciated that PEs would challenge them (StH), and were clear about their assessment role, but this challenge and ‘stretching’ of student learning was done ‘appropriately’ (StH and StE) rather than oppressively and whilst maintaining a collaborative approach within supervision.

Thus, the ‘safe space’ encouraged within the supervisory relationship appears to require, and incorporate, wider skills, approaches and understandings than a unitary conceptual understanding of ‘support’ initially implies. This supports the findings of the Moorhouse et al., (2014) study, where one of the key factors shaping the students’ experiences was the ‘skill of responsiveness of the supervisor’ (p. 45). I would suggest that the student themes and subthemes outlined within this chapter – including how supervision made the student feel and the professional and personal skills and qualities of the PE – suggest that the skill of PE ‘responsiveness’ and availability was present within this study.

Further, supervision as a site for emotional containment has been acknowledged by a number of authors (Hughes and Pengelly, 1997; Ruch, 2007b; Ferguson, 2018a; Gibbs, 2001), referring to Bion's (1962) concept of containment and the importance of secure relationships in acting as containers where 'unmanageable' feelings "can be processed and made thinkable and manageable" (Ruch, 2007a, p.675). However, beyond the impact of supervision for emotional regulation, Gibbs (2001) refers to the 'empathic containing' function of supervision. It is clear that for many students in this study, this 'containing' function was indeed a feature of the PE and student supervisory relationship. Thus, StE felt "*looked after*" within the supervisory relationship; StH felt "*held*" within supervision and StC felt her PE enabled her to be able to go and "*do your own thing, but I am always here*".

The importance of the PE and student supervisory relationship as the site for emotional support and containment - and indicating some of the challenges in how these features are accommodated and perceived within the relationship - is highlighted by the experiences of StI, the 'outlier' student (see this chapter, 9.3.2.3). This student described her PE as '*emotionally not supportive, but she was still educationally supportive... she helped me see how to develop myself and everything*'. The student also spoke positively of the PE role in discussing her practice after a direct observation and about how she helped the student think about theory and the '*critical evaluation*' of her academic work. However, as has been previously noted, the PEs perceived lack of emotional responsiveness and the students feeling that she was not heard sufficiently within supervision, meant she kept her responses within supervision '*as brief as I could*'. Significantly, StI was the only student to specifically mention the '*power imbalance*' within supervision and to reference a fear of 'failing' the placement, '*because she's (the PE) in charge of a situation, if you upset her or whatever*'. This recalls the small scale study by Litvack et. al., (2010) into the emotional reactions of 12 students on placement. This study

noted that students experienced (either positive or negative) 'strong personal reactions early on' (p.233) to their Field Instructors (sic) and a sense of vulnerability emerged as a 'significant stressor when the relationship was not considered solid' (p.233). These findings find an echo in this study, where participants were aware of the assessment role of the PE, but the only student to specifically mention the 'power imbalance' and potential and fear of failing the placement was the student who felt least supported and positive about the relationship with the PE.

#### 9.4.1.2 The relationship as site of human interchange

Beyond the skilful demonstration of the tasks inherent in the PE role however, student interview themes discussed within this study suggested that the PEs professional skills and personal qualities – as social workers and fellow humans - mattered and impacted upon them. Thus, the position of the PE as a knowledgeable and approachable resource for others in the team appeared an important factor and influence on students learning. This speaks to the significance of the 'implicit curriculum', or 'hidden curriculum' within social work education (Bogo and Wayne, 2013). This usually refers to the educational environment or setting within which the taught and explicit curriculum is provided, and how the manner in which this explicit curriculum is taught (the 'hidden' element) impacts upon student experience and their professional socialisation (Christensen, 2016). However, Bogo and Wayne (2013) suggest that the concept of the 'implicit curriculum' and the array of values, expectations, practices and understandings that support it, also applies to field placement (practice placement) settings. Thus, the 'culture of human interchange' (p.3) within practice placement settings is key, recognising the 'educational interventions in daily human interchanges that will promote the professional values and demeanour we are mandated to both model and teach' ( p.6). The importance of the 'implicit curriculum' and values demonstrated by PEs and their behaviours and practices – their ways of going about their task with the student, their approachability and availability for students and other members of the team, their approach with



service users - were indicated in the student interview themes. Thus, whilst the findings from the analytical coding of the recorded supervision sessions (Chapter 7) indicated that explicit 'values talk' was limited with supervision exchanges (although those supervision conversations did involve discussions of student thoughts and reflections, and values thus implicitly implied), the existence and manifestation of the 'hidden curriculum' applies.

Further, the value of exposure to PEs as role models is clearly indicated within the themes and was specifically noted by StJ who felt she had learnt '*lessons from her (PE) practice ... I want to be like that*'. The value of PEs as role models has been noted in other studies (Cleak et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2015; Wilson, 2013). However, the impact of role modelling on student learning, or indeed the exact nature of what role modelling means or includes, in relation to social work or the practice placement has not been explored as widely as in other fields such as medicine or nursing (Baretti, 2009; Jack et al., 2013; Cruess et al., 2008; Illingworth, 2006). Illingworth's (2006) small scale study of mental health nursing students' perceptions of what made a good role model concludes that 'humanism' is 'the central quality of a role model...humanism is then shown by being respectful to others, by being a sharing practitioner, in the form of enabling attitudes, which all results in a functional role' (p.814). The concept of 'humanism' being the central quality of a role model – and the bearing that this has on other functions and aspects of the PE role and the PE student relationship - clearly has resonance with this study. Findings from the recorded supervision sessions and analysis (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) point to the comfortable, exploratory and enabling conversational dialogue and tone of many supervision sessions and were suggestive of a respectful and sharing PE approach but with a clear functional purpose.

To summarise, the centrality of the PE/student relationship and the availability of a supportive and enabling PE who is able to model and sustain good and humane relationships and 'practice what they preach' emerges as a significant dimension of supervision.

#### 9.4.2 Focus on practice

The second dimension of supervision indicated within the themes and subthemes of the student interviews was a clear and persistent focus on practice, where students used supervision to seek advice, guidance, reassurance, discussion and to help 'do things right'. The ubiquity and use of the latter statement (or similar) were noted in the themes (9.3.2.1), directly invoking Munro's (2011b) use of the term in relation to the focus within the child protection system. Munro asserted that 'instead of "doing things right" (i.e. following procedures) the system needed to be focused on doing the right thing (i.e. checking whether children and young people are being helped)' ( p.6). I would suggest that the sentiment implied within the student comments within this study appear to focus on 'doing things right' – gaining advice on procedures and next steps - rather than 'doing the right thing'. However, there are examples, where student challenge (StC and StB) seems to be predicated on their sense of 'doing the right thing' in challenging managerial decisions and pursuing options for practice with senior managers.

To suggest that students in this study were focused on 'doing things right' is not to deride the sense of responsibility and accountability that was evident within their practice. As has been discussed, these students were all final year students, on the verge of professional qualification. Within their placements, they were undertaking assessments, carrying out work with vulnerable families, children and service users and working alongside other professionals, in conditions characterised by uncertainty and complexity. A focus on accountability and using supervision for reassurance that they were 'doing things right' – and the understanding of its necessity – indicates a robust and values-based sense of responsibility and accountability that is both expected and required. Further, as has also been discussed, the case work framing of supervision does not necessarily imply (or invite) a singular focus on managerial accountability imperatives, nor does it preclude the use

of supervisory discussions as 'gateway' to further exploration, discussion or wider deliberations.

Indeed, some research into NQSW and practitioner supervision supports, and furthers, this contention. This research is important as it relates to practitioner (and particularly Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) ) experiences that are likely to be the closest to the final year students within this study. Whilst much of the research into the supervision of NQSWs (Manthorpe et al, 2015; Wilkins and Antonopoulou, 2019; Wilkins 2017; Berry-Lound and Rowe, 2013) indicates that the content of supervision is discussion of individual cases, with managerial oversight as the main focus, there is other research that suggests a more nuanced consideration is necessary.

For example, Wilkins and Antonopoulou's (2019) study notes that NQSWs found their supervision more helpful than more experienced social workers, over a range of measures. This included helping with their decision-making, clarity around risk and a focus on the family/service user. The NQSWs in their study experienced more lengthy and frequent supervision sessions, the authors suggesting that this frequency may account for the findings of increased helpfulness. Whilst the content of these lengthier and more frequent supervision sessions is not known or revealed, other research (Manthorpe et al., 2015) suggests that they would have included attention to personal development, support and wellbeing, and reflection and deliberation that extended beyond managerial accountability concerns.

Thus, there is research that adds weight to the contention that case work as invitation or as 'gateway' to discussion and enhanced thinking is possible within supervision. In particular, there is a remarkable similarity between some of the findings from the earliest research into NQSW experiences carried out by Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) and one of the most recent studies into the supervisory experiences of children and family social workers (Wilkins et. al., 2020). Marsh and Triseliotis's (1996) study was primarily

concerned with the fit between training and practice and included the experiences of 714 newly qualified social workers and 69 supervisors. Whilst acknowledging that a 'significant number' of newly qualified social workers received supervision that was 'totally instrumental in nature by focusing wholly, or almost totally, on accountability' (p.154), they offer important qualifications to this. An extract from their research and analysis is quoted in full below, as so much of these findings chime with findings, themes and previous discussions within this study:

The discussion of cases for purposes of accountability was not always as instrumental as it might sound. Often seniors (supervisors) would be posing questions about other possible explanations or about alternative ways of going about a case (p.156) ...Many of the newly qualified confirmed the view of their seniors about the purpose of supervision, including the necessity of accountability. Accountability, which usually occupied most of a session, was used by the newly qualified to enter into a dialogue with their supervisors about the handling of a case, to help improve the quality and effectiveness of the service offered. Such discussion, as described by some of the newly qualified, could help to broaden their angle from which a case was being handled, suggest alternative approaches...A supervisor, being interested and knowledgeable, demonstrated the qualities that made accountability more than an instrumental device to control the work of the newly qualified' (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996, p.157).

These early findings suggest that supervision, including discussion of case work with an accountability, managerial oversight focus (a case management approach), was used for more than instrumental purposes. Thus, 'discussion', 'dialogue' with an 'interested and knowledgeable' supervisor were key to 'broadening' the newly qualified social workers thinking. These findings replicate many of the findings and analysis within this study (Chapters 6, 7 and 8).

These findings are mirrored in one of the most recent studies into the supervisory experiences. Wilkins et al., (2020) carried out a pilot study concerned with the feasibility of Outcomes Focused Supervision in children's

services, including children and family social workers (n=20) and supervisors (n=10) in one local authority. At the start of the study, 50 social workers and 10 supervisors were interviewed about what they felt about the role of the supervisor and the purpose of supervision. Like the Marsh and Triselitos (1996) study, the Wilkins et al., (2020) study suggests that supervision as a forum for accountability was 'not necessarily viewed as problematic...for some workers, the oversight provided in relation to case management was a welcome feature of supervision' (p.14). Thus, supervision used to discuss processes and procedures provided 'reassurance for the worker that they were doing the right thing' (p.14), a finding similar to this study. Beyond this, and again very similar to the findings in the Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) study, the Wilkins et al., (2020) found that 'by discussing different ideas with their supervisor, workers could often gain (or regain) a sense of clarity and focus' (p.15). Parallel findings were indicated in the Bourn and Hafford Letchfield study (2011), a small-scale study of ten supervisors who provided ten digital audio-visual recordings of 30-minute segments of supervision. These authors, noted the dominance of the managerial and administrative function of supervision and the supervisors awareness that they were mainly directive (particularly with less experienced staff), but also the presence of other strategies and that 'devices for facilitating reflection included such verbal strategies as managers asking in supervision sessions: 'Do you have any more thoughts about that?' or 'Do you think...?' (p.50).

However, as the findings and analysis of the content of student supervision sessions in this study indicate (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) the enduring issue with NQSW, practitioner or student supervision remains the balance enacted between the managerial demands of supervision and the more reflective, analytical and theoretical considerations and discussions. This balance rests upon, and is tested by, some very real tensions and dichotomies of practice, particularly in relation to the place of theory within supervisory discussions, as evidenced in research and aided by some findings within this study.

In contrast to the findings from the recorded supervision sessions within this study (Chapters 6 and 7), where there was scant discussion or elaboration of theoretical approaches, students who were interviewed indicated that they did discuss theory in supervision. Their experiences differed, and some students suggested that greater theorising, unpicking and thinking through practice was required. There was also a recognition that discussing theory application was easy to sideline and that the pressures of qualified practice may exacerbate this. The suggestion of the need for synergy between student and practitioner supervision is important and has resonance with research into NQSW supervision (Berry-Lound and Rowe, 2013; Manthorpe et al., 2015). The Berry-Lound and Rowe (2013) evaluation of the first year of the ASYE in Adult Services (over two cohorts) indicated only 41% of NQSWs said that supervision was used to help apply theory understanding to practice. A similarly large but longitudinal study carried out by Manthorpe et al., (2015) regarding the content of NQSW supervision appears to confirm the experiences of the NQSWs in the Berry-Lound and Rowe (2013) study and found that discussion and application of theoretical approaches to practice decreased with time, particularly so in the second year of practice.

To summarise, the focus on practice as a key dimension of student perspectives on supervision, whilst expected and lauded, also rests upon on a number of competing tensions within supervision. Whilst a necessary focus on accountability and case management pertains to both student and practitioner supervision, there needs to be robust attention to discussion, dialogue, widening and broadening thinking as an important pillar of supervision, including the use of theory and research to aid thinking about practice and intervention. The educative repurposing of student supervision discussed in Chapter 8 is a key element of this, and a reminder of its importance is offered by Marsh and Trisileotis's (1996) study, where 'it appeared that the more students learned to apply theory whilst in training, the more likely they were to also use it in their practice' (p.64).

### 9.4.3 Environment for learning

The third dimension of supervision places focus upon the environment for learning. The environment for learning includes physical, emotional and organisational context dimensions, and the contribution of the PE and student supervisory relationship to the creation of a safe and emotionally sustaining environment for learning has been discussed previously. Consideration of this dimension of environment for learning also acknowledges the integrative theme of the team environment and the sense of efficacy, confidence and reciprocity this engendered within students.

Within the practice education literature, the importance of the learning environment is acknowledged in a number of ways, from planning for the student arrival and paying early attention to issues of partnership and power sharing within the placement (Williams and Rutter ,2019) that can lay the foundation for a positive learning environment. The important role of the student supervisor in the creation of a 'climate for learning' was noted as early as 1967, Young (1967) drawing attention to both the 'practical arrangements' and preparation this included, but also the establishment of a particular kind of positive and affirming relationship. Her formulation that 'students need to be at ease with their supervisors as far as possible, not to be afraid, and to receive plenty of encouragement' (p.15) is echoed in most student accounts in this study.

The broader (team) environment for learning and the student and PE relationship supervisory relationship may at first appear as unrelated, or as an element of the placement out with the PE remit or control. Indeed, theorists such as Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that learning arises out of participation in 'communities of practice', a theoretical approach that views learning as a relational, social but collective endeavour that is integral to social practice. However, whilst learning as a social and relational process and the many forms of it is acknowledged (for example, informal or incidental

learning (Eraut, 2004) or social and situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991, 2002), the integrative theme of team environment arising from the interviews suggest that the broader environment for learning is an area that PEs need to consider. Indeed, it is a requirement of PEPS (BASW, 2019) Domain A - PEs have to 'Work with others to organise an effective learning environment'. The PE thus needs to consider the team culture and the wider organisational culture within which the placement setting is located (Field et al., 2016). This can be through PEs paying attention to their own continuous learning, being open and curious, setting up and contributing to PE or mentor support groups or peer discussion groups within the team. The need for PEs to contribute to developing the 'learning organisation' and to encourage their student to do so is also found in PEPS (BASW, 2019) A9 and D6 requirements. Analysis of the student interviews also supports other research and the importance of the availability of informal discussions with other team members – for example, the Manthorpe et. al., (2015) study into the experiences of NQSWs, suggests that the informal support and supervision offered by team members contributed to job satisfaction and may outweigh the formalised support from line managers. Similarly, the findings from the Helm (2017) study, suggests that interactions and informal discussions with colleagues (referencing the 'Can I have a word?' in the title of the article) was important in practitioners 'sense making' and decision-making activities.

Boud and Walker (2002), in considering how reflection is supported within teachers' professional practice, make an interesting distinction between the broader 'learning milieu' and specific local learning 'contexts' or 'micro contexts' of practice (p.98). Thus, whilst the 'learning milieu' represents the 'totality of the human and material influences that impinge on learners in any particular situation' (p.97), they point to the importance of creating local 'contexts' and 'micro contexts'. They describe this local context as 'like making a space in the organisation...it can establish a different atmosphere...this is a space in which conditions are created deliberately rather than just accepted from the larger context' (p.100). These authors recognise that



socio political, institutional and organisational imperatives can limit and hamper the management of the local context. However, within the 'local context' of the PE and student supervisory relationship, the creation of space and deliberate consideration of the contribution that can be made to the positive promotion, and support of, the environment for learning, is something that should be aspired to.

#### 9.4.4 Pathway to practice

Students were asked about preparedness for practice, and their responses exhibited an understanding of preparedness in a number of ways that extended beyond a simple readiness for *entry* into qualified practice. The notion of supervision providing a pathway is helpful as it encapsulates some important aspects that arose from the themes, including understanding supervision developmentally, understanding supervision as a forum for ongoing learning and negotiating supervision as an arena of challenge.

As the themes indicated, many students demonstrated development in their understanding of supervision, contrasting their experiences of supervision during their first placement and indicating marked development in their understanding of supervision, its role and purpose and their contribution to it. Strong feelings and sentiments were voiced - StG now '*grasped*' how supervision could be used and said she would not have gotten through the placement without supervision; StE felt she '*owned*' supervision and realized she had an '*entitlement*' to it in future practice.

Secondly, the students' sense of efficacy and confidence engendered within this final placement was allied to an awareness of their ongoing learning needs and a willingness to proactively use supervision (once qualified) to identify and meet their needs. Thus, StA felt she would '*bring theory into supervision*' and StJ felt she would be able to '*push for more education to be included*'. A sense of a continuing path of

learning was indicated, rather than a sense of completion once qualified.

Finally, negotiating supervision as an arena for challenge within qualified practice, and as a forum within which to be challenged and to challenge, was an important subtheme. Many students had learnt that supervision was an important site of challenge - their PE asking, '*what would you do?*' (StC) or '*what do you think?*' (StD) and where there '*wasn't any room to just agree, I had to come up with things*' (StD). Beyond this, for two students in particular (StB and StC), who had challenged decisions made or agreed by senior managers, their experiences suggested that advocating for service users and challenging as part of practice could be an attainable goal of practice. Such challenge was preceded by discussion in supervision, and clearly underpinned by a supportive PE and positive supervisory relationship, but the learning for the students nonetheless suggested both possibility and necessity of challenge as a key element of practice.

#### 9.5 Chapter summary

The themes and dimensions of supervision indicated by the findings from the nine student interviews suggest that the bedrock of a warm, reciprocal and positive student and PE supervisory relationship can offer an array of learning and developmental opportunities for students. Student supervision can be a site of positive challenge and development for students, allowing for accountability concerns to be embraced and managed, but also a site for student learning beyond the procedural. PEs as inspirational role models is indicated along with the influence of the PE as a knowledgeable other resource upon the wider environment for learning.

## **Chapter 10 The Practice Educator interviews: perspectives on placement supervision**

### **10.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss and analyse the interviews with the nine PEs. Template Analysis (TA) (King, 2012) was used in analysis and several themes and sub themes arose.

When placements had ended and the students' final placement portfolios were submitted, all PEs were contacted by email and an interview requested. All nine of the PEs agreed and each were interviewed in their place of work. A PE Interview Schedule was developed (see Appendix 5), each interview lasted approximately one hour and was recorded. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, four interviews were transcribed by the researcher and a transcription service transcribed five interviews. NVIVO 11 Pro was used to code the data.

Within the following themes and analysis, all PEs are referred to as 'she'. Analysis will follow presentation of the themes and this will include reference to the findings and analysis of the student interviews (Chapter 9), and the findings and analysis of the coded supervision sessions (Chapters 6, 7 and 8), where appropriate.

### **10.2 Development of the Coding Template for the PE Interviews**

As outlined in Chapter 5, the method used to analyse the data from the PE semi structured interviews was Template Analysis (TA) (King, 2012). This involved reading and re reading the transcribed interviews a number of times and then developing a coding template. The discussion of elements of supervision within the interviews was prompted by the PE Interview schedule and the particular focus on the elements of the PE roles as outlined by Doel (2020) , Education, Support, Management and Assessment (ESMA) . Thus, such a priori themes were already identified on the initial coding template and used

as parent nodes and applied to a sub section of the data (two PE interviews). PE responses to these apriori elements of supervision and the PE role, along with responses to other questions on the interview schedule were then identified as child nodes and sub themes and a First Revised Coding Template (Table 10.1) was devised. This was applied to further interviews in an iterative fashion, revised further and resulting in the Final Coding Template (Table 10.2).

Table 10.1 – First Revised Coding Template

First Revised Coding Template			
1	Purpose of supervision	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4	Guide and enable Reflection and 'unpicking' Support and protect Preparation for practice
2	Roles in placement	2.1       2.2	PE role  2.1.1 Education / theory 2.1.2 Support 2.1.3 Managerial 2.1.3.1 accountability issues 2.1.3.2 gatekeeping and challenge 2.1.4 Assessment  Role of others
3	Positive supervisory relationship	3.1 3.2	PE approach Student qualities

4	Impact on learning and practice	4.1	Impact on student practice 4.1. 1 Real practice 4.1.2 Relationships and challenge
		4.2	Impact on PE practice and development

Table 10.2 – Final Coding Template

Final Coding Template			
1	Elements of supervision	1.1	Education 1.1.1. Guide and enable 1.1.2 Reflection and 'unpicking' 1.1.3 The place of theory
		1.2	Support 1.2.1 Support and protect 1.2.2 Emotions 1.2.3 Roles of others
		1.3	Management 1.3.1 Accountability 1.3.2 The challenge of balance
		1.4	Assessment 1.4.1 Assessing all the time 1.4.2 The holistic nature of assessment 1.4.3 Preparedness for practice
2	Positive supervisory relationship	2.1	PE approach
		2.2	Student qualities

3	Impact on learning and practice	3.1  3.2	Impact on student practice 3.1.1 Real practice 3.1.2 Relationships and challenge Impact on PE practice and development
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### 10.3 Practice Educator interview themes

The responses of the PEs suggested a nuanced understanding of the functions and elements of supervision and the wider role of the PE within the placement. These are discussed in relation to subthemes of education, support, management, and assessment elements.

#### 10.3.1 The Education element of supervision

##### 10.3.1.1. Guide and enable

When discussing the elements of supervision, many PEs referred to the enabling, guiding and facilitative aspect of supervision and the PE role. Three PEs referred to '*guiding*' the student in their practice and decision-making and PE9 as '*pointing...in the direction*'. This was differentiated from direct teaching or 'telling' within supervision:

**PE8:** *I'd hope, what I would aspire to do is supervision that supports the person to make, to have support for the decisions that they're making ... not to not necessarily to tell that person what actions to take.*

**PE5:** *(PE role is) facilitating opportunities and guidance, and I think when I first took on the role, I was giving the student everything, like I*

*was a tutor, but actually I've stepped back and more signposted and said, well, this would be really useful to look at.*

Of course, much of the guidance and facilitative elements referred to by the PEs related to their role within the wider placement setting, not simply within the supervisory encounter. Thus, whilst PE8 saw her role in supervision as '*offering them (students) a place to reflect and to think themselves*', she also noted her role within the wider placement as one where she would '*open doors and give opportunities*'. The facilitative and guiding hand of the PE was considered as essential in two main (but linked) ways - it promoted enhanced student independence and confidence in decision making and encouraged student responsibility for their own and ongoing learning and development. Thus, for PE8, her expectations of the student were clear:

**PE8:** *the onus is on them to learn and the onus is on them to succeed. I'm here to facilitate that...but they are the adult learner, and they are responsible for that.*

For PE7, the encouragement implied in a facilitative approach within supervision could also be helpful for dealing with future adversity:

**PE7:** *encouraging them to move forward, so hold but not clamp down or contain or rescue, hold but not rescue. If you want to survive out there, you need to find a way of coping or managing with that, let's talk about how that might be.*

#### 10.3.1.2 Reflection and 'unpicking'

All the PEs referred to supervision as an established and expected place for reflection. The PEs understanding of reflection was nuanced and suggestive of the contested understandings of the term and concept of reflection as discussed in Chapter 8. The term 'reflection' was used and acknowledged by PEs, but some PEs used concepts and different terminology to describe the process within supervision.

PE5 was assured in her understanding and use of the term reflective practice and of the necessity of it within social work practice and within student supervision.

**PE5:** *(supervision is) an opportunity for reflective practice...and in terms of social work values, what are we actually doing, the thing is, why are we doing it?*

PE8 referred to 'unpicking' things in supervision and PE9 referred to the opportunity within supervision to use it for 'not just looking at the task they have done, but what else did you notice, or get them to talk about it really'. This PE spoke of some of the questions she asked in order to prompt reflection after observing the student's practice and her comments are notable for their range and their focus on impact and feelings:

**PE8:** *how did that feel when you had to stand and there wasn't room for an extra chair? how did that impact on the assessment, what do you think that might have made him think? Why was this different to last time (because she had been seeing this chap and had a very different response, a very hostile response last time), erm, and how was that different, what was the difference about having a supervisor there, how did it feel about when I said this...*

PE4 in particular felt that reflection was 'one of the biggest things' within supervision. This PE introduced the idea of reflection as 'drift', an alternative and more positive use of the term than in other realms of social work practice, where such 'drift' usually refers to ineffectual, unfocused social work practice and decision making (Brandon et al., 2020).

**PE4:** *And that's why when we have supervision, I'm quite happy to allow a certain amount of drift. Yes, we have to pull ourselves back to become focused, but I think that drift is really, really important, because for me that's how you learn to reflect properly. You have to*



*think things through, and sometimes you have to think outside of the box and allow yourself that space and time to move on to reflect.*

### 10.3.1.3 The educative role and the place of theory

As with the student interviews, during the PE interviews PEs were asked to consider Doel's (2010) four elements of supervision (Education, Support, Management and Assessment), and cards with these titles were laid out in front of the PEs during each interview as visual reminders and prompts (see PE Interview schedule, Appendix 5). During some interviews I also asked specific prompt questions about the inclusion of theory, particularly of those PEs where theoretical discussions were not present in the audio recorded sessions or where PEs did not mention theory independently.

Some PEs pointed to the Education card as being the 'weakest' in their repertoire, encapsulated by PE1's comment:

**PE1:** *we could have done more of the theory...we could have broken things down more (pointing to the education card)..and making time for that, but I don't feel we necessarily had the time for that.*

This was echoed by PE2, another PE in a statutory setting, who wished she had had '*more time. And more time to prepare the structured stuff...I'd be more proactive (in relation to education)*'. PE9, when asked if theory was referred to in supervision said, '*I struggled, I struggle all the time with theory*' although she did recognise her '*forte*' in '*education about how to do practice*'. In wider relation to the presence of 'theory' discussion within supervision, PE responses during interview largely mirrored the data coded within the audio recorded supervision sessions (Chapters 6,7 and 8) – thus PE4 (Dyad 4) and PE7 were confident in describing how they used theory in supervision and PE8 and PE7 spoke of the usefulness of the CAP in '*generating*' (PE8) discussions about theory. However, amongst the

PEs where theoretical discussions were absent or marginal within the audio recorded supervision sessions, there were some robust positions about the educative role and the place of theory within supervision. Thus, PE3 made the point that 'education' is broader than a singular focus on theoretical discussions:

**PE3:** *I think that as you're working with your student you are educating on various aspects, even if it's a discussion around lone working, it's all information you're picking up and broadening your skills and knowledge around that. That's how I feel anyway.*

Similarly, PE6 (PE for Dyads 6 and 7 where there were no analytically coded activities in relation to theory or research in any of the supervision sessions) noted the following:

**PE6:** *I mean, I could sit here and say yeah, you're using Exchange Model, Questioning model, you're using Social Focus Techniques, I can say it to them and give them all the answers, but what I feel in a final placement, I expect them to be slightly more robust in thinking about theories and models in their practice.*

This PE referred to reading the students written 'reflections' regularly and these being the place where theories were included.

### 10.3.2 The Support element of supervision

#### 10.3.2.1 Support and protect

The purpose of supervision as a space to offer support to social work students was also understood by PEs. PE3 was particularly vocal about this (and noticeably, this PE was the PE who has been noted previously as exceptionally supportive in her approach). Further, within the wider placement, instilling a sense of 'belonging', physically and metaphorically, was key:

**PE3:** *it's about giving them a sense of belonging, that was my biggest thing...if you've got somewhere you know you're going to sit...you've got that little base... Don't wander about with cups, it's not fair. We don't want to do that.*

Most PEs recognised that factors and experiences outside the placement could affect students, and two PEs commented that their students had particular issues (and one had a '*crisis*') in their personal life whilst undertaking the placement. These issues were discussed in supervision, PE5 commenting '*we did a two-hour supervision, but it wasn't really formal supervision, it was more of a support*'. All the PEs noted the importance of '*checking in*' at the start of supervision, and '*how are they feeling...how are you managing...how is that impacting?*' was important for PE6. This is significant as this is the PE6 from Dyad 6 where it has been previously discussed that the student spent some time in supervision '*reporting back*' on service user highly vulnerable and emotional states, but where the PE had not opened up discussion about the potential impact on the student.

A number of PEs mentioned that they enquired about the students level of workload and about whether the workload was manageable - '*do you think it is enough, it is too much, because I think sometimes people might feel overwhelmed*' (PE1). However, whilst this pointed to consideration for student welfare, it was also clear that for a couple of PEs that enquires of this nature were made as a mechanism to ensure that students were '*not forgetting to do things or dropping things*' (PE8).

The dichotomous nature of support was suggested previously by PE7, who depicted support as '*hold but not rescue...you (the student) need to find a way of coping or managing that*'. This was further indicated by PE4 and her concept of '*reflective support*', support that invokes an element of challenge and encouragement for deeper thinking:

**PE4:** *because you can give support, but it's not necessarily reflective support is it? Sometimes it might just be a case of, yeah, you did well there, you're alright, don't worry, you're fine. That's support of a kind. But reflective support has got to be about looking at why they've done a good piece of work, what do they think they did that was well, thinking about that. The young person you're working with, how did they think about that?*

There was a significant use of the word and concept of 'protect' by four PEs. These PEs suggested that part of their purpose within the placement was to perform a gatekeeping function, to 'protect' the student from being overwhelmed or dumped upon, and particularly so from other members of the team or senior managers. Interestingly, these four PEs were within statutory settings and hearteningly, three of them were new PEs. The notion of protecting students is indicated forcefully, as the following quotes indicate:

**PE1:** *I was also conscious about protecting her from the, oh, get the student to do this ...and I said no we can't, we can't do that, you need to come and see me or let me know and we will look at what's appropriate... students can't be seen as a dumping ground, oh here, have that, I've been dying to get rid of that for ages, you have that*

**PE4:** *That doesn't mean to say other people don't come to me at times and say, "I've got an interesting piece of work here", or "would STUDENT like to help me with this, because I'm a bit overwhelmed", and I will look at that. I'll discuss it with STUDENT, we'll look at the learning needs that are being met through that, and if it's appropriate, the answer will be yes.*

**PE2:** *I was really conscious to protect her. [Laughs] Arguments in the office about it, no she's not having that...Can STUDENT go and*

*supervise this contact? No, that's not what she's here for... She could easily have been swamped.*

These comments also suggested that the PEs had a firm commitment to prioritising the students learning needs and judging the individual 'appropriateness' of the task requested by others.

#### 10.3.2.2. Emotions

The place of supervision for offering emotional support and acknowledging the emotional impact of work being undertaken, was referred to by several PEs. PE3 was very clear in her view of supervision as a forum to discuss emotions and emotional impact:

**PE3:** *We've got to make sure that we look at how cases impact on people. We don't know the experiences everybody has had.*

For other PEs, the motivation for making time within supervision for the discussion of emotional impact was to promote positive habits in students and allied clearly to an understanding of the pressures of future practice. For PE2, early career attention to the emotional impact of social work was essential:

**PE2:** *if you don't do that from the beginning in someone's career path, they might never do it. So, I needed to create that time and space for her to have that, because I know that you won't get that again.... once you're a practitioner there's this sort of expectation that emotions are set aside really.*

Two PEs acknowledged that 'power dynamics' (PE6) within the relationship and the potential impact of the PE assessor role on students' willingness to discuss the emotional impact of the work. Thus, PE6 explained that she understood that students could feel 'judged...they can feel real anxiety for "Oh God, if I say this to PE, she's going to think I'm not coping' (PE6). To alleviate these feelings of anxiety, the PE suggested that students also get 'support from each other or from workers as well, so it's not just me they

*depend on'* (PE6). This leads me to discuss the role of others, a sub theme within the findings.

### 10.3.2.3 Role of others

Whilst the role of others within the placement was not a question on the interview schedule, it arose clearly as a sub theme, and the role of team members in the support of students particularly resonated with PEs.

PEs recognised the important role of fellow team members played in providing the student with opportunities to shadow, undertake joint pieces of work and visits and discuss issues and cases. PE8 referred to colleagues as *'totally invaluable. I think with any new starter ...the colleagues are the people doing most of the work realistically'*. PEs also referred to the benefits of students being able to see how other team members work and getting used to hearing and sharing experiences with others.

Being 'part of the team' and being included was seen as important and clearly relied on there being an appropriate positive culture of peer support and this seemed to be the case for all PEs. PE7 hoped that the placement had shown the student *'the importance of peer support, somebody else in this team will know something...never walk into the office feeling dreadful and sick with it on your own'*.

The provision of support and learning from others was not unidirectional, student attitude and approach impacted, and reciprocity was required. PE9 suggested that because the student *'was so warm and open, everybody was queuing up to take her out'*. PE8 referred to the "two-way process" between the student and the two NQSWs she sat with:

**PE8:** *she (student) learnt things that she could then share with them and that created a nice atmosphere in that room because they were quite supportive of each other...it was a permanent dialogue in that room...it was a kind of nice dynamic, I think.*

### 10.3.3 The Management element of supervision

#### 10.3.3.1 Accountability

It was clear from the interviews that PEs felt a keen sense of accountability and this operated alongside the other functions of support, checking in on students' wellbeing and offering space for reflection and discussion. PEs felt accountable for the student's actions and work with service users and thus case management was an important part of supervision:

*PE8: they're operating on your behalf aren't they, so a little bit of kind of caseload management, that sort of thing; a bit of checking in that time management is going okay, so that they're not forgetting to do things or dropping things*

#### 10.3.3.2 The challenge of balance

Most PEs were conscious of 'balances' that needed to be struck, and maintained, within student supervision. One balance was between an overly case management approach and the '*monitoring*' required (PE1), and supervision as a forum for reflection and discussion. Whilst it was acknowledged that '*we'd have to look at cases...we'd always have to discuss cases, where we were up to, what we were doing*'(PE4), one of the ways to initiate balance was using and promoting an agenda for supervision, either to which the student contributed or where the PE had a prepared template. Some PEs used a supervision template they had adapted from their own supervision template - with '*additions to it, reflective practice, log, assignments*' (PE5) or '*things that are relevant to this place, safeguarding, assessment, anti-oppressive practice...I'd almost done myself a bit of a checklist*' (PE8). An agenda also enabled both PE and student to keep on track with placement requirements, and when observations or interim reviews were due and to maintain focus on the administrative and management aspects of the placement structure.

However, particularly for some PEs in statutory settings, there were challenges to balance within supervision. For example, PE1, a PE in a statutory children and family team noted:

**PE1:** *you are overseeing so you know there are really tight timescales and I think subconsciously you can possibly pass on some of that, to them, (students), not rushed, but the need for those deadlines on to other people....and I think you have got to be conscious not to do that and overwhelm*

Similarly, other PEs felt pressures of statutory practice and for PE8 and PE3, the challenge was to resist being overly 'directive' with students, rather than supporting their judgements and decision making. PE3 commented on the challenge and contradictory forces of placements and the supervisory relationship within a statutory setting as follows:

**PE3:** *It's supposed to be a learning space, isn't it, so actually you need to help them to come to their own decisions rather than being as directive perhaps as I was. But there has to be a balance, I think, because they need to know that what they're doing is right*

These comments and challenges have resonance with some of the themes and analysis from the student interviews and these will be discussed further within this chapter.

### 10.3.4 The Assessment element of supervision

#### 10.3.4.1 Assessing all the time

Part of the interview schedule invited PEs to consider the contribution of supervision to their assessment of the student. PEs were clear about their role in assessment and commented that assessment permeated the supervisory relationship:

**PE4:** *When I'm working with a student, I'm assessing all the time*



*PE7: assessment is there all along.... I'm also assessing constantly where they're at and encouraging them to get to the next point*

There was also an understanding that assessment was a developmental process and PEs were measuring growth and development over the period of the placement – ‘*how they've progressed all the way through*’ (PE3). Some PEs noted the role that formal direct observation played within this – ‘*I don't just want to see it on paper, I want to see how you are doing*’ (PE1). For PE4, informal observation also played a role - ‘*sometimes I might just overhear a telephone call...so that's part of my ongoing assessment, is listening*’.

The importance of the student meeting their learning needs, and the range and appropriateness of learning opportunities as the bedrock for the PEs assessment was also indicated. This was suggested previously in PEs protective insistence that student learning needs and opportunities were defended against encroachment by team members or managers. PE5 said she felt that ‘*being active with a plan...so they get a breadth of experience*’ assisted her in a more robust assessment of the student .PE8 used a ‘*self-assessment tool*’ with her student and worked with her to ‘*narrow down*’ some of the learning objectives from the Learning Agreement Meeting into smaller objectives.

A shared understanding of the developmental process of assessment, and the nature of student contribution to this process, was thus important and the lack of this with one student was commented upon by PE7. Interestingly, this was the PE for the outlier student Stl, who felt ‘*emotionally not supported*’ and feared failing the placement (see Chapter 9). As the following quote suggests, lack of shared understanding appears to have caused frustration for both:

*PE7: Stl struggled to understand that assessment was a process...that my assessment of her was a process. For instance, I can't remember what she had done, probably*

*something for the interim review and I said, "That's fine, now let's look at how we could improve on that", "I'll take it away and improve it because I don't want to fail..."*

Greater discussion of the experiences and analysis of this outlier student (and PE) are discussed in Chapter 11.

#### 10.3.4.2 The holistic nature of assessment

PEs indicated understanding of the holistic nature of assessment and the need to gather and seek views and understanding of student development from a range of sources. It was also clear that PEs were conscious of the power invested in their position.

Thus, PEs spoke about the range of influences and sources used for their assessment. This included ensuring they read the student's assessments, written work and case notes; that they read and discussed the student's reflective logs; using direct and indirect observations; assessing the student's contributions to meetings and gaining feedback from colleagues and service users. PE3 in particular was forceful in her view of the role that young people's feedback played in her assessment of the student:

**PE3:** *a biggie for me was feedback from young people. That was invaluable for me...to get face to face with a 16year old who's angry , and be able to use those skills, and they're still coming to me, saying "Send her because she's brilliant".*

Supervision was helpful in informing their assessment in other ways. This included the student's preparation for supervision – ‘are they on time, are they preparing’ (PE7) - but also using supervision to gauge if ‘there are skills that are being picked up, if there's areas of knowledge’ (PE3) or understanding of the work they were doing, or the nature of ‘their working relationships with the children and families they are working with’ (PE1). PE6 considered supervision helpful in assessing more abstract qualities within the student, which she described as

*'things you can't measure. You know, enthusiasm, that kind of commitment, willingness...'* (PE6).

PEs also acknowledged the power within their role but gave indications of how they managed this to enable a fair assessment. PEs dealt with this in several different ways. Thus, PEs spoke of deliberately ensuring that others also carried out observations of the student in order to mitigate against total PE *'control'* (PE5) of the assessment, but also to offer *'validation'* (PE3) from others to the student about their work. PE3 and PE8 deliberately sat their students away from them, so the students did not feel they were constantly watching them. Conversely, other PEs, such as PE2 *'commandeered the seat next to me'* for the student in order to facilitate a close working relationship and PE9 felt that sitting next to her student enhanced her availability and approachability, commenting that her student *'was so engaged, we were constantly talking about everything'* (PE9).

#### 10.3.4.3 Preparedness for practice

PEs were asked to comment on their understanding of 'preparedness for practice', and then how well they felt their student was thus prepared. PEs considered preparedness for practice to incorporate a number of different elements - and generic words and terms such as 'adapt', 'reflect', 'values', 'empowerment'; 'using and transferring skills', 'having confidence' were used - many of which are encapsulated by PE1:

**PE1:** *I think it about a good understanding of different ways of working, erm, it's about having those adaptable skills and transferable skills that actually you might use that with that family, but also that ability to adapt. I think it is also about being able to learn as you are going along, but also the ability to reflect on action and in action about what you are doing, how did that work, why did I change my mind part way thorough that, and be able to take ownership for those decisions*

Some PEs referred to more specific skills and strategies they felt their student had learnt - including report writing (PE6); assessing risk (PE6; PE4; PE7); ability to work with others (PE4; PE5) and confidence, including '*confidence to challenge*' (PE4).

Whilst all PEs felt their student was ready to practice, for some this was a distinctly qualified understanding. Thus, although PE5 suggested her student had the '*value base*' and other skills necessary for entering practice, this did not imply that the student was '*the finished product, and thankfully we have the ASYE*' (PE5). These PEs acknowledged the foundational skills and understanding that the placement had provided students but considered that further learning was necessary, allied to further support provided by employers.

The foundational skills, knowledge and understanding provided by the placement as the basis for continuing support and learning is summed up by the comment from PE2, who considered the student '*ready to be supported into practice and she knows what to expect*' (PE2).

### 10.3.5 Positive Supervisory Relationship

#### 10.3.5.1 PE approach

PEs referred to a number of qualities and approaches essential to a positive supervisory relationship, many using similar words or phrases. Thus, for many PEs, being open and honest was key:

**PE3:** *honesty...something I always told my student... if I have got any concerns, we'll discuss them*

Other suggestions made by PEs regarding the facilitation of a positive supervisory relationship included: being clear about expectations from the beginning, partially facilitated for PE6 through the completion of a supervision agreement; being '*straightforward*' (PE9); being '*available*' (PE6);

PE9); being to open to student challenge (PE4; PE8) ; providing a space within supervision for discussion of 'mistakes' (PE1, PE7 , PE8) or to consider "*bad practice*" that had been witnessed (PE2). For PE2, the latter was important in her approach and concern to build trust and ensure supervision was '*a really safe space*', but such discussion was also evidently used as an opportunity for learning:

**PE2:** *I made the conscious effort to make it safe. It's okay to talk about whatever you want to in here, that's fine. It's not going any further unless it really has to. And actually, we can talk about good things you see and bad things you see and how people could do things differently.... So, I think that's the most important bit, is that trust*

Further comments regarding the building of a positive supervisory relationship included PE reliability and commitment to supervision (PE1; PE7) and PE display of '*trustworthiness*' (PE7), described thus: '*being there when you say you're going to be there, if you've offered to get something for them, get it now, that helps to build it up*' (PE7).

Mutuality within the relationship was explicitly expressed, considered by PE2 to be a '*mutual respect, a really good understanding of each other*' (PE2) and three PEs (PE1, PE2; PE4) specifically referred to the '*two-way process*' (PE1) within the supervisory relationship.

#### 10.3.5.2 Student qualities

During the interviews, PEs commented on the expectations they had of students in relation to qualities, approach to placement and attitude to learning.

Many PEs referred to expecting honesty and openness from students and that students would have '*integrity*' (PE6) and be '*forthcoming*' (PE4), PE3 referring to this as a key quality in the student – '*above all, she was really*

*honest*'. Honesty was also a basis for PE trust in a student, PE8 appreciated that her student was '*confident in saying no, I don't know how to do that, or I'm not confident in doing that*'. Other PEs actively encouraged this honesty within students:

**PE1:** *my expectations were that if there is something you are struggling with, you know, we have all been new...and it is not a problem to say I don't understand that, I know you have told me three times, but I am still not understanding it, that is not a problem*

Expectations and hopes in relation to the student's approach and attitude to learning were also evident. PEs appreciated their student's enthusiasm (PE3; PE6) and other PEs particularly commented on students '*work ethic*' (PE3) where a student '*volunteered to do work*' (PE5) and PE4 noted that the student would actively '*turn over stones and look for new things to do, she did that all the time while she was here*' (PE4). Self-direction and students taking responsibility for their learning was thus appreciated and expected by PEs, as the following comments suggest:

**PE8:** *(student was) keen to kind of improve and reflect...you didn't have to force her to think about what could be better, or what she'd done well*

PEs also commented on their student's reflective capabilities and some clearly had students who were more open to reflection than others. Thus, PE2's student would '*actively reflect...it was not this... I have to go away and think about it...actually think about it while you're doing it*'.

### 10.3.6 Impact on learning and practice

#### 10.3.6.1 Impact on student practice

##### 10.3.6.1.1. Real practice

There was a sense in PE comments that 'preparedness for practice' and the role of the PE and the placement involved helping the student engage with a wider understanding of the pressures of qualified practice. This was referred to by PE6 as '*real practice out there*' and included an acknowledgement that it would be different to a student placement. Thus, the frequency and nature of supervision would be different – '*it won't be heavy supervision and lots of supervision, it will be, go out there and do things on your own*' (PE9). To 'prepare' students for this, PE8 spoke of promoting '*independence*' in her student and encouraging her ability to gauge when to use informal supervision or when to '*save some stuff up (for formal supervision) and have to decide what was urgent and what was not urgent*' (PE8). Likewise, PE6 encouraged her student in decision-making – '*day 80, you need to start making decisions. Because what they're thinking, and it was thinking aloud really, a lot of it...most of the time they'd make the right judgement, they didn't need me*' (PE6). However, as has already been discussed, this preparation for 'real practice' was allied to the foregrounding and attention to the emotional impact of social work during the placement, laying foundations for good career practice.

##### 10.3.6.1.2 Relationships and challenge

As has already been discussed, positive student qualities and reciprocity, a 'two-way process' were considered by PEs as foundational elements of a sound supervisory relationship, but also impacted on the willingness of the team to offer support. The importance of relationships in the team and with other professionals was noted as key for student learning by several PEs, '*networking with other professionals*' (PE7) being key to future practice.

However, many PEs (PE9; PE10; PE1; PE3; PE4; PE5) also spoke about student learning in relation to understanding the importance of challenge, with other professionals and with managers - *'you have to learn to stand up for yourself sometimes, say 'I can't do anymore'* (PE4):

**PE1:** *(StA) was having some quite difficult conversations...with the other professionals who in some respects were trying to pull rank on her...she was really good in the manner in which she did it (challenged), it was respectful to everybody.*

**PE5:** *(StE had) a very tricky consultant, and I had to acknowledge that, I said, well you managed that really well, and it was very difficult.*

#### 10.3.6.2 Impact on PE practice

The impact of the student and the supervisory relationship had an impact on PE practice and learning in a number of ways. Several PEs mentioned learning from the student (PE9 *'she kept me on my toes'*) or being challenged by them and both PE4 and PE8 were specific about the importance of challenge from students:

**PE8:** *I think I probably chose people that I thought would give me a challenge, that would have an expectation, rather than somebody who would sit there and absorb just like a sponge.*

PE5 noted she had learnt from the student *'in relation to housing issues, StE was far more knowledgeable about that than I was, through practical experience'*. In addition, PE9 implied a particular impact of the student presence in that, prior to the student's arrival she had begun to *'implement having a case discussion group, several times I have tried to do this and no interest whatsoever, it was like pulling teeth...now people are saying can we get together and discuss x case and y case and see what other people have got to bring to it'*.



#### 10.4 Dimensions of supervision - analysis of the PE perspective

The themes outlined from the PE interviews indicate similar dimensions to those arising from the student interviews (outlined in Chapter 9) – the centrality of the student and PE relationship; the focus on practice; the importance of the wider environment for learning and the role of student supervision as part of a pathway to practice. These will be addressed in turn.

##### 10.4.1 The centrality of the student and PE relationship

PEs indicated they had expectations regarding student qualities, honesty, and reciprocity in the relationship. Further, in the same way that students valued the supervisory encounter as a 'safe space', the PE interviews indicated that PEs consciously tried to provide this. This was through being honest, open, available, and trustworthy, and significantly, trying to '*protect*' the student from being overworked or put upon by managers or others. The forceful insistence with which some PEs voiced the desire to 'protect' the student in this manner was notable.

##### 10.4.2 Focus on practice

PEs, like students, had a clear and persistent focus on practice as an essential element of supervision. The PEs awareness of responsibility and accountability easily matched the students' awareness of this imperative, perhaps with a greater acknowledgement of the competing demands on their time and the need for balance. PE acknowledgement of the challenges presented within supervision and the need to balance direction, autonomy and learning echo's the findings from the Nordstrand (2017) study about the balance of direction and autonomy to give to students , and the impact of the PEs own workload on their time. However, PEs understanding of their role in enabling learning and the need to use supervision to think through and 'unpick' and reflect on practice would suggest that the tempering of these managerial and organisational imperatives is possible.

PE responses to the issue of the educative aspect of their role were complex but indicated some understanding of the extended nature of the educative element (such as enabling and facilitating learning), beyond discussion of theory. Some PE responses indicated a struggle with theory articulation, as discussed in Chapter 8 (Osmond and O'Connor, 2004) and acknowledged the impact of time constraints and a 'wish to do better' in this area. Whilst the contention of PE6 - that she expected a 'robust' approach to theory with final year students and for this to be included in their written reflections – is laudable, I suggest that the *use* and *discussion* of theory within student supervision (based on their written reflections as a tool) as an aid to thinking about practice and intervention is a missed opportunity.

#### 10.4.3. The wider environment for learning

As discussed in Chapter 9, the wider environment for learning and the impact of the physical and emotional context on student learning, was understood by PEs. As with student experiences of supervision, the wider role of a supportive team and peer support was recognised, along with the importance of promoting positive relationships with other professionals. In a similar fashion to student perspectives on supervision, the issue of challenge arose within the PE interviews – challenge as an essential part of practice (with future managers or other professionals), but also within the supervisory forum.

#### 10.4.4. Pathway to practice

The phrase used by PE2 – that the student was '*ready to be supported into practice and she knows what to expect*' – encapsulates many of the nuanced understandings and experiences of student supervision voiced by PEs in their interviews. Thus, they recognised student supervision was indeed part of an essential pathway to practice, and their focus on preparing students for this ('*knowing what to expect*' in the '*real world out there*') was indicated by encouraging thinking through of practice, increasing student responsibility for decision making, and acknowledging and encouraging student challenge.

However, the views of PEs in relation to providing a safe space and seeking to 'protect' the students on placement with them indicated an understanding that students indeed needed to be '*supported into practice*' as part of their ongoing learning journey. This contention is reinforced by the comments of some of the PEs in relation to how they protected their student and challenged managers and others in so doing ('*arguments in the office about it...no, she's not having that*'(PE2)).

### 10.5 Chapter summary

The themes and dimensions of PEs experiences of student supervision indicate that PEs in this study have a conceptually nuanced understanding of their role in relation to the educational, support, assessment, and managerial functions of their role. However, the challenges of student supervision – in particular, the balancing of accountability concerns alongside the wider PE educative role – are evident. PEs acknowledgement of the power invested in their assessment function are clear, as is the need to locate this function in the context of a trusting, honest and reciprocal relationship with the student.

## Chapter 11 Concluding analysis – themes, anomalies, and dissonances

### 11.1 Introduction

Within this chapter, I offer concluding thoughts and analysis arising from the findings from the 30 recorded supervision sessions (Chapters 6 and 7) and their analysis (Chapter 8); from the interviews with PEs and students (Chapters 9 and 10) and the review of the literature (Chapter 3). Throughout this study, during the period of data collection, reading and reviewing literature, coding, and analysing data and presenting findings, two strong themes have presented – the enduring centrality of the PE and student relationship and the predominance of case work discussion as the frame for student supervision. Within these themes, and alongside them, clear dissonances and anomalies have arisen, and in some instances, accepted assumptions and orthodoxies of the content of student placement supervision have been significantly troubled.

### 11.2 The centrality of the PE and student relationship

The enduring centrality of the PE and student relationship as key to experiences of supervision and learning, highlighted by several studies and authors within the literature base and the literature review is replicated in the findings within this study. The positivity, strength, and warmth of feeling about supervision and corresponding and contributing PE (or student) behaviours, approaches and attitudes within the supervisory encounter was transparent within the student and PE interviews. A supportive, collaborative, trusting and enabling relationship was evident from student and PE comments. Student views on the availability and responsiveness of the PE, feelings of being '*looked after*' (StE) and in a '*safe space*' (StH) found parallels in PEs prioritising '*safe*' supervision and making a '*conscious effort*' to do so (PE2); being '*open*' and '*honest*' (PEs 1,3,5) and endeavouring to provide '*belonging*' (PE3) for a student. There was also a clear sense from PEs of wanting to '*protect*' the student from being overwhelmed or overloaded with work. Some well-honed communication and relationship skills were evident (on both sides) in the recorded supervision sessions

(Chapters 6,7,8), an easy conversational tone and dialogue indicating a sense of reciprocity, mutuality, and respect within the dyads.

#### 11.2.1 'Feel secure, then explore' – the anomaly of the outlier student

Howe's (2014) contention that the 'recipe' for good service user and social worker relationships is 'feel secure then explore' (p.133) feels an appropriate adage to apply to the experiences of the outlier student, Stl. In stark contrast to other students, this student felt that her PE was '*emotionally not supportive*' although she was '*educationally supportive*'. For this student, not feeling listened to or heard and thus not gaining or maintaining a sense of trust affected not only the relationship, but also opportunities for learning. Stl notes that '*in the end...I kept it as brief as I could*' and thus using supervision as an opportunity to explore and discuss practice was diminished.

Significantly, this student was the only student to mention the '*power imbalance*' and was acutely aware of the (assessment) power invested the PE role. This clearly aligns with the Litvack et al., (2010) study and their finding that for some students a 'sense of vulnerability emerged as a significant stressor when the relationship was not considered solid' (p. 233).

The student's PE(PE7) also noted her experiences with Stl, in particular commenting in her interview that (in relation to Stl) '*if I posed anything that might, what I would call critical reflection, but I think she saw it as criticism, there was all this tentatively defensive response*'. Interestingly, in relation to the content of the recorded supervision sessions, this dyad included the lowest number of service users discussed across the data set during each supervision session and time in the supervision sessions was taken to consider wider aspects of the placement, preparing for a direct observation and including lengthy feedback after a direct observation (one of only two dyads where this was occurred.). PE7s contributions to the two recorded sessions were noted favourably – for example, as being probing (see Extract S, Chapter 7); being skilled in questioning and using questioning to probe and extrapolate learning, and being comfortable with asking about feelings and anxieties. However, PE and student within this dyad (Dyad 9) appear to have operated like 'ships in the night', narrowly missing each other in

approach and expectation. In each of the transcribed supervision sessions, there was a sense that the PE was 'challenging' the student and sometimes with limited involvement from the student (see Extract Y, Chapter 7). To avoid collision, it appears that the student disengaged with elements of the supervision process, regardless of intent on the part of the PE.

There may be significance in other aspects of this relationship also, in that StI identified as Asian British/Pakistani and PE7 identified as White British (see Chapter 4 and Tables 4 and 5, Student and PE profiles). PE7 was also the longest qualified PE in social work, qualifying in 1975. The impact of difference and concerns regarding differential power imbalances in relation to the practice learning experiences of black and ethnic minority students have been discussed in the literature review. The lack of a trusting and supportive relationship has been noted in a number of studies (Bartoli et al., 2008; Tedam, 2014; Thomas et al., 2011) and find echo in the StI's comments and experiences within this study. In relation to the PEs views and experiences, findings from the Yeung et al., (2019) UK study, are echoed as PEs in that study noted the challenge of 'social differences'; of supervising younger students and the difficulties engaging students in 'critical dialogue' (p.7).

The PEPS (BASW, 2019) require that PEs promote anti oppressive practices within practice learning and there are some useful models that can be used to explore difference or life experiences and their impact, for example, the MANDELA model (Tedam, 2012) or the Social GRRRAACCEEESSS model (Burnham, 2012). Use of such models early in the PE and student supervisory relationship could provide a helpful platform for discussion and could provide opportunities for the promotion of security and a sense of safety and trust in the PE and student relationship.

### 11.2.2 The value of 'Recognition theory'

Honneth's (1995) conceptual framework of 'recognition' provides a helpful lens through which to view and analyse the significance of the PE and student relationship, as identified within this study. Honneth's 'recognition theory' (1995) considers the formation of identity and the influence of

recognition (self and social recognition), self-esteem and self-confidence on this formation. He contends that human beings are dependent on three forms of recognition for the development and protection of their identity – referring to these as ‘love, rights and esteem’ (p.143). Whilst love or care is associated in the theory with early childhood relationships and draws on psychoanalytic theory, the emotional support of love provides self-confidence and an essential ‘foundational sense of self’ (Zurn, 2015, p.32). The second form of recognition is ‘rights based’, and, in having legal rights and legal status as a ‘full and equal member’ of a community (Zurn, 2015, p.34), individuals gain self-respect, described by Mitchell (2020) as feeling ‘that one is equal to everyone else’ (p.4). The third form of recognition, ‘esteem’ is described by Turney (2012) as ‘social appreciation’ and ‘social acknowledgement of the individual’s achievements and abilities’ (p.4). Zurn (2015) notes that Honneth’s ‘key claim is that we only become who we are through our interactions with others’ (p. 25), thus recognition is mediated through social relationships. The converse of recognition is ‘misrecognition’, whereby the status or identity of a person is violated or undermined. Houston (2015) names these three forms of recognition as receiving ‘care, respect and the acknowledgement of one’s strengths’ (p.14) but to which he adds a fourth dimension, that of personal change and a ‘capacity for self-transformation’ (p.14).

Whilst Honneth’s work on recognition has been philosophically critiqued within the social work literature - accused by Garrett (2010) of ‘psychological reductionism’ (p.1521) and the ‘under theorizing’ (p.1528) of the wider role of the state in structuring relations – other authors have noted the contribution that Honneth’s conceptual framework makes to social work practice (Houston, 2015; Turney, 2012; Mitchell, 2020).

Turney’s (2012) acknowledgement of the value of recognition, respect and reciprocity and the attention that this focuses on the affective and social dimensions of experience clearly has resonance with the data and findings within this study. Student interviews (Chapter 9) indicated that they felt valued and respected (apart from StI), as well as feeling supported and

cared for. A form of 'legal' respect from PEs, and acknowledgement of the student's place as training practitioners within a regulated profession can also be said to be present. Thus, there were coded activities and conversations within the recorded supervision sessions where some detailed conversations about ethical and legal imperatives took place (see Extracts M, X, Z, Chapter 7). Further, emphasis on 'doing things right' and a sense of joint accountability (on both sides) indicated an acknowledgement of membership of a legally and ethically bounded community of practice. Similarly, I have noted in Chapter 7 where PE and student hypothesising during supervision sessions were matched and students were confidently and readily hypothesising, without prompting. This could be said to exemplify their status of feeling 'an equal member' in a community of (see Extracts P and Q, Chapter 7). The acknowledgement of student strengths and achievements – PEs commenting on where the student had done well or where positive feedback had been received - was identified in the recorded and coded supervisory activities (Chapter 7). Further feelings of recognition, respect and achievement were identified, particularly in the student interviews (Chapter 9), whilst both the PE and student interviews were transparent in their acknowledgement of Houston's (2015) suggested fourth dimension of recognition, that of personal change.

### 11.3. Focus on practice – case work discussion framing supervision

The other major theme within the data, particularly the recorded supervision sessions, was the focus on practice and case work discussion informing the frame of the supervisory session and of PE intervention within supervision. This confirms the findings of the (few) studies of audio recorded supervision sessions outlined in the literature review. Thus, 'case discussion' (Nelsen, 1974) or the student 'reporting back' and 'telling the case' (Brodie, 1993; Brodie and Williams, 2013) dominated supervision sessions, with the PEs consequent advice and guidance following (but also often expressing opinion and hypothesising). As confirmed in the studies within the literature review, students in this study also valued opportunities for 'doing' and 'thinking' activities (Lee and Fortune, 2013b; Coohy et al., 2017; Flanagan and



Wilson, 2018) during the placement, the latter being predicated on a safe, trusted and emotionally attuned relationship with their PE (Killick, 2005; Knight, 2001). Students also valued and acknowledged their PEs as a knowledgeable resource and role model (Baretti, 2009; Miehl et al., 2013).

A particular anomaly in the findings from the 30 recorded supervision sessions is indicated in this thesis and this is in relation to feedback within supervision. The literature review overwhelmingly notes that feedback is valued by students and helpful to their learning (Ketner et al., 2017; Ross and Ncube, 2018; Bogo, 2015; Smith et al., 2015; Roulston et al., 2018; Miehl et al., 2013), and in one study, PEs also included the giving of feedback as a key element of the PE role (McSweeney, 2016). However, findings from the recorded supervision sessions in this thesis (see Topic Coverage in supervision, Chapter 6) indicated the provision of feedback was low, either ongoing appraisal feedback in relation to the student's progress, after direct observation of the student's practice or other student activity, or in relation to a wider review of student learning in preparation for an interim review. Only 2 of the 30 recorded sessions coded detailed feedback by the PE after a direct observation (PE7, Dyads 8 and 9). This limited presence of feedback, in any form, be that evaluative, progress marker or constructive, has been discussed in Chapter 8 and such findings do not chime with the research literature nor with the accepted and assumed place of feedback found within the wider practice learning literature (Evans, 1999; Williams and Rutter, 2019).

The underuse and reference to direct observation of the student's practice as an opportunity to promote thinking or theoretical issues, was a particular and surprising dissonant feature of the findings. Doel (2018) notes this devaluing of 'the practice of practice' and suggests 'we need more research to know just how much direct time together is the norm' (p.xiii) for PEs and students. He suggests that the limited attention paid to this is one of the 'wallpapers' of practice education, 'so prevalent and taken for granted that is no longer remarkable or remarked upon' (p.xiii). Doel's contentions are confirmed in this study.

### 11.3.1 Case work as gateway and facilitating learning

Whilst discussion of case work framed supervision and PE supervisory intervention, and findings could thus point to the managerial capture of supervision, an alternative paradigm was introduced in Chapter 8, that of the potential of case work as a gateway to greater conceptual discussion and student learning. Findings from the recorded supervision sessions, and further bolstered by both student and PE interviews, suggested that discussion of case work was not always 'procedurally bound' as a simple managerial model would imply. Further, even where PEs were explaining a system or giving advice, this was not always in relation to procedural issues and were often driven by pedagogical purposes. Thus, in many supervision sessions, there was conversational tone and exchange, the 'zigging and zagging' (Kadushin and Harkness, 2014, p.132) of dialogue, the invitation to hypothesise, offer and exchange opinion. This confirms findings from Nelsen's (1974) early research and a supervisory discussion pattern where 'both FI and student participated actively, with much volunteering of information and ideas' (p.149). Such discussions were often underpinned by regulatory imperatives and accountability concerns, and some PEs were clearly more skilled and comfortable in encouraging and sustaining such 'thinking through of practice' or '*drift*' as PE4 called it. These findings are similar to the Brodie and Williams (2013) study, where the authors note that there was a focus on practice discussion and analysis during supervision, where student and PE 'were actively and interactively engaged in a learning process' (p. 519).

### 11.3.2 Theorising and unpicking practice

In relation to the issue of theorising, using, and referring to theory during supervision, there were dissonances: between a recent study using audio recorded supervision sessions (Brodie and Williams, 2013) and between the coded activities from the recorded supervision sessions (Chapters 6 and 7), and student interview responses. Thus, the Brodie and Williams (2013) study indicated a significant increase (from the earlier Brodie (1993) study) in

references to theory and the student's academic work during supervision, findings not replicated in this study.

All students interviewed said that 'theories and 'theorising' about practice were an element of their supervisory experiences, although their experiences differed; such theorising was not always routine, and some students suggested that it could be increased during supervision. However, analytically coded activities (Chapter 7) suggested a different picture, where reference to theory was the second lowest coded activity for PEs and the lowest coded activity for students. Similarly, Chapter 6 (topic coding) noted the limited amount of time spent on the student's academic work or portfolio preparation during supervision, both of which could provide opportunities for introducing theory. The use of tools or models to encourage discussion of the theory – practice connection was also noticeably absent in the content of the recorded supervision sessions, and PEs also noted their 'weakness' around theorising, and 'unpicking' practice' (see Chapter 10).

The dissonance between the coded activities and students' stated experiences is a conundrum on several levels. It could be the case that the 30 recorded supervision sessions sent and coded represented an aberration and that within other sessions, greater discussion of theory took place. Alternatively, it could be that student's self-reporting of experiences (when interviewed) was skewed in some way. This could have been due to a number of reasons: the interviews took place one to two months after placement had ended and students had qualified, so memory was warped or infused with a rosy glow; the student was aware of the desirability (necessity?) of 'applying theory to practice' within social work education so could have felt uncomfortable if it was not present during supervision; the student had possibly spent a lot of time considering theory towards the end of the placement when preparing the portfolio and other academic work, so understanding and application of theory was fresh in their mind; or students had low thresholds of understanding in relation to what 'theory discussion' entailed and thus the merest mention of 'theory' during supervision sufficed. Further, as is evident in the literature review and discussed in Chapter 8

(analysis of the findings), there is conflicting research and contradictory findings regarding the integration of theory and practice on placement and the findings from this study confirm this perplexity. Thus, often students do not receive regular opportunities for linking practice to theory (Maidment, 2000; Cleak et al., 2016 Roulston et al., 2018), yet other self-report studies (Lee and Fortune, 2013a, 2013b; Fortune, 2003; Flanagan and Wilson, 2019) note that student satisfaction with placement is related to the opportunities for such theory to practice discussion and wider ‘conceptual-linkage activities’ (Lee and Fortune, 2013a). The conundrum arising within this study – the difference between student self-report and the content coded in the recorded sessions – serves to underline the importance of ‘uncovering’ what happens in student supervision, but also to acknowledge the potential impact of positive experiences, feeling valued and ‘recognised’ may have on student responses, regardless of the actual content of the supervisory session.

### 11.3.3 Use of tools and activities to facilitate learning

Direct and independent practice is noted in the literature review as important to students and ‘exposure to direct work with clients’ is placed by students ‘over and above other learning tools’ (Wilson and Flanagan, 2019, p.6). Within this study, students worked directly and independently with many service users, and as has been discussed, were given a lot of time in supervision to discuss this. However, the corollary of this is twofold: as suggested in Chapter 6 (Topic Coding), little time was thus left for discussion of other placement learning activities that the student was engaged in and further, could inflate a tendency (acknowledged by PEs) for a singular focus on case management within supervision, or as described by PE9 during interview, *‘going through cases, tell me about this, tell me about this, I want this by then’*.

The literature review included many studies where students reported on the range of learning activities, methods and tools used in placement. Activities included supervision (but the detail of how supervision is used, or what it is expected to contain that makes it a key learning activity, is omitted), along

with other learning activities already discussed in this chapter, such as being given feedback, linking practice to theory, discussing feelings, being observed and observing others. Within the literature review, the findings from these studies are 'broad brush', with no explication of how or where these activities are enacted and what PEs or students do (or need to do) to enhance their utility. Within this study, it was noticeable that few tools and models were used within supervision to promote thinking about practice; to help with theory-practice connections; to promote reflection or to consider anti oppressive or anti discriminatory practice. However, these exist in abundance within the practice learning literature base (Doel et al., 1996; Collingwood, 2005; Maclean, 2016, 2017; Taplin, 2018) and students and PEs are often familiar with them. Their use could have assisted both PEs and students in theorising about practice or reflecting more rigorously on practice, both activities being low in occurrence in the recorded supervision sessions.

#### 11.4 Assumptions and expectations challenged?

The data collected and analysed in this study throws into sharp relief the range and complexity of both the PE role and the interaction within supervision, and also refutes some of the expected content of placement student supervision. One of the objectives of this study was to explore student and PE views in relation to the effectiveness of supervision in facilitating student learning, and the PE and student interviews do confirm that supervision was felt to be effective in facilitating and promoting student learning. Further, student learning was indicated across a wide spectrum of areas.

However, other areas of analysis within this thesis question and trouble some existing orthodoxies and assumptions about placement supervision. For example, in Chapter 7, I questioned the categories within the coding frame and whether my differentiation of PE 'direct teaching' and 'advice, guidance and direction' was reasonable and whether I had presumed that student supervision would replicate the 'task and target' practice (Bartoli and

Kennedy, 2015) pertaining in particular to statutory practitioner supervision. Findings from this study suggest a particular dissonance with this presumption. Thus, analytical coding (see Appendix 7 and Chapter 7) indicated that some of the highest occurrences of Student 'Describing case / practice/ case update' occurred in Dyads 6 and 7 (and these dyads both discussed the highest number of service users across the data set) and these occurrences were accompanied by some of the lowest occurrences of 'PE expressing opinion or hypothesising'. Both placements (with same PE6) were in a voluntary sector setting, yet the supervision sessions were consistently focused on short casework updates, with discussion extremely limited in analysis or wider theorising and replicated much of the 'task and target' approach said to happen within statutory supervision. In contrast, Dyads 10 and 11, both in (adult) statutory settings, recorded some of the highest occurrences of 'PE expressing opinion or hypothesising' within their supervision sessions, matched by some of the highest occurrences of Student 'Expressing opinion, hypothesising/ providing analysis of practice.

In addition, whilst some of the more skilled questioning and prompts encouraging exploration of practice was evident in the practice of the more experienced PEs (such as PEs 4,5, 7 and 8), the PEs undertaking the role with their first student (PEs 1,2 and 3) also evidenced some of these skills, and importantly, interviews with these latter PEs indicated a particular reflective attention to their role and a focus on wanting to improve and adapt their practice with future students. Findings from this study would suggest that Stage 2 accreditation as the main requirement for undertaking the (independent) PE role with final placement students (as required in the 2019 PEPS, BASW, 2019) may be misplaced. Whilst experience and academic knowledge and understanding of the PE role counts, so too does a PEs particular qualities and attributes; their attitude and approach to learning (and continuing learning) and the range and type of support they receive from a mentor.

The premise of the thesis (and the expectations of PEPS 2019 (BASW, 2019) as discussed in Chapter 2) is that whilst student supervision should include support, management and assessment features, the educative element and a focus on student learning should be foregrounded. The findings of this study, particularly Chapters 6 and 7 and the coded content from the supervision sessions have challenged this expectation to a degree. For example, the limited discussion of theory; the lack of feedback to encourage and explore learning and the low occurrence of (formalised) reflection beyond the level of 'technical' or 'practical' reflection as identified by Ruch (2009a), contributes to the contention that aspects of placement supervision could have had a greater educative focus.

### 11.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the two main themes arising from the data presented in the thesis: the centrality of the PE and student relationship and the case work framing of supervision predominance of case work discussion. Some anomalies and dissonances within and alongside the themes have been presented. Further, areas of contest and challenge to accepted expectations of the content of the educative focus of student placement supervision have been discussed. The final chapter will present recommendations for the educative repurposing of student placement supervision.

## **Chapter 12 Conclusion and recommendations**

### **12.1 Introduction**

This chapter concludes the thesis and discusses the strengths of the study and its limitations. The chapter also makes recommendations for the educative repurposing of student placement supervision and suggests areas for further research.

### **12.2 The strengths of the thesis and contribution to the knowledge base**

The hidden nature of what takes place in student placement supervision was the main impetus for this study. The underresearched nature of this was confirmed in the literature review, with the majority of studies being student 'self-report' and 'placement satisfaction' studies and few studies using audio recordings of student supervision to 'lift the lid' on supervision activity. This study has content coded 30 audio recorded supervision sessions from 11 student and PE dyads, across a range of placement settings. Alongside the Basso (1987) study (where 30 recorded supervision sessions were analysed in relation to fidelity with a particular model of supervision), this represents the largest number of recorded (and coded) student supervision sessions since the Nelsen (1974) study, where 68 audio recorded supervision sessions ('conferences') were coded. This study also matches the Nelsen (1974) study in involving the largest number of student and PE supervisory dyads providing audio recordings of supervision (and during the duration of a placement, rather than a single supervision session as in the Brodie and Williams (2013) study), both studies involving 11 dyads. By dint of these features alone, particularly given the 47 years that has elapsed since the Nelsen (1974) study, the contribution of this PhD to the knowledge and literature base has some significance.

A further strength is the qualitative approach taken to the collection of data - ethnographic methods using audio recorded supervision sessions, complemented by semi structured interviews with students and PEs – as this has allowed the exploration of a broad range of subtleties and nuances of practice. This triangulation of data has strengthened the research, and as



discussed in Chapter 4, this has assisted with complementarity and 'crystallization' (Tobin and Begley, 2004, p.393) of the data. The major strength of using audio recording of supervision sessions for data collection, and the coding of the content within each session, is that it focused on 'practice as it happens' and has afforded a glimpse into hitherto hidden interactions during student supervision that is acknowledged as a gap in the research literature (Doel, 2010; Parker, 2007). This ethnographic research method also complements the upturn in the use of such methods in other contemporary research into social work practice (Ferguson, 2016b; Ferguson et al., 2020a).

Methodologically, the development of the bespoke coding frame (Appendix 4 and Appendix 7) to differentiate and delineate the content of student supervision has assisted in transparency of data and a robust audit trail (Bryman, 2008). Similarly, this also chimes with the current direction of travel in other related research endeavours into (children and family) practitioner supervision, where Wilkins and colleagues (Wilkins, 2017c) have developed and revised a Coding Framework for supervision. Wilkins (2017c) contends that such a coding framework can provide 'the basis for more rigorous examinations of the relationship between supervision, practice and outcomes', a contention that resonates with the findings from this study.

The findings and analysis provided in this study contribute to, and extend, the established knowledge base of practice education. The exposure and exploration of the fine detail of what happens in student supervision has highlighted areas of practice that are consistent with established research and literature in the field. For example, the centrality of a reciprocal and trusting PE and student relationship as the pivot on which much else depends; the use of supervision to explore direct work and practice; using supervision to seek and be given emotional support and the contribution that supervision and the placement experience makes to student confidence and readiness to practice, have all been spotlighted in this research. Other findings and analysis within this study have been more incongruent with established knowledge and assumed or expected practices within student

supervision. Thus, the coded content findings from the audio recorded supervision sessions (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) indicate significant departure with established expectations in relation to the frequency (and place?) of theory, reflection and feedback within student supervision. A further strength of the study lies in the voice it gives to the experiences of PEs in relation to supervision, an area of practice learning that is underexplored in the literature.

### 12.3 The limitations of the research

This was a small-scale qualitative study, involving 11 PE and student dyads (11 students and 9 PEs) from one regional location in the UK, and these factors clearly limit the study and its generalisability. Whilst the PEPS (BASW, 2019) are nationally recognised standards for PEs and for PE training, regional and local partnerships develop their own pathways and programmes to enable the standards to be met. Thus, the regional location and pool from which the PEs participating in this study were drawn, could be a limiting factor and it could be the case that PEs from this region are not representative of other PEs who practice elsewhere in England or, they have been trained differently. Having been involved with the teaching, training and assessing of PEs locally, regionally and nationally over a number of years (and co - authored a book for PEs based on these experiences, purporting to be a 'handy guide...and a reminder of what they have covered in their initial PE training course' (Field et al., 2016, p.1)), I believe that the training provided and standards expected of PEs in this region is similar to others. However, it is the case that the inclusion of an indicative Practice Education Curriculum in the 2019 PEPS (BASW, 2019) is a welcome step forward in standardising expected elements of PE training, as this was a missing feature of the 2013 PEPS (BASW, 2013) that pertained to the PEs involved in this study.

Although 30 recorded supervision sessions were received and coded, three of the dyads only sent two supervision records. Further, whilst the invitation to participate (see the Participant Information Sheets, Appendix 1 and 2) asked for 3 supervision audio recordings to be sent to the researcher, it did

not specify at what points in the 100-day placement would be preferable. It may have been that asking for particular supervision recordings, at the beginning, middle and towards the end of the 100-day placement, could have indicated different activities and interactions, as suggested by the research undertaken by Everett et al., (2011), Knight (2000) and Gardiner (1989) highlighted in the literature review. A low number of supervisory records was also received, and this limited the analysis of them (Chapter 8), although perhaps providing an insight into the lack of understanding or research into the purpose, form or function of student supervisory records.

Whilst the development of the bespoke Coding Frame (Appendix 4 and Appendix 7) required for the content coding of supervision sessions has been referred to as a strength of the study, it also has limitations. In Chapters 6 and 7 (findings from topic an analytical coding), I referred to coding overlap and questioned some topic categories. Whilst this did not detract from the overall usefulness of the Coding Frame, the limitations of a single researcher were apparent. Given the complexity of developing a coding frame (also noted by Nelsen, 1974), I am envious of Wilkins' (2017c) reference to his 'team of talented and experienced colleagues' who have assisted in the development of the Coding Frame for the many supervision studies he has been involved with. In his view, this enabled the reduction of categories and dimensions whilst 'deepening our (sic) conceptual understanding of what they mean' (Wilkins, 2017c). The experience of developing and using a bespoke Coding Frame in this study has heightened my awareness of the need to involve others in its further development and potential revision.

In relation to student experiences of placement, two students (out of 11 students who participated and sent audio recordings of supervision sessions) did not respond to my requests for interview (StF, Dyad 6 and StG, Dyad 7). This may have impacted on themes arising from the interviews.

#### 12.4 Recommendations for the educative re focusing of student supervision

In Chapter 8 I suggested that an educative (re) purposing of student placement supervision is required, premised on a (reasserted) understanding

and application of Kolb (2015) and experiential learning. The analysis of the PE and student interviews confirmed my suggestions and belief that, to 'rebalance' and maintain a focus on the placement for the facilitation of student learning, an educative refocus of student supervision is required. Such a refocus would also ensure that essential domains and elements of the PEPS (BASW, 2019) can be met successfully. As part of the conclusion to this thesis, I present these as recommendations for future practice and for inclusion in PE training, noting where this will enable domains and elements of PEPS (BASW, 2019) to be met:

- PEs need to consider the creation and delivery of a teaching and learning programme for the placement, or for aspects of the programme in relation to particular learning opportunities (PEPS, 2019, Domain A4; A5; B2; B4; C5)
- Widen PEs active facilitation skills through the expansion of their questioning repertoire (PEPS, 2019, Domain B3; B4)
- Foreground consideration of 'theory and practice' connection within the supervisory encounter; use of tools and models can be explored (PEPS, 2019, B2; B3; D2)
- Consider ways to prompt thinking and reflection that ask questions beyond self and / or technical reflection (PEPS, 2019, B3; C2)
- Reassert the use of direct observation as a primary tool for learning and assessment and as a deliberate location for feedback (PEPS, 2019, C1; C3)
- Promote and encourage emotional thinking within supervision (PEPS 2019, A3; B3; C2)
- Reassert the importance and specific discussion of equality, diversity and anti discriminatory practice (Thompson, 2016) within social work, as essential elements of the value base of social work and practice education (PEPS, 2019, 2.1 Statement of Values). This is a reminder particularly acute at the time of submission of this thesis and the racialised discrimination highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement (Reid, 2020).

These specific recommendations find a broader voice in the indicative Practice Education Curriculum for PE training courses suggested in the PEPS (BASW, 2019, p.14). Some of the training suggestions within this curriculum includes training PEs in: 'how to be a reflective supervisor'; 'expertise in reflective supervision'; 'developing a student's capacity to be critically reflective'; 'providing challenging and positive constructive feedback'; 'research mindedness and developing the student's capacity to make good use of knowledge in practice' and 'understanding of , and critical engagement with, the experiences of people with lived experience of social work including issues of culture and discrimination and social justice'.

A further recommendation relates to the current PEPS (BASW, 2019) requirements that only a Stage 2 PE can independently support and assess a final placement social work student. The Fazzi and Rosignoli (2016) study referred to in Chapter 3 (literature review) builds upon the Waterhouse et al., (2011) study in its contention that supervisor / PE confidence and expertise builds with time and is thus partially a developmental process. However, within this study, the Stage 1 PEs were skilled in many areas of the role, as indicated both within PE and student interviews and findings from the audio recorded supervision sessions (Chapters 6,7 and 8). Therefore, individual aptitude, discernment and deliberation in the role (alongside receiving positive and helpful mentoring) may be overriding attributes, regardless of level of accreditation in the role. The educational (re)purposing of student supervision recommended here includes helpful suggestions and reminders for PEs at both levels of accreditation.

However, the necessity of a secure, trusting, honest and empathic PE and student relationship remains, as without this foundational rock, many of these recommendations may founder.

#### 12.4.1 Refocusing student supervision in Covid19 pandemic and post Covid 19 conditions

As mentioned in Chapter 1, social workers, students, PEs have been, and still are, living and practising in Covid-19 pandemic conditions that have disrupted, challenged, and changed social work practice and the nature of student placements. Many of the practices forced upon practitioners and students by the Covid-19 pandemic – including increased home working with intermittent days spent in the office; limited face to face contact with fellow professionals or between PE and student; and visits and meetings undertaken on virtual platforms – may continue (or be reinstated) in the near future. Pink et al., (2021) refer to this as ‘Digital social work’ and a ‘hybrid practice that integrates digital practices such as video calls and face-to-face interactions’ (p.1). This new form of hybrid social work will likely be replicated within student placement settings, and attention thus need to be focused on additional considerations needed to be applied to the recommendations above.

During the height of Covid-19, Ahmed (2020) urged managers to ‘enhance the compassion in supervision’ through offering increased (virtual) supervision if needed and purposefully creating space and time for the exploration of feelings. Domakin’s (2020) explorations into supervision during Covid-19 echoed this, and supervisors noted their focus shifting towards emotional containment of the supervisee, allied to rigorous regular virtual ‘check ins’ and team ‘catch ups’. The use of practice tools to facilitate such check ins and emotional exploration are promoted by both authors. The focus on the emotional toil of social work, the heightened complexities of practice interaction under Covid-19 conditions and the stress laid on ‘emotional thinking’ suggested in these approaches, neatly echoes one of the recommendations above. In particular, the promotion of tools to facilitate thinking and discussion provides additional support for the recommendations made.

Further, the recommendation reasserting the use of direct observation of practice as a primary tool for learning on placement, becomes more pressing

in Covid-19 and post Covid 19 times. As opportunities for more informal observations of students, such as their office-based interactions with other professionals or service users; co working with other practitioners or undertaking joint visits to service users, become less available, then attention has to be focused on securing and planning formal observations of a student's practice. Detailed attention to planning for the observation – and any additional complexities that will need to be discussed if the observation is undertaken virtually – becomes increasingly pertinent.

### 12.5 Recommendations for further research

This thesis confirms that audio recording of student supervision is possible and that participants are prepared to participate. I suggest that this method is a useful one that can be explored and researched further. As a method, audio recording of a supervision session (or part of a session) could also be used more extensively in PE training and I am aware that one PE academic programme includes this in the assessment portfolio for Stage 2 PE assessment, and PEs in training audio record and analyse part of a supervision session with their student. Rankine's (2015, 2019) use of a 'thinking aloud' process with supervisors and supervisees could be usefully explored with PE and student dyads. This is where 'participants vocalise their thought processes through the examination of transcribed material for deeper reflection and understanding of the information they draw upon' (Rankine, 2019, p.99). A supervision session is recorded, transcribed and a (researcher led) content analysis undertaken with brief themes identified and then a 'thinking aloud' session is facilitated between supervisor and supervisee.

### 12.6 The impact of the research

I have already disseminated elements of the findings and recommendations of this thesis during my teaching of a Stage 2 PE course, using these to prompt reflection and thinking amongst participants. Presenting and sharing my findings in this way also informed the validity and reliability of the research as it focused 'attention on the credibility of the *interpretations* and

*conclusions* drawn from the study' (Maxwell, 2012, p.148). In this way also, the rigour of the research was enhanced as I was able to attest that the findings were recognisable to PEs and they regarded them as 'meaningful and applicable in terms of their experience'(Cutcliffe and McKenna ,1999 p. 379). Future plans include dissemination of the findings at conferences and in written publications, alongside inclusion in my teaching of PEs.

### 12.7 Promotion and resourcing of practice education

The recommendations made in this thesis rest on a continuing, and possibly increased , promotion of the importance of practice education within social work education.

In 2010, Bellinger (2010a) argued that 'practice learning' and 'practice experience' needed to be differentiated and that the 'protected pedagogical space' (p.611) of the practice placement and the infrastructure for it was being eroded. This was because of changes to qualifying routes, new requirements and arrangements for practice learning, a continuing shortage of placements and as a result of a 'thousand cuts' (p.604). Bellinger et al., (2016) has also reiterated the view of practice learning as the 'poor relation' within social work education, a position well versed in the practice learning literature over a number of years (Nixon and Murr, 2006; Clapton et al., 2008).

The Croisdale – Appleby (2014) report into the revisioning of social work education contained insightful and knowledgeable views about the value of placements across a spectrum of settings; the place of practice education and the role and training of PEs, recommending that placements of the highest quality required 'the educational supervision necessary to ensure their potential is delivered' (p.86). Since 2014, there have been a number of changes that have suggested that the infrastructure for practice learning has not been eroded in the way that Bellinger (2010b) proposed. Thus, the change in England's regulator to Social Work England (SWE) and the sole focus on the regulation of social workers; the ownership and refresh of the PEPS (BASW, 2019) initiated by the social work professional association



BASW and the creation of a BASW PEPS subgroup; the closer working relationship forged during Covid 19 between SWE and BASW , and the creation of Teaching Partnerships (DfE 2020) (many of which focus on placements and PEs) has meant a renewed focus on the infrastructure of practice learning.

However, the threat to the placement as a 'protected pedagogical space' (Bellinger, 2010a, p.611) remains and some of the findings and the analysis presented in this thesis attest to this, hence the recommendations for the educative repurposing of student placement supervision. The 'struggle for the soul of social work' (Higgins ,2015, p.13) persists within the wider context of social work which inevitably impacts upon the practice placement and the interactions within it. I hope that the findings, analysis, and recommendations presented in this thesis can contribute to the realisation of 'educational supervision' envisaged by Croisdale – Appleby (2014) and the 'reflective supervision' encapsulated in the PEPS (BASW, 2019).

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**List of Tables**

Table A: Database Search

Limits - 2000-2021; peer reviewed; in English only; Source: scholarly journals; Document types: article, commentary, editorial or preprint. Sources in ( ) indicate relevant and used sources.			
<b>Search terms</b>	<b>ASSIA</b>	<b>SCOPUS</b>	<b>SOCIAL CARE ONLINE</b>
"Social work" AND Supervis* AND "Practice Educat**"	52 (2)	26 (3)	

"Social work" AND Supervis* AND "Field Educat**"	100 (13)	103 (9)	
"Social work" AND "practice placement"	44 (4)	69 (5)	
"Social work" AND "practice placement" AND "learning activities"	8 (0)	1 (0)	

"Social work" AND "field placement" AND "learning activities"	9 (3) but duplicated	2 (2) but duplicated	
"Student supervis*"AND "field educat*	17 (5) but duplicated	14 (4) but duplicated	
"Student supervis*"AND "practice learning"	27 (3) but duplicated	10 (3) but duplicated	



"Social work students" AND supervision			140 (14)
"Student social worker" AND field education			138 (8)
"Social work student" AND "supervis*" AND "audio tape*"	2 (0)	0	
"Field placement"	3 (0)	0	

AND "audio tape**"			
"Field placement" AND "audio record**"	9 (0)	1 (0)	
"social work student supervis**" AND recorded	2 (1)	0	

Articles and research excluded were:

- studies focusing on student assessment
- studies focusing on models of practice learning such as integrated, rotational or international placements

- studies with 'external' or off-site supervision or PEs
- studies that evaluated student placements within specific service user settings or within health settings
- studies that considered the content or range of work with service users or the development of specific skills within students
- studies that considered practice learning and its relationship to the development of professional identity, whether PE or student informed
- studies considering 'live' supervision or group supervision
- commentary, opinion or research articles about the wider pedagogy of practice learning and / or its history



Table B: Documentary data – Supervision records analysed

<b>Dyad</b>	<b>Placement setting</b>	<b>Number of supervision records received</b>	<b>Did supervision record correspond to a taped recording?</b>
Dyad 4	Statutory Children and Families Leaving Care Team	1	Yes (2 <sup>nd</sup> Supervision recording)
Dyad 6	Voluntary setting, young people's mental health support	1	No
Dyad 9	Voluntary setting, advocacy with adults	2	Yes, 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> supervision recordings
Dyad 10	Adult statutory team	12 (n=3 analysed)	Yes, all 3 supervision recordings

Table C: Table of Student Profiles

<b>Student</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Self identified gender</b>	<b>Self identified ethnic group</b>
StA	Under 26	Female	White British
StB	Under 26	Female	White British
StC	Under 26	Female	White British
StD	Under 26	Female	Eastern European
StE	Under 26	Female	White British
StF	Not known	Not known	Not known
StG	Not known	Not known	Not known
StH	Under 26	Female	White British
StI	Under 26	Female	Asian British /Pakistani

StJ	Under 26	Female	White British
StK	Under 26	Female	White British

Table D: Table of Practice Educator profiles

<b>PE</b>	<b>Age and gender</b>	<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>PE qualification and students supervised previously</b>	<b>How long qualified as a PE?</b>	<b>Social Work qualification and years qualified</b>	<b>Any other supervisory role held</b>
PE1	35 -44 F	did not answer	Working towards Stage 1 (first student)	1 year	MSW. Qualified 2012	Yes
PE2	25 – 34 M	White British	Working towards Stage 1 (first student)	1 year	MSW. Qualified 2013	No



PE3	45-54 F	White British	Working towards Stage 1 (first student)	1 year	BSW.  Qualified 2012.	No
PE4	45-54 M	White British	Stage 1; working towards Stage 2.  11 previous students	10 years	DipSW.  Length of qualification not given	No
PE5	45-54 F	White Irish	Stage 2.  2 previous students	3 years	DipSW.  Qualified 2001.  14 years qualified	Yes

PE6	45-54  F	Asian British/ Indian	PTA (equiv Stage 2).  90 previous students.	11 years	DipSW.  Qualified 1999.  17 years qualified	Yes
PE7	55-64  F	White British	Stage 2.  14 previous students.	3 years	CQSW.  Qualified 1975.  45 years qualified	No
PE8	25-34  F	White British	Stage 1. Working towards Stage 2.	2 years.	MSW.  Qualified 2012.  4 years qualified	Yes

			1 previous student.			
PE9	55-64 F	White British	Working towards Stage 1.  3 previous students.	3 years	CQSW.  Qualified 1984.  32 years qualified	Yes

Table E: Table of Recorded Supervision Sessions

Dyad	Student	PE	Supervision number	Date of recording (either of supervision or date received by researcher)	Week in placement (based on start date and end date of placement)	Length of supervision recording
<b>1</b>	StA	1	Supervision 1	7.1.16	Week 8	1 hour
			Supervision 2	14.3.16	Week 18	1 hour 16min
			Supervision 3	27.4.16	Week 24	1 hour 1 min
<b>2</b>	StB	2	Supervision 1	17.1.17	Week 11	1 hour
			Supervision 2	13.4.17	Week 23	43mins
<b>3</b>	StC	3	Supervision 1	1.2.17	Week 13	1 hour 23
			Supervision 2	25.2.17	Week 16	54 mins
			Supervision 3	14.3.17	Week 20	56 mins
<b>4</b>	StD	4	Supervision 1	17.2.17	Week 15	52mins
			Supervision 2	Early march?	Week 18	1hour 5mins
			Supervision 3	22.3.17	Week 20	36mins
<b>5</b>	StE	5	Supervision 1	15.12.15	Week 5	1 hour 19mins
			Supervision 2	2.2.16	Week 12	59 min
			Supervision 3	25.4.1	Week 24	1 hour 1 min
<b>6</b>	StF	6	Supervision 1	5.1.16	Week 5	57min
			Supervision 2	29.2.16	Week 13	1 hour
			Supervision 3	17.05.16	Week 24	37min
<b>7</b>	StG	6	Supervision 1	29.2.16	Week 13	39min
			Supervision 2	7.3.16	Week 14	1 hour 31mins
			Supervision 3	18.5.16	Week 24	48min
<b>8</b>	StH	7	Supervision 1	7.12.16	Week 5	1 hour

			Supervision 2	17.01.17	Week 11	1 hour 5mins
			Supervision 3	8.3.17	Week 17	58min
<b>9</b>	StI	7	Supervision 1	15.2.17	Week 15	1 hour
			Supervision 2	22.3.17	Week 20	54 min
<b>10</b>	StJ	8	Supervision 1	22.11.16	Week 3	1 hour 31mins
			Supervision 2	29.11.16	Week 4	1 hour 3mins
			Supervision 3	17.1.17	Week 11	1 hr 29mins
<b>11</b>	StK	9	Supervision 1	27.01.17	Week 11	1 hr 36mins
			Supervision 2	6.2.17	Week 13	38mins

Notes:

30 recorded supervision sessions transcribed; eight of the eleven Dyads provided 3 recorded supervision session and three of the Dyads provided 2 recorded supervision sessions

Placement period 100 days, about 23 or 24 weeks depending on start date/ holidays

1851 minutes of supervision across the 30 recorded sessions, average length of supervision is 62 minutes; least time in supervision session was 37 minutes, most was 1 hour 36 minutes.

Table F: Table of Practice Educator and Student Coded Activities

	<b>PE Coded Activities</b>		<b>Student Coded Activities</b>		
1	Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	30/30	Describing case/ practice/ case update	30/30	1
2	PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	30/30	Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	30/30	2
3	Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	30/30	Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes	21/30	3
4	Feedback	18/30			
5	Expression / use of support	16/30			

	(emotional or intellectual reinforcement)				
6	Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions	14/30	Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation)	17/30	6
7	Elicitation / reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values	14/30	Reflection – discussing practice, thoughts feelings and values	17/30	7
8	Reference to theory / research, either:  a. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research  b. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research	13/30	Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading, either:  a. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research	7/30	8

			b. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research		
9	Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool	7/30			



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Practice Educator Participant Information Sheet

Manchester Metropolitan University

FACULTY OF HEALTH, PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL CARE



### **What are the characteristics and contribution of effective supervisor within the social work practice placement to student learning and assessment and preparedness for qualified practice?**

#### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR PRACTICE EDUCATORS**

##### Invitation to take part

My name is Cathie Jasper. I am undertaking doctoral study and I wish to carry out a small-scale research study with Practice Educators and final year social work students on placement regarding their experiences of supervision. Whilst supervision is considered essential within the practice placement and vital for student learning and assessment, the 'fine detail' of what takes place within supervision and the experience for both PEs and students is an under researched area of practice learning. As a Practice Educator (PE), I would like to invite you to take part in the study. This sheet will give you information you need.

##### What is the purpose of the study?

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- to identify the elements of the content and activities of supervision between student and Practice Educator (PE) during the student final placement
- to explore student and PE views and experiences of supervision and the supervisory process within the placement in relation to the effectiveness of supervision in facilitating student learning within the practice placement

- to evaluate the contribution of supervision to the practice assessment of social work students on placement, from the perspectives of the PE and the student
- to evaluate the contribution of supervision to student perception of preparedness for qualified practice after degree completion

#### Why have I been approached?

You have been approached as you are the named Practice Educator for a final year social work student from MMU during the academic year 2015-16. If you indicate your willingness to participate in the study, I will then contact the final year student and seek their agreement. Employer permission will also be sought for your participation in the study and appropriate (local) research governance procedures followed.

#### What will it involve?

The study involves three elements and you are asked to do the following:

- the audio recording of supervision sessions between you and the student during the course of the placement (minimum of 3 supervision sessions). You will be provided with a digital audio recorder for this purpose and instruction will be given on how to operate, save and share the recording with me as the researcher.
- An individual semi structured interview with you, at an agreed time and location, during the course of the placement.
- Provide anonymised, written copies of supervision records of the audio-recorded supervision sessions to the researcher.

You and the student may also be invited to attend MMU Video recording suite to have a supervision session videoed.

#### Do I have to take part?

It is up to you whether to take part. Even if you do agree to take part you can withdraw your consent at any time, without giving a reason. This will not have any repercussions for you or affect any professional relationships or your career in any way.

#### What about confidentiality?

All information and data collected will be handled with the strictest confidence and you will not be identified by name, place of work or any other identifying feature. Your contact details will be kept in a locked cabinet. I will transcribe the audio recordings as soon as they are sent to me and the transcriptions will be anonymised

and pseudonyms used. I am the only person who will have access to the digital recordings (for transcription purposes) and I will store the digital recording in an encrypted protected electronic file. All digital recordings and hand written notes will be kept for 5 years following the completion of the doctoral study ( Jan 2021) and then destroyed.

I will not name any participant, student, placement setting, place of work or employer in the doctoral thesis or any reports or articles written about the study. I will remove any information that could identify any participant, their place of work, employer or the student.

My university supervisor for this project, Professor Hugh McLaughlin, may see parts of some of the transcriptions in the process of our doctoral supervisions, but only after they have been anonymised.

In the event that in the course of the research something arises which indicates dangerous or unprofessional practice, the matter will, in the first instance be raised directly with you as the participant. Where it is considered that a child is placed at risk of significant harm; an adult is at risk of serious harm or there is behaviour which may undermine the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime, consent to share this information with the appropriate authorities will not be sought. As I am a registered social worker, I have a duty under my professional code of ethics to respond in this way.

#### What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Taking part in this research should not cause you any problems. There are no direct risks to participants and it is unlikely that participation will be harmful. The study concerns professional roles and behaviours and does not require personal disclosure outside of these boundaries. However, should there be any emotional distress or discomfort for any reason during interview, the interview will be stopped immediately.

#### What will happen to the results of the research study?

I will analyse the findings and will write about this research study as part of my doctoral thesis, which I will be submitting in January 2021. I may also use the results to inform and write articles for publication in relevant social work journals and/or conferences. When writing any publications I will ensure that it is not possible to identify you individually in any reports, papers or presentations.

Who has reviewed the study?

I have received ethical approval from MMU Ethics Committee who has agreed that the study can go ahead.

What do I have to do?

If you consent to take part, please complete the attached Consent Form and contact details and return to me via email.

Contact for further information

For further information about this research study, please contact:

Cathie Jasper – [c.jasper@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:c.jasper@mmu.ac.uk) , 0161 247 2143

If you do not wish to discuss this research with me, or if you are not satisfied with any part of the research or how you are treated, you may discuss this with my supervisor, Professor Hugh McLaughlin – [h.mclaughlin@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:h.mclaughlin@mmu.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking time to read this information.

**Practice Educator Consent Form**

Having read the Participant Information Sheet, if you are willing to take part in this research please initial the boxes next to each statement and print and sign your name at the bottom of the page.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask any questions I have	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without prejudice	
3. I understand that I will not be identified by name, place of work, placement setting, employer or any other identifying feature in the doctoral thesis or any reports or articles written about the study.	
4. I understand that all information I provide will be stored on a password protected computer file and my details in a locked cabinet.	

<p>5. I understand that my confidentiality will be respected unless it is considered that a child is placed at risk of significant harm; an adult is at risk of serious harm or there is behaviour which may undermine the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime, consent to share this information to the appropriate authorities will not be sought.</p>	
<p>6. I agree to take part in the study</p>	

<p><b>PE to sign</b></p>	<p><b>Researcher to sign</b></p>
<p><b>Signed</b>.....</p> <p><b>Please print name</b>.....</p> <p><b>Date</b>.....</p> <p>(PLEASE PROVIDE CONTACT DETAILS BELOW)</p>	<p><b>Signed</b> .....</p>

## Appendix 2: Student Participant Information Sheet

**What are the characteristics and contribution of effective supervision within the social work practice placement to student learning and assessment and preparedness for qualified practice?**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDENTS**

#### Invitation to take part

My name is Cathie Jasper. I am undertaking doctoral study and I wish to carry out a small-scale research study with Practice Educators (PE) and final year social work students on placement regarding their experiences of supervision. Whilst supervision is considered essential within the practice placement and vital for student learning and assessment, the 'fine detail' of what takes place within supervision and the experience for both PEs and students is an under researched area of practice learning. Your PE for your final year placement has indicated that s/he would like to participate in the study and your agreement to participate in the study is also sought. This sheet will give you information you need.

#### What is the purpose of the study?

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- to identify the elements of the content and activities of supervision between student and PE during the student final placement
- to explore student and PE views and experiences of supervision and the supervisory process within the placement in relation to the effectiveness of supervision in facilitating student learning within the practice placement
- to evaluate the contribution of supervision to the practice assessment of social work students on placement, from the perspectives of the PE and the student
- to evaluate the contribution of supervision to student perception of preparedness for qualified practice after degree completion

#### Why have I been approached?

You have been approached as you are undertaking a final year social work student placement during the academic year 2016-17 and your PE for this placement has indicated a willingness to participate in this study. Your agreement and willingness to participate in the study is also sought.

### What will it involve?

The study involves three elements and will involve the following:

- the audio recording of supervision sessions between you and the student during the course of the placement (minimum of 3 supervision sessions). Your PE will be provided with a digital audio recorder for this purpose and instruction will be given on how to operate, save and share the recording with me as the researcher.
- An individual semi structured interview with you about your experiences of supervision, at an agreed time and location, during the course of the placement.
- A further individual interview with you once you have completed your degree regarding the contribution of supervision to your preparedness for qualified practice.

You and the PE may also be invited to attend MMU Video recording suite to have a supervision session videoed.

### Do I have to take part?

It is up to you whether to take part. You can refuse, even if your PE has agreed, and you and your PE will not be included in the study. Your refusal will not affect your placement or your professional standing or relationships within the placement or within the university in any way. Even if you do agree to take part, you can withdraw your consent at any time, without giving a reason. This will not have any repercussions for you or affect your studies, placement, any professional relationships or your career in any way.

### What about confidentiality?

All information and data collected will be handled with the strictest confidence and you will not be identified by name, place of work or any other identifying feature (other than your status as a final year social work student at MMU). Your contact details will be kept in a locked cabinet. I will transcribe the audio recordings as soon as they are sent to me and the transcriptions will be anonymised and pseudonyms used. I am the only person who will have access to the digital recordings (for transcription purposes) and I will store the digital recording in an encrypted protected electronic file. All digital recordings and hand written notes will be destroyed 5 years after the doctoral study is completed ( Jan 2021). I will audio record the individual semi structured interview immediately after the interview.

I will not name any participant, PE, student, placement setting, place of work or employer in the doctoral thesis or any reports or articles written about the study. I will remove any information that could identify any participant , their placement

setting, place of work or employer . My university supervisor for this project, Professor Hugh McLaughlin, may see parts of some of the transcriptions in the process of our doctoral supervisions, but only after they have been anonymised.

In the event that in the course of the research something arises which indicates dangerous or unprofessional practice, the matter will, in the first instance be raised directly with you as the participant. Where it is considered that a child is placed at risk of significant harm; an adult is at risk of serious harm or there is behaviour which may undermine the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime, consent to share this information with the appropriate authorities will not be sought. As I am a registered social worker, I have a duty under my professional code of ethics to respond in this way.

#### What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Taking part in this research should not cause you any problems. There are no direct risks to participants and it is unlikely that participation will be harmful. The study concerns professional roles and behaviours and does not require personal disclosure outside of these boundaries. However, should there be any emotional distress or discomfort for any reason during interview, the interview will be stopped immediately.

#### What will happen to the results of the research study?

I will analyse the findings and will write about this research study as part of my doctoral thesis, which I will be submitting in January 2021. I may also use the results to inform and write articles for publication in relevant social work journals and/or conferences. When writing any publications I will ensure that it is not possible to identify you individually in any reports, papers or presentations.

#### Who has reviewed the study?

I have received ethical approval from MMU Ethics Committee who has agreed that the study can go ahead.

#### What do I have to do?

If you consent to take part, please complete the attached Consent Form and contact details and return to me via email. I will then contact you to advise you of the date and time of the focus group.

#### Contact for further information

For further information about this research study, please contact:



Cathie Jasper – [c.jasper@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:c.jasper@mmu.ac.uk) , 0161 247 2143

If you do not wish to discuss this research with me, or if you are not satisfied with any part of the research or how you are treated, you may discuss this with my supervisor, Professor Hugh McLaughlin – [h.mclaughlin@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:h.mclaughlin@mmu.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking time to read this information.

### **Student Consent Form**

Having read the Participant Information Sheet, if you are willing to take part in this research please initial the boxes next to each statement and print and sign your name at the bottom of the page.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask any questions I have	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without prejudice	
3. I understand that I will not be identified by name, place of work, placement setting, employer or any other identifying feature in the doctoral thesis or any reports or articles written about the study.	
4. I understand that all information I provide will be stored on a password protected computer file and my details in a locked cabinet.	
5. I understand that my confidentiality will be respected unless it is considered that a child is placed at risk of significant harm; an adult is at risk of serious harm or there is behaviour which may undermine the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime, consent to share this information to the appropriate authorities will not be sought.	
6. I agree to take part in the study	

Student to sign	Researcher to sign
<p><b>Signed</b>.....</p> <p><b>Please print name</b>.....</p> <p><b>Date</b>.....</p> <p>(PLEASE PROVIDE CONTACT DETAILS BELOW)</p>	<p><b>Signed</b> .....</p>

Appendix 3: Ethical Approval

**MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF HEALTH, PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL CARE**

**M E M O R A N D U M**

***FACULTY ACADEMIC ETHICS COMMITTEE***

To: Cathie Jasper

From: Prof Carol Haigh

Date: 28/10/2015

Subject: Ethics Application 1309

Title: What are the characteristics and contribution of effective supervision within the social work practice placement to student learning and assessment and preparedness for qualified practice.

Thank you for your application for ethical approval.

The Faculty Academic Ethics Committee review process has recommended approval of your ethics application. This approval is granted for 42 months for full-time students or staff and 60 months for part-time students. Extensions to the approval period can be requested.

If your research changes you might need to seek ethical approval for the amendments. Please request an amendment form.

We wish you every success with your project.

Prof Carol Haigh and Prof Jois Stansfield  
Chair and Deputy Chair

Faculty Academic Ethics Committee

Appendix 4: Coding Frame – Final version

PE/STUDENT DYAD:

DATE OF SUPERVISION SESSION: SUPERVISION SESSION number (sent to researcher)?:

WEEK OF PLACEMENT: Week

LENGTH OF SUPERVISION SESSION:

No. of service users discussed in this supervision session

/ length of each discussion:

Other notes/comments:

**1. TOPIC COVERAGE / CODING**

Topic	Length / Minutes
Direct work / practice discussion	
Academic work, including discussion of portfolio content and preparation; Critical Analysis of Practice (CAP); extended case study or dissertation	
Administrative issues (annual leave, toil , mileage, phone)	
Agenda setting	
Feedback (incl placement review)	
Workload checking	
Placement review	
Other:	

**2. ANALYTIC CODING**

<b>A. Direct work / practice discussion</b>			
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>		<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>	
Type of activity	No. of Occurrences (comments, not line by line)	Type of activity	No. of occurrences
1. Use of exploring/questioning/prompting by PE		1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	

2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising		2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	
1. Reference to theory / research a. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research b. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research		3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading a. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research b. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research	
Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool		4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes	
5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)		5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values	
6. Feedback		6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation	
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values			
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions			
9. Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)			

**Researcher comments:**

<b>B. Academic / portfolio work discussion</b>			
Length of time portfolio / academic work discussed in this session:			
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>		<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>	
Type of activity / nature of discussion	No. of occurrences	Type of activity	No. of

			occurrences
1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE)		1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)	
2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work		3. Fuller discussion of academic work	

**Researcher comments:**

## Appendix 5: Practice Educator Interview Schedule

### **PE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

*(feelings, thoughts and actions)*

#### General experiences of being a PE

1. How was the experience of being a PE for X for you?
  - Any similarities /differences with previous students/experiences? (number of students?)
  - What made this placement different or memorable?
  - Any particular highlights, surprises or challenges?
2. What do you see as the main role(s) of the PE?
  - What expectations does this place on you?  
(how does supervision fit into this? place / purpose of supervision in PE role?)
  - How do you manage the roles of the PE – support, management, assessment and educating/ teaching function?

#### Particular focus

**Supervision** *(to explore student and PE views and experiences of supervision and the supervisory process within the placement in relation to the effectiveness of supervision in facilitating student learning within the practice placement)*

1. What makes for **effective** supervision?
  - what do you see as the purpose of supervision?
  - What should be (is?) the focus of supervision within the placement?
  - How do you know if your supervision is effective?
2. **Expectations** of supervision - how do you approach supervision? (What are your thoughts about the supervisory process and relationship?)
  - What do you hope for – in the student? For yourself? In relation to the supervisory relationship?
  - What do you bring to supervision? What do you hope / expect the student to bring? (attitude and approach)
  - Does anything get in the way (what?). What helps/ enables supervision?
3. How do you encourage student learning and practice analysis within supervision? ('telling the case' and 'analysing the/ their practice').
4. Doel's 4 **ESMA** cards:
  - what do they mean to you?

- Can you give an example under each element? (prompt re theory?)
5. You have an agenda for supervision. Who sets this agenda? How do you find this helps? (balance of functions / time allocated to issues in supervision? What is the first item/top priority?)
    - Own supervision – differences
  6. Are there any areas regarding supervision and how you carry out supervision you would want to change/develop?
    - If you could change one thing that would make a significant difference, what would it be?
    - I will be asking the student for their experiences of supervision – what do you think they will say? What do you hope they will say?

**Assessment** *(to evaluate the contribution of supervision to the practice assessment of social work students on placement, from the perspectives of the PE and the student)*

1. How does supervision contribute to your overall and holistic assessment of the student?
2. What influences/affects/contributes to your overall assessment of the student (positively or negatively)?
  - (How do you use direct observation within the placement? What is its importance / how do you use it ?)

**Preparedness for practice** *(to evaluate the contribution of supervision to student perception of preparedness for qualified practice after degree completion)*

1. What do you think 'preparedness for practice means? ('practice ready' or prepared to enter the next level. ASYE? What support/further learning will they need? What is the expectation on future employer?
  - How well do you feel your student is prepared for practice after this final placement?
  - What has been their learning and development on placement? (differentiate between knowledge/processes/development of understanding of the professional role?)
  - What impact have you had? (how do you know?) What impact have other factors had (such as external environment/other colleagues) ? What impact has their experience of supervision had?



## Appendix 6: Student Interview Schedule

### **Student interview schedule**

(feelings, thoughts and actions)

#### General experiences

1. How was your experience of supervision?
  - Differences/similarities with first placement?
  - Any particular memorable bits/supervision sessions: highlights, surprises or challenges?
  - Pressure/anxieties felt?
  
2. (Skills/experience/roles of PE) The PE role has a number of different elements (support, managing the placement, educating/teaching function and assessment of the student) – what do you think of your PEs skills, knowledge and abilities in these areas?
  - how aware of these roles were you? How were they balanced?
  - Any particular skills/knowledge base or area relating to your PEs expertise or skills you want to mention?

#### Particular focus

**Supervision** (*to explore student and PE views and experiences of supervision and the supervisory process within the placement in relation to the effectiveness of supervision in facilitating student learning within the practice placement*)

1. Supervision is a key part of the placement. What do you think makes supervision effective?
  - What do you feel should be the main elements of supervision? (what should be / is the focus of supervision?)
  - How do you know if supervision is effective?
  
2. Did supervision help your learning on placement?
  - If so, how?
  - What was your role in this?
  - What was the PE role in this?
  - How did your PE encourage and help develop your learning? (theory to practice; practice analysis? Reflective practice? What opportunities were there for these?)

3. There has been research and comment that supervision in social work has become case management focussed, prioritising tasks, risks and accountability.
  - What do you think of this?
  - How or did this impact on your supervision on placement?
  
4. Doel's 4 **ESMA** cards:
  - what do they mean to you?
  - Can you give an example under each element?
  
5. You have an agenda for supervision.
  - Who sets this agenda?
  - Do you find this helps? (balance of functions / time allocated to issues in supervision?)
  - What is the first item/top priority?)
6. Would you change anything about this?
  - **Assessment** (*to evaluate the contribution of supervision to the practice assessment of social work students on placement, from the perspectives of the PE and the student*)
  - From your perspective, what role did supervision play in the overall assessment of you and your practice/the placement?
  - Any other factors contributing to your PEs assessment? (direct obs? Written work etc on placement? Portfolio work?)
  
7. **Preparedness for practice** (*to evaluate the contribution of supervision to student perception of preparedness for qualified practice after degree completion*)
  - What do you think 'preparedness for practice' means? ('practice ready' or prepared to enter the next level. ASYE? )
  - How well do you feel you are prepared for practice after this final placement? What support/further learning do you feel you need?)
  - What has been your learning and development on placement? (differentiate between knowledge/processes/development of understanding of the professional role?)
  - What do you think your PE said about your preparedness for practice and why?
  
8. Overall , what impact has supervision had on :
  - your learning and development
  - on your future career?
  - How you will approach supervision in the future?

**9.** What impact did your PE have on you?

**10.** Are there any areas regarding your experiences of supervision you wish had been different?

- If you could change one thing that would make a significant difference, what would it be?

Appendix 7: Supervision coding – All dyads

Part 1: TOPIC COVERAGE / CODING

Topic	Length / Minutes of supervision session and number of service users (SUn) discussed/length of discussion										
	Dyad 1	Dyad 2	Dyad 3	Dyad 4	Dyad 5	Dyad 6	Dyad 7	Dyad 8	Dyad 9	Dyad 10	Dyad 11
Direct work / practice discussion	<b>Sup 1=1hr</b> SUn=3 <b>45min</b>  <b>Sup 2= 1hr</b> 16 SUn=3 <b>1 hour</b> <b>5min</b>  <b>Sup 3= 1hr01</b> SUn=3 <b>50min</b>	<b>Sup 1=1hr</b> SUn=6 <b>56min</b>  <b>Sup 2 = 43min</b> (cut short) SUn=5 <b>39min</b>  <b>NO SUP 3</b>	<b>Sup 1=1hr</b> 23min SUn=9 <b>1hr4min</b>  <b>Sup2=54min</b> SUn=6 <b>37min</b>  <b>Sup 3=57min</b> Sun=6 <b>48min</b>	<b>Sup 1=52min</b> SUn=8 <b>38min</b>  <b>Sup2=36min</b> (cut off) SUn=6 <b>21min</b>  <b>Sup3=1hr5min</b> SUn=7 <b>38min</b>	<b>Sup 1=1hr</b> 19min Sun=5 <b>25min</b>  <b>Sup 2=1hr</b> 4min Sun=7, <b>33min</b>  <b>Sup3=1hr1min</b> Sun=6 <b>39.5min</b>	<b>Sup 1=57min</b> SUn=10 <b>32min</b>  <b>Sup 2=1hr</b> SUn=18 <b>53min</b>  <b>Sup 3=37min</b> SUn=14 <b>19min</b>	<b>Sup 1=39min</b> Sun=7 <b>10 min</b>  <b>Sup 2=1hr</b> 31min SUn=12 <b>1hr 1min</b>  <b>Sup 3=48min</b> Sun=13 <b>35.5min</b>	<b>Sup 1=1 hr</b> SUn=1 <b>11min</b>  <b>Sup 2=1hr05</b> SUn=2 <b>13.5min</b>  <b>Sup 3=57min</b> SUn= 2 (and group work) <b>40min</b>	<b>Sup 1=1 hr</b> SUn=2 <b>19min</b>  <b>Sup 2=54min</b> Sun=1 <b>32min</b> (*inc feedback from D.Obs) <b>NO SUP 3</b>	<b>Sup 1= 1 hr</b> 31 SUn=6 <b>35min</b>  <b>Sup 2= 1hr3</b> SUn=6 <b>46min</b>  <b>Sup 3 = 1 hr29min</b> Sun=4 <b>1hr 16min</b> (*but inc crit reflection and case study disc)	<b>Sup 1=1hr 36</b> SUn=4 <b>1hr29min*</b>  <b>Sup 2= 38min</b> SUn=4 <b>37min</b>  <b>NO SUP 3</b>
Academic work,	<b>Sup 1 4min</b>	<b>Sup 1 3min</b> (CAP)	<b>Sup 1 2min</b>	<b>Sup 3 2min</b>	<b>Sup 1 18min</b>	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 1 12mins</b>	<b>Sup 1 16min</b>	<b>Sup 1</b>	

including discussion of portfolio content and preparation; Critical Analysis of Practice (CAP); case study or dissertation	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>3min</b> (case study)  <b>Sup 3</b> <b>2min</b>		<b>Sup 2</b> <b>4min</b> (Diss)  <b>Sup 3</b> <b>5min</b> (CAP)		<b>Sup 2</b> <b>19min</b>  <b>Sup 3</b> <b>12min</b>	<b>8min</b> (inc reflections)  <b>Sup 3</b> <b>7min</b>	<b>6.5min</b> (inc reflections) <b>Sup 2</b> <b>6min</b>  <b>Sup 3</b> <b>11min</b>	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>30min</b> <b>(CAP)</b>	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>8mins</b> <b>(*plus feedback from D.Obs)</b>	<b>45mins</b> (inc CAP and discrete assessment)  <b>Sup 3*</b> <b>40min</b> (case study and PCF)	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>4 min</b>
Feedback (inc. placement review)			<b>Sup 1</b> <b>2min</b>	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>2min</b> <b>Sup 3</b> <b>2min</b>	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>1min</b>		<b>Sup 2</b> <b>1min</b>	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>12min</b> <b>Sup 2</b> <b>12 min</b>	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>3.5min</b> <b>Sup 2</b> <b>32mins*</b> (in conjunction with discussion of SU)	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>4min</b>	
Agenda setting Inc check in				<b>Sup 2</b> <b>0.5min</b>	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>2min</b>	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>4min</b> <b>Sup 2</b> <b>4mins</b>	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>3min</b> initial and for next <b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>1min</b>			

							2min				
Administrative issues (annual leave, toil, mileage, phone)	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>3min</b>		<b>Sup 1</b> <b>2.5min</b> (leave, toil; phone) <b>Sup 2</b> <b>4min</b> (toil) <b>Sup 3</b> 2min(toil, reflection time)					<b>Sup 1</b> <b>3min</b>			
Workload checking	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>5min</b>				<b>Sup 1</b> <b>11.5min</b> <b>Sup 2</b> 1min	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>3mins</b>		<b>Sup 3</b> <b>2min</b>	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>22min</b>	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>2minutes</b>  <b>Sup 2</b> 9min	<b>Sup 1</b> 6min
Placement review	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>3min</b>	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>2 min</b>	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>2.5min</b> <b>Sup 2</b> 5min		<b>Sup 1</b> <b>8min</b> <b>Sup 2</b> 2min <b>Sup 3</b> 8.5min(end pl review)	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>10min</b> (inc workload checking)	<b>Sup 2</b> 10min <b>Sup 3</b> 1min	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>2min</b> <b>Sup 3</b> <b>15min</b>	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>3min</b> <b>Sup 2</b> 4mins		<b>Sup 1</b> 21min* (feedback and placement review overlap and interspersed with discussion su 4))
Other:	<b>Sup 3</b> <b>7mins</b> reflection/discussion on		<b>Sup 1</b> <b>7mins</b> discussion /support after	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>8min</b> disc of theory related to	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>10min</b> disc training attended	<b>Sup 3</b> <b>10min</b> (processes, procedures for end of	<b>Sup 2</b> <b>4min</b> disc of training attended	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>7min</b> disc of phone call/professionalism	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>2min</b> disc of PCF grid	<b>Sup 1</b> <b>9min</b> values disc <b>Sup 2</b>	

	student 'mistake'		challenging parent <b>Sup 3</b> <b>2min</b> DBS/school issue	su not portfolio <b>Sup 2</b> <b>15min</b> disc of theory related to su not portfolio <b>Sup 3</b> <b>14min</b> disc of theory related to su not portfolio	and to attend <b>Sup 2</b> 6min arranging a visit	placement/c losing		and <b>8min</b> on HV and safety		<b>6min</b> disc of safeguarding and instincts and PE particular example as 'teaching tool' <b>Sup 3</b> Values talk <b>3min</b> and Kolb critical reflection <b>28min</b>	
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**Part 2 : ANALYTIC CODING DYAD 1**

<b>A: Direct work / practice discussion</b>				<b>DYAD 1</b>				
<b>PE ACTIVITIES (no of occurrences)</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>				
	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>		<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>	
1. Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	22	24	34	1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	31	18	33	
2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	9	9	16	2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	11	29	39	

3. Reference to theory / research c. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research d. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research	3a. 1	3a.1		3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading 10. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research 11. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research		3a .1	
4. Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool	1			4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes		2	4
5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	38	36	19	5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values			8
6. Feedback	2		5	6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation		2	4
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values	2	2	4				
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions		3					
9. Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)		2	7				
<b>B: Academic / portfolio work discussion ( **= who initiated discussion)</b>							
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
Type of activity / nature of discussion	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>	Type of activity	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE)			2 min	1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)			2 min
2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work	4min	3min		2. Fuller discussion of academic work	4min	3min	



**ANALYTIC CODING DYAD 2**

<b>A: Direct work / practice discussion</b>				<b>DYAD 2</b>			
<b>PE ACTIVITIES (no of occurrences)</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>		<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	53	37	X	1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	71	20	X
2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	28	28	X	2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	47	58	X
3. Reference to theory / research a. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research b. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research	3a. 3		X	3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading a. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research b. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research			X
4. Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool			X	4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes	6	3	X
5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	55	22	X	5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values		3	X
6. Feedback	1		X	6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation	2		X
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values			X				X
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions			X				X
9. Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)	1		X				X
<b>B: Academic / portfolio work discussion</b>							
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
Type of activity / nature of discussion	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>	Type of activity	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>

1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE			X	1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)			X
2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work	3min		X	2. Fuller discussion of academic work	3min		X

### ANALYTIC CODING DYAD 3

A: Direct work / practice discussion				DYAD 3			
PE ACTIVITIES (no of occurrences)				STUDENT ACTIVITIES			
	Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3		Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3
1. Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	38	43	24	1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	106	71	48
2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	98	18	50	2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	48	19	33
3. Reference to theory / research a. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research b. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research	3a.1			3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading 12. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research 13. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research	3a.1		
4. Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool				4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes	1	7	2
5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	29	28	9	5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values	2	7	
6. Feedback	20	9	23	6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation	11	3	1
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values		3					
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions	5	3	2				

9. Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)	18	26	1				
<b>B: Academic / portfolio work discussion</b>							
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
Type of activity / nature of discussion	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>	Type of activity	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE)				1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)			
2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work	2min CAP DOBS	4min	5min CAP	2. Fuller discussion of academic work	2min CAP DOBS	4min	5min CAP

#### ANALYTIC CODING DYAD 4

<b>A: Direct work / practice discussion</b>				<b>DYAD 4</b>			
<b>PE ACTIVITIES (no of occurrences)</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>		<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	34	4	9	1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	43	8	20
2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	25	34	27	2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	25	19	19
3. Reference to theory / research a. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research b. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research**	<b>3b. 8 mins</b>	<b>3b. 15mins</b>	<b>3b 14mins</b>	3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading 14. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research 15. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research			

4. Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool				4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes	4	5	5
5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	32	21	30	5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values	2		
6. Feedback	2	2		6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation	1		
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values							
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions	1		1				
9. Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)	5						
<b>B: Academic / portfolio work discussion</b>							
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
Type of activity / nature of discussion	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>	Type of activity	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE)				1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)			
2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work ** theory discussion related to casework; portfolio not mentioned	**8min Systems theory	**15min attachment	**14min Person centred	2. Fuller discussion of academic work ** theory discussion related to casework; portfolio not mentioned	**8min Systems theory	**15min attachme nt	**14min Person centred

**ANALYTIC CODING DYAD 5**

<b>A: Direct work / practice discussion</b>				<b>DYAD 5</b>			
<b>PE ACTIVITIES (no of occurrences)</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>		<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>	
1. Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	11	19	15	1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	6	26	24 (st lead)
2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	11	26	20	2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	12	19	34 (st helping PE?0)
3. Reference to theory / research a. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research b. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research		3a 2		3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading 16. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research 17. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research		3a 3	
4. Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool	20	9		4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes	2	4	
5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	30	15	16	5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values	9	3	
6. Feedback	2	4		6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation)	9	5	
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values	2	8					
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions	4	1					
9. Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)		8	2				

<b>B: Academic / portfolio work discussion</b>								
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>				
Type of activity / nature of discussion	Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3	Type of activity	Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3	
1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE)				1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)				
2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work	18min PCF and ass	19min** assign; PCF; ref log	12min ** portfolio /dObs.	2. Fuller discussion of academic work	18min PCF and ass	19min assign; PCF; ref log	12min	

#### ANALYTIC CODING DYAD 6

<b>A. Direct work / practice discussion</b>								
<b>PE ACTIVITIES (no of occurrences)</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>				
	Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3		Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3	
1. Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	25	75	66	1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	34	89	49	
2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	9	4	4	2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	4	7	7	
3. Reference to theory / research e. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research f. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research				3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading 18. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research 19. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research				
4. Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool				4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes	2			

5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	26	5	16	5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values	6		
6. Feedback		2		6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation)	1		
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values	7						
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions	2						
9. Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)	3						
<b>B: Academic / portfolio work discussion</b>							
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
Type of activity / nature of discussion	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>	Type of activity	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE)				1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)			
2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work				2. Fuller discussion of academic work			

**ANALYTIC CODING DYAD 7**

<b>A. Direct work / practice discussion</b>				<b>DYAD 7</b>			
<b>PE ACTIVITIES (no of occurrences)</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>		<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	27	60	24	1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	21	92	35
2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	6	19	10	2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	4	14	10

3. Reference to theory / research g. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research h. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research				3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading 20. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research 21. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research			
4. Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool				4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes	1		
5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	12	7	12	5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values	1	2	**
6. Feedback	2	2		6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation	2	1	
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values		2		**indirect ‘I don’t know...’ see notes			
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions	3	1					
9. Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)		1					
<b>B: Academic / portfolio work discussion</b>							
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
Type of activity / nature of discussion	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>	Type of activity	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE)				1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)			
2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work	6.5min	6min	11min	2. Fuller discussion of academic work	6.5min	6min	11min

**ANALYTIC CODING DYAD 8**



<b>A. Direct work / practice discussion</b>				<b>DYAD 8</b>			
<b>PE ACTIVITIES (no of occurrences)</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>		<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	29	25	19	1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	5	8	5
2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	10	33	14	2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	16	5	26
3. Reference to theory / research A. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research B. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research	3a.2 3b.4	3b. 4		3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading A. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research B. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research		3b.2	
4. Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool				4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes	5	1	
5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	44	1	26	5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values		3	10
6. Feedback	8	3		6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation	8	1	
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values	3	3					
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions	3						
9. Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)							
<b>B: Academic / portfolio work discussion</b>							
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
Type of activity / nature of discussion	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>	Type of activity	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE)				1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)			

2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work		42min		2. Fuller discussion of academic work		42min	
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### ANALYTIC CODING DYAD 9

A. Direct work / practice discussion				DYAD 9			
PE ACTIVITIES (no of occurrences)				STUDENT ACTIVITIES			
	Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3		Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3
1. Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	25	20	X	1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	13	8	X
2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	2	11	X	2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	5	16	X
3. Reference to theory / research	3a.		X	3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading	3a.		X
i. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research	2			22. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research	3		
j. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research				23. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research			
4. Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool	3		X	4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes		2	X
5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	6	17	X	5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values		8	X
6. Feedback		25*	X	6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation)	6		X
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values			X				X
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions	4		X				X
9. Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)	2	1	X				X

<b>B: Academic / portfolio work discussion</b>								
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>				
Type of activity / nature of discussion	Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3	Type of activity	Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3	
1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE)			X	1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)			X	
2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work	16min	8mins*plus feedback on Dobs 32min?	X	2. Fuller discussion of academic work	16min	8mins*plus feedback on Dobs 32min?	X	

**ANALYTIC CODING DYAD 10**

<b>A. Direct work / practice discussion</b>								
<b>PE ACTIVITIES (no of occurrences)</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>				
	Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3		Sup 1	Sup 2	Sup 3	
1. Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	27	15	20	1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	10	12	17	
2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	34	35	55	2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	48	49	39	
3. Reference to theory / research	3a.		3a. 6	3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading	3a.		3a. 4	
k. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research	19			24. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research	3		3b. 1	
l. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research								

				25. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research			
4. Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool	13	2 + 6min *	4	4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes		9	3
5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	25	18	11	5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values	17	7	48
6. Feedback	20	4		6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation		2	4
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values	19	13	30				
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions		1	7				
9. Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)	1		2				
<b>B: Academic / portfolio work discussion</b>							
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
Type of activity / nature of discussion	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>	Type of activity	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE)				1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)			
2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work*in relation to service user/safeguarding		*6min direct teaching?	PCF 10min and Case study	2. Fuller discussion of academic work *in relation to service user/safeguarding		*6min direct teaching	PCF 10min and Case study

			disc 30mi n				disc 30min
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**ANALYTIC CODING DYAD 11**

<b>A. Direct work / practice discussion</b>				<b>DYAD 11</b>			
<b>PE ACTIVITIES (no of occurrences)</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>		<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	19	24	x	1. Describing case/ practice/ case update	38	32	x
2. PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	52	27	x	2. Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	49	27	x
3. Reference to theory / research m. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research n. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research			x	3. Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading 26. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research 27. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research			x
4. Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool			x	4. Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes	9	5	x
5. Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	40	32	x	5. Reflection – discussing practice , thoughts feelings and values		1	x
6. Feedback			x	6. Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation)			x
7. Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values		1	x				
8. Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions			x				
9. Expression / use of support		1	x				

(emotional or intellectual reinforcement)							
<b>B: Academic / portfolio work discussion</b>							
<b>PE ACTIVITIES</b>				<b>STUDENT ACTIVITIES</b>			
Type of activity / nature of discussion	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>	Type of activity	<b>Sup 1</b>	<b>Sup 2</b>	<b>Sup 3</b>
1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by PE)			x	1. Mention of / reference to (acknowledgement) of portfolio/ academic work (initiated by student)			x
2. Fuller discussion of portfolio/ academic work		4min dobs	x	2. Fuller discussion of academic work		4min dobs	x

Appendix 8: Data Set – Practice Educator and Student Coded Activities

**Direct work/ practice discussion** – what **Practice Educator (PE) activity** and **Student activity** was coded over the data set (n=30 supervision sessions). E.G. 30/30 means that this activity took place in each coded supervision session; 13/30 means that this activity took place in 13 of the 30 coded supervision sessions across the data set. Variation in the content and nature of these activities are discussed and analysed in Chapters 6,7 and 8).

<b>PE activities</b>	
Use of exploring/ questioning/prompting by PE	30/30
PE expressing opinion or hypothesising	30/30
Offering advice, guidance, direction, clarification of procedures (management oversight)	30/30
Feedback	15/30
Elicitation / discussion of feelings /emotions	14/30
Expression / use of support (emotional or intellectual reinforcement)	13/30
Elicitation/ reference to reflection – thoughts, feelings and values	12/30
Reference to theory / research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research</li> <li>b. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research</li> <li>c.</li> </ul>	11/30
Direct teaching, including reference/giving reading material or use of specific learning tool	5/30

<b>Student activities</b>	
Describing case/ practice/ case update	30/30
Expressing opinion/ hypothesising / providing analysis of practice	30/30

Seeking clarification /advice on procedures/ processes	20/30
Talking about feelings, emotions (volunteering or in response to elicitation)	16/30
Reflection – discussing practice, thoughts feelings and values	15/30
Reference to theory/ research / own knowledge base or reading a. Limited reference – oblique reference or alluding to theory/research b. Explicit/ elaborated reference to theory/research	6/30





