Beyond Professional Boundaries: the reflective practitioner, identity and

emotional labour in social work

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Jill McDonald MSc (Leicester)

Centre for Labour Market Studies

University of Leicester

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Author: Jill McDonald

Abstract

Reflective practice is advocated within social work academic literature as a means of improving practice. It is enshrined in requirements for practitioners to achieve qualifying and post qualifying awards. This research explores reflective practice with individuals who contribute to social work education as students, academics, practice teachers and practitioners. The study considers factors which have influenced the adoption of Schön's theories and analyses respondents' perceptions of relationships between reflective practice, development and social work practice. Through reflexive research methodology it emerges that reflective practice has a more fundamental link with people who are engaged with social work than previously considered. However, rather than being primarily utilised as a process for written assessment and addressed through social work theory, it is regarded by respondents as a useful and honest method of problem-solving and sharing concerns with others. The research demonstrates respondents' deep commitment to self-development and improvement to enhance the lives of users of social work services, which motivated their entry into the profession. Reflective practice offers emotional support and a safeguard for social workers. The research leads on to explore how it is used as a personal process, as well as how it connects with feelings and emotions generated by the role. Reflective practice is used not just to present written work for assessment; it is a phenomenon which primarily takes place informally and spontaneously and in formal supervision. It is used as professional socialisation, to develop and maintain good and safe practice, emotional self-protection and to reinforce professional values. This research explores how the concept is linked to emotional labour and personal identity for social workers. The overall perception is that social work is not just a job; being a social worker permeates all aspects of respondents' lives.

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GLOSSARY

ASW   -   Approved Social Worker (Mental Health Social Worker)

BASW   -   British Association of Social Workers

CCETSW   -   Central Council for Education and Social Work.

CQSW   -   Certificate of Qualification in Social Work

CRB   -   Criminal Records Bureau

CSS   -   Certificate of Social Services

Degree in Social Work   - BA (Hons) Social Work

DfES   -   Department for Education and Skills

DipSW   -   Diploma in Social Work.

GSCC   -   General Social Care Council

HE   -   Higher Education

Nvivo8   -   Software for qualitative research analysis

NVQ 4   -   National Vocational Qualifications: level 4

O level   -   GCE (pre GCSE)

PQ   -   Post Qualifying Award

PQ 1 –   Post Qualifying Consolidation Award

PQ Framework –   All Post Qualifying modules within Award

TOPSS –   Training Organisation for the Personal Social Services

TSO –   The Stationery Office

VSO –   Voluntary Service Overseas

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

The accompanying thesis submitted for the degree of PhD entitled "**Beyond Professional Boundaries: the reflective practitioner, identity and emotional labour in social work"** is based on work conducted by the author in the Department of Centre for Labour Market Studies at the University mainly during the period between October 2003 and July 2009.

All the work recorded in this thesis is original unless otherwise acknowledged in the text or by references.

None of the work has been submitted for another degree in this or any other university.

Signed…………………………………………..Date…………………………..

Jill McDonald

STATEMENT OF CONSENT FOR BRITISH THESIS SERVICE INCLUSION

In accordance with the University of Leicester Regulations for Research Students, I hereby give my consent for this thesis to be included in the British Thesis Service operated by the British library.

Signed……………………………………….Date……………………………..

Jill McDonald.

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

The names and identification of respondents in this study are confidential. All names referred to are pseudonyms, but alternative names have been chosen to retain the gender and ethnicity of the respondents who participated.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

1.1　**<u>Introduction</u>**

This thesis explores how social work students and practitioners within practice and training settings utilise reflective practice. Within a reflexive approach, I interview thirty two social work practitioners, student social workers, practice teachers and academics, presenting findings through thematic analysis. My background lies in social work practice, teaching and education. Whilst academic literature can be found concerning reflective practice in a variety of professions, notably teaching and nursing as well as social work, my personal interest and knowledge is specifically social work.

Professional social workers need to "think on their feet" whilst encountering problems which create unpredictability, change, confusion, or aggression; a task described as "moral action under conditions of uncertainty" (McBeath & Webb 2002). Social work training delivers knowledge and skills and requires students to think critically, recognising the impact of societal diversity (Thompson 2001). This requires a sound 'value-base' that is non-judgemental to work within a multi-racial, multi-cultural society. Social workers require ability to apply theory to practice to become 'reflective practitioners'. According to

theorists, this enables a process of sound judgement through continual learning in practice (Brown et al 2005, Payne, 2002, Ruch 2000, Schön 1991).

Theories of adult learning suggest that individual perception and experience affect the reflective process and may be derived from informal learning (Boud et al 1993, Harrison 2000, Kolb 1984). This therefore requires recognition of significant learning experiences for people to be reflective (Crawford et al 2002). However, there are also arguments that students who have no pre-conceived ideas are able to be developed to think critically about their practice (Balen & White 2007). There is a wealth of literature expounding the virtues of reflective practice, and expectations that practitioners are able to reflect to develop social work expertise (Gould & Taylor 1996, Martyn 2000, Noble 2001, Payne 2002). Requirements in qualifying and post-qualifying courses stipulate that reflection is integrated in work submitted for assessment. However, other than manuals written for students and practitioners to facilitate meeting requirements for qualifications (see Brown & Rutter 2006, Shardlow & Doel 1996) there appears to be little written about the process of how and why reflection is achieved. I argue that much of the material available does not explore the essence of reflective practice. Academic literature used by social workers advocates reflective practice as a process, but little is known about how social workers actually employ reflective practice other than within formal training.

1.1.1 <u>Context</u>

This research began as exploration of how mature students identify current and past experience for learning transfer within social work training settings to enable reflective practice. The research proposal focused on mature learners using reflective practice as a catalyst to consider previous positive and negative experiences. I saw this as particularly pertinent in social work where people draw on experience to capture understanding of other people's lives. Interest in practitioners' use of reflective practice was developed from an MSc research thesis (McDonald 2003), exploring whether NVQ 4 candidates meeting competences for management roles became reflective practitioners in the process. The findings had identified respondents' prior learning and experience as significant.

1.1.2 <u>Change of Focus</u>

However, I recognised early in this research process that respondents were describing employing reflective practice as a strategy, rather than referring to previous learning. As the research travelled through a pilot study and subsequent interviews, dialogue with respondents rapidly led to changing the focus. What emerged is that respondents primarily see reflective practice as a way of dealing with and working through feelings about their work as well as improving practice. Respondents emphasise the practice environment, but also personal issues. The data also demonstrates a focus on choosing and adapting to

social work as a career and respondents' identity as people and professional social workers.

The research focus therefore encapsulates a broader view of reflective practice, exploring how it is defined and used, involving respondents who study and work in the social work academic and practice environment. Overall, I encounter commitment to self-development and improvement to enhance the lives of users of social work services. The ability to communicate and care for people is perceived by respondents as personal attributes recognised before entering into the profession. As well as utilising it for written work submitted for qualifying and post-qualifying training, reflective practice is perceived by respondents as a useful and honest method of problem-solving and sharing concerns with others, derived from reflecting on experience and learning. Reflective practice also contains a protective element for practitioners dealing with difficult issues. The data suggests that it links to strong emotions about the nature of the social work task. Through analysis, I demonstrate that reflective practice encapsulates a moral perspective which people perceive as integral to them personally, as well as professionally. Themes emerge which relate it to problem-solving and assessment for professional development but also values, morality and emotional labour.

1.2 **Outline of the Thesis**

Chapter 1 introduces the background to the study and why it was chosen. It presents my profile, explains the rationale behind the research and where the subject area is currently situated within social work practice. There is a brief trajectory of social work and training, contextualising the development of reflective practice. Chapter 2 is a literature review, critically examining historical development of its use in social work education and definitions of reflective practice, presenting academic debates surrounding the concept. I also discuss controversy surrounding its use and issues relating to the delivery of social work training within the UK. The methodology is presented in chapter 3; in particular, this addresses the reflexive style of research, arguments for its use in this study and how the methodology is applied. This chapter critiques the framework used for data analysis. It then examines emerging themes and their relevance to the subject area. The following chapters, 4 and 5, provide a thematic analysis of sub-themes, which are identified separately but also link to an overall global theme. These are examined with narrative evidence from the data and are divided into the following; values and morality, time and place, relationships and communication, problem-solving and development and monitoring and assessment. In chapter 6 the global theme emerges as a critical analysis of identity and emotional labour. A global theme is defined as: "macro theme(s) that summarize or make sense of clusters or lower order themes abstracted from and supported by the data" (Attride-Stirling 2001: 389). Drawn from dialogue, this thematic chapter

argues that the data demonstrates that through reflective practice, respondents examine emotional management as professional social workers and their relationship to their role as a social worker. The final chapter draws the research together through a conclusion, presenting the main findings and the contribution this research makes to debates on reflective practice with suggestions for further related areas for research.

1.3 **Personal Profile**

A reflexive approach requires the researcher to take part in the construction of knowledge (Bryman 2001: 470). Therefore, it is important to explore personal, educational and professional experience (Ruch 2000: 100) influencing my ontological perspective. It can be argued that in order to interpret others' experiences, an understanding of how this is shaped by personal history is imperative, as it is understood within a "cultural context" (Ellis and Brochner 2003: 213). Letherby (2003: 9) states that she believes that identifying your own experience is "an antidote to feeling superior in research relationships". Further, people's identities are constructed through language and dialogue (Wetherell et al 2001) I am therefore presenting a personal history, simultaneously providing explanation of why I developed an interest in adult learning and reflective practice in particular.

I am a disabled British white woman aged 58. My childhood was spent in Cheshire with two older brothers and two parents. My parents both worked in white-collar jobs; my father was an engineer and my mother was an insurance clerk and so we were comfortable financially. However, although we appeared as other families, my life felt strange compared to those observed amongst my peers. My mother was critical of others, particularly women, and highly materialistic. My father had difficulty communicating and expressing positive emotion. In hindsight, I realise he had Asperger's syndrome. He was silent and bad tempered, but dominating. I felt continual fear of his unspoken aggression. Combined with my mother's constant disapproval, this created a lack of personal confidence. Fortunately, in adulthood, I have experienced positive significant relationships, compensating for some of these experiences. Nevertheless, there was a constant feeling of guilt and unworthiness. I believe I chose a career in social work as a consequence of those negative experiences, as I could personally identify with disadvantage; albeit emotional rather than material.

Health issues have considerably affected my life. I have a degenerative foot disability, recently undergoing major surgery and I am unable to walk without mobility equipment. I was also born with 'holes in the heart' and spent frequent periods in hospital during childhood, affecting my formal education. In the 1950s in post-war Britain, classes were large and streamed. I lurched between the 'A' stream where I struggled, to the 'B' stream

where I achieved highly, so educationally I largely 'switched off'. My parents feared I might fail the 11 plus which, as they verbalised, would cause them social embarrassment. However, after specific private tutoring, I gained a place at a girl's grammar school. It was clear by my parent's subsequent relief, which I can still vividly recall, that they had not considered this possible. They had enrolled me into a private school as an alternative. As they were determined I was not going to the local secondary modern school as "no-one from our private estate goes there". Nevertheless, at that point their interest in my education ended, primarily on the basis on my gender and their lack of educational knowledge. Girls were not required to achieve and, in addition, they did not consider me very bright. Indeed, my mother used to regale me with stories of how clever she was at school, making me feel even more inadequate, although I did recognise that I was in fact intellectually capable.

I hated most of my grammar school years and felt like a fish out of water, although I am grateful for the high expectations the experience gave me. We were constantly told that we were the top ten per cent in the country and it was our responsibility to achieve! However overall, these overriding negative experiences led me to become a feminist and a socialist, with a strong belief in equality and justice. Letherby (2003) argues that histories of people's lives offer a process of evaluation, by examining the past it enables consideration

of the future. My decisions were in opposition to my background and created further disapproval at home, which I believe left me feeling more in control and where I began to feel more comfortable with the choices I made. I scraped some 'O' levels and 'A' levels, but did not want to teach, nurse or become a secretary; the main options, other than university, for grammar school girls in 1969. I knew I had to leave home because the atmosphere was so oppressive and applied for Community Service Volunteers, basically VSO, but in England. Consequently, my social work career commenced at the age of 18 in a boy's 'approved' school for young offenders in Yorkshire, followed by a challenging year in a secure unit in Birmingham. I confess to being attracted to the work as it seemed exciting and totally different from what I was used to. I then became involved in the whole ethos of working with young people who clearly had damaged backgrounds and decided I wished to pursue this as a job.

Aged 20, I obtained a place on a social work course in Liverpool. I felt I'd 'come home' politically, academically and emotionally and I also met my partner of 37 years, whose working class, single mother welcomed me into the family. I really enjoyed learning about subjects to do with people and society, such as psychology and sociology, and I therefore began to work hard academically. Spurred on by supportive tutors, I received high marks. Having experienced this sudden change in others' perception of me, I realised how much

confidence can affect how people perform within the education system. I also identified with some of the theories I was learning about, such as 'labelling theory' (Payne 1997). Although, I was learning about it in relation to "delinquency" at that time, I recognised its transferability to other oppressed groups. I was also influenced by studies of social stratification, prevalent in social work training at the time, and the exploration of deprivation, both sociological and psychological. I have carried that knowledge into my social work practice, training and education roles and as a parent. I also believe that my middle class background had been a protection and, despite the dysfunction, had offered opportunities not open to everyone. I then became a qualified social worker when I was 22, working from 1973-1978 in a generic social work team. I worked mainly in child protection but gained experience in all service user sector groups as the system demanded at the time. This included solitary emergency weekend and night duty. I found the work difficult and anxiety-provoking, but also satisfying and totally absorbing.

I left employment to 'have my family' of three sons, returning to social work in 1983 in three part-time posts; fostering and adoption, lecturing and study supervision. These were to fit 'around the children', but which I really enjoyed. It was during this time that I developed my interest in adult learning. Study supervisors worked with day care and residential social workers studying for a Certificate in Social Services. Acknowledging that

these mature students were not from academic backgrounds and few had qualifications, the role facilitated links between theory and practice. A lot of my work involved confidence building, enabling students to consider what they had gained from their personal and practice experience. This part-time work led to a training manager's post in a social services department where I remained for 17 years. Working with a number of universities and colleges in partnership, I gained knowledge of teaching and curriculum development for social work within higher education, alongside managing a team of practice teachers assessing social work students in practice.

I also had opportunity to take my interests further and acquire more qualifications. In 1991, I completed a graduate personnel management course. I wanted some theoretical underpinning in management and this course also included training theory and adult learning, which I found fascinating. However, my health was still an ongoing issue. Despite seeking medical advice and being reassured that my heart would be able to cope, my three pregnancies had taken their toll. In 1994, at 43, I was informed that I would not survive unless I had heart surgery, which fortunately was successful. This made me grateful to be born in the twentieth century! Nevertheless, having life threatening surgery affected my perception. I was ready take more risks and was thankful for the opportunity to live longer than initially expected. Seeking something different, I changed jobs to

another social services department in 2001. I was employed to manage a 'difficult' training team, but not supported in the task. I became the victim of horrendous bullying, affecting my health. I was there for two years, one of which I was absent. In 2002 emotionally battered, I retired……or so I thought. My experience also tapped into early life experiences, which made me ill. Nevertheless, I still gained an MSc in Training and Performance Management in 2003 from Leicester University which helped me to develop further confidence in my academic ability and I began part-time work at a college delivering social work qualifying training. Also, at their request, I started to take on academic managerial duties.

The dreadful bullying experience left me determined never to collude with such oppressive behaviour as a manager and to recognise how a culture of an organisation can become soured through negative group processes when they are not deal with. I then became the Head of Social Work and Counselling at the college, delivering the social work degree. I enjoyed three years there where I began this research. This led to my having the confidence to successfully apply for, and obtain, my current post as Head of Social Work and Advice Studies in a post 92 university. My experiences have reinforced an interest in the relationship between reflection, learning and personal development.

Steier (1991: 3) identifies that as we engage in research it is also "telling a story about ourselves" and the activity links to our own experiences as researchers as well as the research subject. My particular interest in reflective practice has developed over the twenty five years I have been involved in the education and training of social workers. Specifically, I have recognised how experience informs people's development, both at work and in their personal lives. I am frequently humbled by how many mature students juggle complex lives and jobs, deal with complicated decisions and discuss service users' experiences with knowledge of how it changes their perception. Yet, when asked to write about this in a reflective way, it appears to create fear and apprehension which does not match the worker's capability, which I, with a poor, but consistent grammar school education, find no difficulty with. It is especially rewarding to see how people blossom with encouragement and go on to be successful in their studies, some gaining promotion or continuing onto other courses. I can recall speaking to the Director of Social Services where I was a training manager who was rejecting the notion of having a formal ceremony to celebrate achievement. The employees we were discussing worked in day care and residential service, where people historically had the least qualifications. I had to explain to him that for most of the employees, this award ceremony was something that had been beyond their wildest dreams. I advised him to observe the constant photography and number of family members in attendance. Later he came to me and said he had not considered this before and he accepted that what I had said was true.

Learning does not just have benefits of personal gain, although that is part of any achievement. I believe the quality of people's work is enhanced by the opportunity to consider practice and analyse how, what and why we do it; reflective practice is part of that process. However, when I began this research, I also had concerns. Critics of the requirement of reflective practice (see Ixer 1999) within academic social work submitted for assessment, have argued that it is not clear and moreover it is an extra requirement for students to achieve, which has little substance. I had assessed a lot of work and also believed that this requirement had become formulaic. People writing about their reflections were doing so to pass a course and this process may still not create reflective practitioners. I had also experienced differences in people's ability to achieve this and this was not only related to confidence or educational background. In particular, I was working with a number of practitioners submitting work at post-qualifying level who had been recruited from African countries, coming to work in England after experiencing atrocities of the most barbaric nature. Although it is not appropriate to generalise, it was apparent that some of those practitioners seemed to find it less difficult to write reflectively about their work than some others without those experiences. I therefore began to become interested in links between previous experience and learning. This therefore led to my initial research interest in this area, alongside the research work I had completed at Masters level.

As can be seen by this account, my interest in the subject area has been informed by my experiences and professional learning. I have been greatly influenced by working with social work students and practitioners, many of whom have not had traditionally academic backgrounds. For many, the concept of reflective practice and in particular, writing reflectively, has presented challenges. My position as a researcher therefore has included the desire to ask people directly about this topic. I believe that people are often expected to address the subject of reflective practice for assessed work, but have not been in a position to present their own perspective on the subject and I wanted to address that power imbalance. I have been influenced by my own educational advantages and disadvantages as well as professional learning. I recognise that personal and professional accounts, as well as self-esteem and confidence, affect individuals considerably. I therefore wished to contribute to the debates which will inform social work education and practice in the future.

1.4. <u>Brief Trajectory of Social Work and Training</u>

The Local Authority and Allied Personal Services report of 1968 by the Seebohm Committee debatably had the greatest influence on current qualifying training for social workers. The report called for a "more co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to the problems of individuals, families and communities" (cited in Lymbery 2001: 371) and was combined with a brief period of optimism that social work could contribute to creating a

more just and fair society. Prior to this, during the post-war period, personal social services had been fragmented and delivered through different departments (Forder 1971). In the 1970s, services for children, mental health, people with physical and learning disabilities and older people were amalgamated into one generic service, thus creating Social Services Departments (Lovelock et al 2004).

The Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) was introduced in 1971, primarily for 'field' social workers. These courses were regulated through "CCETSW"; the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (Humphrey 2006). Training for residential and social care workers was piecemeal, with the inception of the Certificate in Social Services (CSS) in 1975 (Community Care 2003). The number of places available was small compared to the number of unqualified workers and students had to be employer seconded. 1981 CCETSW reviewed its training. During the 1980's, there was an increased on emphasis on diversity and equality in social work education and there was criticism from the Conservative government for "promoting political correctness" (Humphrey 2006: 357). In addition, the universities were critical of the CQSW academic curriculum. An overhaul saw need for greater links between training and education, employment and research. 'Equal opportunities' was explored from the perspective of anti-oppressive practice, with the emphasis on meeting the needs of

individuals and communities in a diverse society. However, although an amalgamated qualification for all social workers was proposed, the government rejected a 3-year qualification (Walker 2002). A 2-year Diploma in Social Work was introduced in 1989, replacing the CSS and CQSW and focusing on competency-based training, which was criticised as being functionalist (Humphrey 2006).

Eventually, in 2001, the Department of Health announced that a new qualification would be at graduate level. For the first time, there was parity with international universities (Orme 2001). Commencing, in 2003 with a wider curriculum and a minimum of 200 days assessed practice, it arguably raised the professional status of social work. The government provided undergraduate bursaries to encourage recruitment (Furness 2007). Social work students have traditionally been mature and social work experienced. This is still the case but, in addition, younger, less experienced students are recruited (Higham 2006). However, this in itself causes controversy amongst those involved in delivering social work education. As Lymbery (2001: 369) identifies:

> "Social workers work with some of the most psychologically damaged and socially disadvantaged people, and are susceptible to public devaluing of the services they provide. Indeed, social work has been subjected to an ever-increasing volume of public debate and criticism, and its claims to professional status are under threat".

Media-publicised tragedies created greater scrutiny as 'suitability for social work' has become formalised, alongside professional registration (GSCC 2007a). The government reformed child care and mental health in order that professionals work together (DoH, DfES and Home Office 2003, DoH 2007) and the qualification is presented as facilitating interprofessional training. Including users of services in planning and the delivery of social work became a requirement, enforced by the regulatory body, the General Social Care Council (GSCC 2005). Continual professional development through post-qualifying awards began in the 1990s but took time before embedding into employer training policies, encouraged by government-funded training support grants. However, the inception of the degree has meant revision of a post-qualifying (PQ) framework. Academic institutions are required to award the qualifications, working closely with employers to meet local service needs (GSCC 2007b). This has implications for reflective practice through models and methods of learning within academic institutions.

During the last twenty-five years, there have been numerous policy changes for community care. There is less institutional care alongside increased private and voluntary growth. Recently, there have been splits in services, largely between children and families and those for adults, through the demise of Social Services departments to Directorates of Services. There is a marriage of health and social care under the 'modernising' agenda

within adult care (Karban & Smith 2006) and with education under 'Every Child Matters', which amalgamates and integrates services for children and families (DfES, DOH and Home Office 2003). This has implications for qualifying and post-qualifying courses amongst the care sector with an increase of multidisciplinary teams. Social work has a role governed by legislation throughout all its provision. To contextualise this role, I am drawing on Payne (2002: 130-131) who divides it broadly into three main areas. Firstly, social workers provide a service to individuals to enable social, emotional and practical functioning, for example, in mental health, with children and families or older people. This may be supporting parents to avoid child abuse or care packages for older people to remain in their community. The second part of the role Payne (2002) terms 'reflexive-therapeutic', enabling people to reach potential by enabling them to identify their own problems and needs; for example, working with disabled people to develop independence and fulfilment. The final area he terms socialist or collective, which involves changing structures or working with groups. For instance, this could be with women in refuges or with communities. Social workers embrace difficult tasks involving dilemmas, dealing with conflict and decision-making:

> "Social work involves entering into the lives of people who are in distress, conflict or trouble. To do this requires not only technical competence, but also qualities of integrity, genuineness and self awareness" (Lishman 1994 cited in Lishman 2002: 95)**.**

Reflective practice has been advocated as a useful method of problem-solving, primarily since the 1980s, since the popularity of the work of Schön, who initially wrote 'The Reflective Practitioner' in 1983, but it is also advocated as a way of challenging technical-rational, competency–based approaches to social work education (Ruch 2002). Healy (2005: 17) identifies what she terms "dominant discourses" prevalent in social work education which are; biomedicine, neo-classical economics and law. These 'scientific' theoretically based approaches can be seen to be drawn from other disciplines. The reflective approach which relies on the practitioners exploration of their knowledge combined with practice may also be seen as an antidote to those scientific processes.

These seemingly competing ontologies of how the development of a qualified social worker should be constructed is an ongoing source of debate within the profession (Healy 2005). One of the biggest difficulties was that there has been no clear role of a social worker (Lymbery 2001). It has also argued that social workers have a societal maintaining role, which is dominated by legislation, policy and the work of social service departments situated within local authorities. Moreover, there have been further reforms by the government since the late 1990's to modernise services. These advocate choice and empowerment by promoting independence, alongside a 'safeguarding' role for vulnerable children and adults. Regardless of the controversy surrounding the political motivation for

this, it also sets a backcloth to the ostensible contradictory philosophies in the expectations for social workers to facilitate decisions in partnership with users of the service, whilst trying to ensure protection of the public. This is combined with the raising of standards and the registering of practitioners (Slater 2004). The social work services have been dominated by financial crises requiring reduction in public expenditure and political ideology within successive governments. The current emphasis for example on managerialism has meant that social workers are faced with a contradiction between need, service user choice and resource-led provision, whilst needing to provide evidence of clear administration and an emphasis on risk management (Lymbery 2001). Humphrey (2006: 358) terms social work education as having "a panopticon-like structure of the regulatory apparatus which surrounds it" and compares the UK curricula with European social work training which has a pedagogical basis and far more autonomy.

Those delivering the social work degree are subject to specific pressures. Whilst universities call for greater numbers and the social work degree attracts people due to a financial bursary, there is also the strong pressure that 'suitable' people need to be enrolled (GSCC 2007a) and as Humphrey (2006: 361) identifies:

> "the implicit interference on the part of the government agencies who scrutinise the profession is that only a minority of the population could weather the stormy seas of social work education and practice".

In addition, there is current recognition that there is a shortage of social workers to deal with increasing societal pressure. The curriculum of the degree is under constant scrutiny by the regulatory body and the key roles identified for social workers are impossible to achieve in the limited time available on the social work degree. However, the overriding issue is that three quarters of the social care staff in the UK are not, as yet, qualified.

1.4.1 Summary

This section presented an historical overview of social work training and education during the last forty years. The brief and précised interpretation of social work offers a background to the research to contextualise the theories, debates and respondents' perspectives. The tensions outlined arguably mirror the debates between historical scientific approaches drawn from other disciplines with the critically reflective historical perspective and which will be expanded upon in the next chapter. It also highlights the complexity of teaching and assessing social work theory and practice in a highly political environment.

1.5 **<u>Conclusion</u>**

The chapter introduced the focus of the study. It outlined the context of reflective practice for social workers and briefly described the respondents who participated. It presented the rationale of the original proposal and explained the change of focus shortly after the commencement of the research process. The structure of the thesis was then described, briefly outlining the content of each chapter and the outcome of the study. As this research is reflexive the researcher is included in the research process, I have therefore provided a personal profile, which also explores how my interest in the subject developed. Finally, to set the study in context, a brief historical overview of social work development, education and training was given, outlining some of the prevalent debates within the profession.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 **Introduction**

The concept of reflective practice in social work is advocated as a means to develop learning and practice. It is mandatory in written work for social work practitioners meeting requirements for qualifying and post qualifying courses, but also expounded as a method of continual improvement. Academic literature also draws from nursing and teaching pedagogy, where reflective practice is situated within human services. This research critically examines gaps and issues identified within academic literature, explored through interviews with student social workers, academics, practice teachers and practitioners.

2.1.1 Outline of the Chapter

The chapter is divided into two main sections, providing a literature background to the study. Firstly, reflective practice is examined by analysing its development within adult learning. I critique definitions and debates surrounding the concept of reflective practice. Evaluation is then made of arguments for how it enables social work students and practitioners improve their practice, for example by problem-solving, perception and

insight. Secondly, I review current and contextual issues, initially examining how reflective practice is perceived as denoting professionalism. I critically explore the use of reflective practice within current social work education and practice. I analyse models and approaches written for practitioners submitting work for assessment. I then widen the discussion to areas of postmodernity and diversity. This identifies its political role and identification within language and narrative. Finally, I critique current factors that affect reflective practice such as choice, scrutiny and surveillance.

2.1.2   Background

Reflective practice as a concept for social workers in the UK was predominately propounded by Schön (1983). He refers to 'reflection-in-action'; the instantaneous application of reflection whilst in practice (Schön 1991). Social workers are expected to demonstrate that they are reflective practitioners academically and practically, particularly through course work presented for assessment (Brown & Rutter 2006). During the last twenty years there has been a movement within certain professions, including social work, linking 'reflection' to professional competence (Adams 2002, Bolton, 2005, Morley 2004, Rai 2006, Ruch 2005, Schön 1991). However, it is a controversial concept and there is debate about its clarity and usefulness (Ixer 1999, Rogers 2001). Ixer (1999: 513) defines it as a "cult", stating that it has been given to students as an unclear extra competence to

meet. Although there is apparent desirability for its application, it is argued that there is little analysis of its actual use, particularly with practitioners in organisations (Ruch 2005), who may not have much time to reflect (Ferguson 2005). It is therefore relevant to establish debates and arguments which advocate its use or otherwise, identifying its development and adoption within social work.

2.2   **The Development of Reflective Practice**

2.2.1   Learning Theory

Reflective practice is a concept derived from learning theory. Various definitions describe reflective practice as encapsulating thought in action, self-involvement and awareness, ethics and values, retrospective thinking and re-consideration of perspectives. These all indicate a purposeful intention; a conscious process (D'Cruz et al 2007, Ixer 1999). This definition of reflective practice includes the consequences of its use, which is helpful in exploring its purpose:

> "The process of creating and clarifying the meaning of experience in terms of self-regulation to both self and the world. The outcome of this process is changed conceptual perspectives". (Boyd & Fales 1983: 101).

Loughran (1996: 21) claims that reflective practice must be viewed as dialectic, with students taking responsibility through active engagement and problem-solving, defining it as:

> "the purposeful, deliberate act of inquiry into one's thoughts and actions through which a perceived problem is examined in order that a thoughtful, reasoned response might be tested out".

Reflection has been termed a "dogma" (Sweet 2006: unpaginated). There is information regarding reflective practice throughout textbooks for practitioners (Adams et al 2002, Crawford 2006, Dominelli 2004, Payne 2005). Much of this relates to written work required for social work qualifications (see Cooper & Spencer-Dawe 2006, Crawford et al 2002, Green Lister & Crisp 2007, Nixon & Murr 2006, Rutter 2006, Saltiel 2003, Taylor 1999). However, theories of learning suggest that reflective practice stems from a constructivist approach, presented within the literature as a model. Its use is advocated within teaching, nursing and social work (Bolton, 2005, Ghaye & Ghaye 1998, Loughran, 1996, Payne 1997, Scanlon et al 2002).

2.2.2 "A Felt Difficulty"

The concept of reflective practice evolves from earlier theoretical constructs for example, Dewey (1910), Kohler (1925), Lewin (1939) and Kolb (1984). Their contributions arguably led to understanding and developing adult education and training, both

theoretically and practically, particularly with respect to reflective practice (Ixer 1999, Powell 1995). Reflection has been discussed as contributing to knowledge of learning since the early part of the last century (Ixer 1999). Dewey (1910) examines the solving problems through cyclical reflection. In the publication "How We Think", Dewey (1910: 5) attaches reflection to belief in order to understand the nature of things. He argues that through this process, thinking leads to "conscious inquiry", explored as a progression of adult learning. He describes the need to "train thought" to be reflective for logical problem-solving: "thought affords the sole method of escape from being impulsive or purely routine action" (Dewey 1910: 14).

Dewey (1910) presents cyclical phases that are not necessarily sequential. Initially, the individual identifies a problem which Dewey terms "a felt difficulty" (Dewey 1910: 72). The second phase defines it and explores where it is, progressing to a potential resolution. This is developed through consideration of how it can be resolved. The final phase explores whether or not to embrace the suggestion for resolution and ultimately, according to Dewey, the "conclusion of belief or disbelief" (Dewey 1910: 72). Ixer (1999) identifies that Dewey poses difference between routine action and reflective action. This is founded on considering a difficult situation, generating new knowledge or awareness through

"cognitive disruption" (Ixer 1999: 515). Dewey therefore embraces two major elements, rational thought and interpretation (Ixer 1999).

Subsequent to Dewey (1910), many definitions of reflective practice follow a pathological course with reflection starting with a problem. In illustration, a further practical and comprehensive explanation is offered by Boyd and Fales (1983: 99):

> "the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self and which results in a changed conceptual perspective"

Boyd and Fales (1983) view reflection as everyday human experience but in professional terms as facilitating learning for both worker and service user. Banks (1995: 142) sees skills involved in critical reflection as enabling social workers, particularly students, to deal with personal dilemmas of uncertainty and inner conflict. The notion that reflection is problem-focused is integrated in books written for practitioners, with numerous examples of reflective practice effecting solutions (Cooner 2005, Hill 2002, Payne 2005, Schlonsky & Stern 2007, Taylor & White 2001). This suggests reflective practice is usually initiated as a way of remedying situations: a 'formula' for problem–solving through examples or case studies (Banks 1995, Brown & Rutter 2006, Martyn 2000, Payne 1997). Dewey has

been criticised for the process being centred on self, whereas people may use reflection in dialogue with others (Loughran 2002).

Different definitions of reflective practice indicate its origins as well as its use. Dewey (1933: cited in Rogers 2001), for example, defines reflective thinking as "active, careful consideration". Payne (2002: 124) identifies reflective practice as "a rigorous way of working" enabling practitioners to apply theory to practice. He also believes that social work is too complicated to rely on empirically based research; reflective practice offers an alternative approach. Likened to Dewey's reflective thought he defines it as: "thinking through issues in all their complexity and acting towards clients and others in a considered, thoughtful manner" (Payne 2002: 124). Yip (2006) alternatively believes that reflective practice is an internal process for professionals to question personal assumptions, underpinning how they act. Yip (2006: 777) emphasising the individual's role, defines reflective practice as: "a process of self-analysis, self-evaluation, self-dialogue and self-observation". Attard (2008) describes reflective practice as an ongoing process of analysis.

2.2.3   <u>Insightful Practice</u>

In 1925 Kohler identified an interest in perception, which I would argue is significant in learning theory and the development of reflective practice.   He explored how individuals perceive objects or phenomena as whole subjects, rather than a number of parts; for example a concerto, rather than a series of notes (Kohler 1925). Moreover, Kohler's work also identifies 'insight' (Kohler 1925: 23) for memorable and meaningful learning through interpretation. This offers the notion of inspiration or recognising understanding through perception (Allard et al 2007, Ixer 1999). I contend that insight is central to analysing and recognising good practice; at the heart of reflective practice, offering opportunity to create knowledge in professional settings (Clegg 2000: 453).

Expecting practitioners to demonstrate insight however, assumes confidence and experience in order to explore meaning introspectively. For example Johns (cited in Johns & Freshwater 1998: 2) asked nurses to reflect on practice experiences. The responses were mixed with anxiety and unresolved conflict, which nurses have been expected to control (D'Cruz et al 2007). One issue for practitioners therefore may be that reflective practice assumes unrealistic levels of experience and confidence (McDuffie 2004). Conversely, others contend that working with students on reflective narrative develops confidence and self–awareness (Cook, 2004, Crawford et al 2002, Gardner 2001, Glover 2000). Taylor

(2003) maintains that reflective practice does not deal with ambiguity and complexity as suggested. Poor practice needs to be recognised to be reflected on for positive change. Alternatively, the confessional nature of reflective practice may offer social workers opportunity to explore dilemmas and feelings (Bleakley 2000, Boud & Walker 1998). It perhaps offers opportunities for self-determination and an ethical approach which bureaucratic structures may counter (Gilbert 2001).

Reflective practice is perceived as a precursor to 'action research' consolidated by Lewin (McKiernan 1996). Lewin recognised how environmental influences affect learning. This is an organisational group process, effecting change through shared deliberation of problems (Arnold et al 1998, Gardner 2001, Greenwood & Levin 1998). He refers to the "life space" (Lewin 1939: 868); a complex interaction of factors affecting the context of learning. Effecting positive change can be seen in theories of reflective practice within caring professions (Johns & Freshwater 1998, Martyn 2000, Taylor 2006a). It is perceived as the basis of reflection being problem-focused (Ixer 1999, Loughran 1996). Group processes are used in social work training and education, for example shared studies of case scenarios (Allard et al 2007, Nähri 2002), presented as "mutual interaction between thought and action" (Regan 2007: 110).

2.2.4   Schön and The Reflective Practitioner

Schön's (1991) theories have had a major influence on developing social work education (Boud & Knights 1996, Gould & Baldwin 2004, Gould & Taylor 1996, Ixer 1999). He introduced reflective practice as an "exploration of professional knowledge" (Schön 1991: vii), challenging theoretical frameworks and professional constructs grown from technical rationality, which he argues leads to professionals viewing themselves as 'experts', creating elitism and superiority over others. Whilst establishing itself as a profession, in the 1960s and 1970s social work adopted scientific approaches (Dominelli 2004, Younghusband 1973). Domination by psycho-dynamic theories prevented clarification of the role (Munro 2004) attracting criticisms of social work training lacking discrete theory (Walker 2002).   Schön (1991: 23) argues that minor professions such as social work identified with theory from disciplines with history and status such as medicine, making social work "hopelessly nonrigorous" and "dependent". However, in the 1970's the inception of amalgamated social services departments required social workers to be generic, emphasising a systems approach to intervention (Parton 2003: 239-240) and maintaining a quantitative structuralist perspective. Thirty years later, auditing and accountability is prominent through inspection of social services systems (Munro 2004) and managerialism, which may also be seen as counteracting reflective practice (Ruch 2000). Strong weight is still given to theories drawn from other disciplines (Healy 2005).

Schön (1991) however, argues that social work, alongside other professions, requires more than technical expertise. According to Bleakley (2000: 15), he established reflective practice as a positive response to "ambiguity, uniqueness and value conflict". Schön (1991: 230) contends that social work cannot be viewed scientifically as it is set in institutionally unstable and moving contexts. Schön (1991: 25-26) describes how it aspires to be a profession with authority and status through utilising theory and research. He recognises it as pluralistic and complex, requiring different solutions to problems, seeing social work as: "a swampy lowland where situations are confusing messes incapable of technical solution" (Schön 1991: 42).

Taylor (2003: 244) also believes that reflective practice is extolled as a method of enabling practitioners to deal with "messiness" and the "real world" of social work in dealing with human dilemmas. Based on similar processes to Polyani's "tacit knowing" Schön: (1991: 52) explores how practitioners work from knowledge about situations, whether or not informed by theory. He presents this awareness of implicit knowledge as an unconscious process, arguing that this takes place whilst the practitioner is in the situation which he terms 'reflection-in-action'. The practitioner discovers a problem, establishes understanding of it and reframes it to solve it. It is this method of problem-resolution working from previous knowledge and experience that becomes reflective

practice. However, critics identify that to reflect on practice the reflector needs to be objective or distant (Eraut 1995, Ixer 1999). Schön (1991) acknowledges that reflection-in-action may not be a quick process, possibly stretching over months, depending on the activity (Schön 1991: 18). His terminology therefore may be regarded as ambiguous. Loughran (2006) points out that whether the reflection occurs prior to, during or after an event leads to different conclusions.

However, Schön's views have been challenged as unreflexive, lacking conceptualisation and with insufficient emphasis on reflection prior to action (Boud & Walker 1998). Eraut (1994) believes that Schön is overly concerned with demonstrating inappropriateness of the epistemology of science within technical rationality, emphasising artistry and creativity of professionals rather than exploring meaningful practice. Further, Eraut (1994) contends that Schön makes generalisations without a clear perspective of what is meant by reflective practice, leading to confusion. Consequently, theoretical constructs are difficult to evolve from his line of reasoning. Whilst he makes statements about professional roles, there are no clear examples of how reflective practice could be used (Cole 2005). Further, it could be argued that reflective practice has been adopted due to lack of discrete theory pertaining to social work specifically. It is argued that it can make practitioners so introspective that it becomes meaningless (Bleakley 1999). A major

criticism of Schön's work is that reflective practice is presented as vague and nebulous (Bleakley 1999, Clegg 2000, Eraut 1995).

Clegg (1999: 168) challenges patriarchal assumptions within Schön's theory, arguing that women's perspectives have been ignored, stating that his professional illustrations exude "unconscious sexism"; an irony considering the prevalence of women within roles adopting reflective practice, specifically teachers, nurses and social workers. Schön has been accused of being inappropriately apolitical (Clegg 1999, Fitzgerald 1994) Rather than delivering accurate accounts, reflective practice can be seen as constructed narratives and as 'confessionals' (Bleakley 2000, Saltiel 2006, Taylor 2003). It does not fully address complications, relying on potentially inaccurate retrospective thinking (Regan 2007). It is also contended that reflective practice presented in professional courses varies in quality (Boud & Walker 1998: 192). Bleakley (1999: 317) supports offering alternatives to technical rationality, but argues that reflective practice risks being "a catchall title for an ill-defined process". Further, it is not clear whether social workers mutually understand what is meant by reflective practice. This is of concern, given that it is mandatory in work presented for assessment (Preston-Shoot 2003, Rutter 2006, Saltiel 2006).

It is also argued that a technical rational approach is suitable for some social work problems, which are not all complex and messy (Lymbery 2003). Nevertheless, Schön (1991: 26) is critical of higher education institutions for not meeting needs of professional training because of emphasis on technical rationality and separation of research and practice. He argues for skills, creativity and flexibility to deal with unpredictability (Schön 1991: 23). According to Yelloly and Henkel (1995: 8) social work is:

> "seldom routine and involves working with people, all of whom are unique, in situations which are complex, frequently messy and obscure, rarely easy to understand, and almost never amenable to standardised prescribed responses"

Despite criticism, Schön's connection of reflective practice to professionalism (Schön 1991) may be a primary reason why it has been adopted by educators and trainers (Yelloly & Henkel 1995). It is argued it creates autonomous and professional practitioners (Preston-Shoot 2003) and facilitates competence (Rutter 2006).

2.2.5 <u>Theory to Practice</u>

Schön (1991) believes that reflection can lead to new theory. Practice and experience as a source of knowledge are currently viewed as supplementing and supporting social work theory (D'Cruz et al 2006, Miehls & Moffat 2000, Pease & Fook 1999, Ruch 2000, Taylor & White 2000). Reflective practice can explore experience and attitudes from personal

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perspectives (Gardner 2001), suggesting links between previous learning and current practice. Taylor (2006: 8) offers a definition incorporating reflection's literal meaning:

> "the throwing back of thoughts and memories, in cognitive acts such as thinking, contemplation, meditation and any other form of attentive consideration, in order to make sense of them, and to make contextually appropriate changes if they are required".

Rogers (2001) identifies that the term reflection is used in different contexts, interchanged with expressions such as meditation, introspection and contemplation. He presents reflection as being:

> "to integrate one's understanding gained into one's experience in order to enable better choices or better actions in the future as well as to enhance one's overall effectiveness" Rogers (2001: 41)

In order to be effective, social workers are encouraged to be reflective practitioners developing professional skills through critical reflective thought (Banks 1995, Morley 2004, Ruch 2005), as a process for exploring power and values (Närhi 2002) and application of theory to practice (Fook 2002, Payne 2002, Saltiel 2006).

Different definitions demonstrate various interpretations, with arguments as to whether it creates theory based on practice expertise (Zeichner 1994). According to Rogers (2001), it can be seen as individually specific. This may determine its use and question shared understanding when being taught or assessed. However, Crossley (1996) argues that there is no such private world; such intersubjective processes are constituted by social contact and the culture that individuals are engaged in. The nature of the work means that they should be open to scrutiny. Nevertheless, there is often an idealistic, optimistic view of reflective practice. The practitioner may be creating a sense of false illusion, therefore reinforcing bad practice. Reflective practice has been described as difficult to define (Cotton 2001, Ixer 1999, Ruch 2005), consequently many practitioners can be left floundering (Clegg 2000: 452). It also may not be suitable for different learners. Conversely, it encourages practitioners to explore practice by identifying and monitoring past events to evaluate for improvement (Crawford et al 2002). Nevertheless, Regan (2007: 111) believes that reflection may promote clearer understanding by providing distance. Prior to the 1980s social work was largely an unqualified profession which Eraut (1994) argues hindered its progress and identity, therefore reflective practice has increasingly provided opportunity for professional development (Lymbery 2003, Pierce & Weinstein 2000). Alongside theoretical input, drawing on life experience for learning has been seen as fundamental (Butler & Elliot 1985, Harrison 2000, Kolb 1984, Taylor 2006a,

Yelloly & Henkel 1995), particularly when facilitated (Johns & Freshwater 1998, Bolton 2006).

2.2.6 Terminology

Despite its use being widely advocated, terminology surrounding reflective practice is confusing and there is lack of clarity about its inception, process and outcome (Rogers 2001: 38). Reflectivity is often used interchangeably with reflexivity (Ruch 2002, D'Cruz et al 2007), although arguably the processes are different. Students and practitioners may find the two concepts bewildering. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) and Payne (2005) describe reflexivity as a cyclical process, which involves reflecting on reflection. D'Cruz et al (2007: 80) identify two views of reflexivity. The first is a perspective offered by Giddens (1991), which emphasises personal choice, taking account of risk and decisions made by individuals for self-development. The second is the critical approach to knowledge generation including that of the researcher, as interpreted in this study. Payne (2002) views the reflexive process as gathering evidence to explore and change practice. He sees it as integral to the circular practice of interpreting feedback (Payne 2000: 127). Fook (2002) believes that reflexivity is taking into account many views on a particular situation. In a social work context this may include service users or colleagues. Reflective thinking is the method of working through something (Fook 2002) and offers insight

about practice through sharing knowledge (Närhi 2002). There are also arguments that reflective practice and reflexivity are interwoven (Karban & Smith 2006).

One of the major difficulties with practitioners' accounts is that language, metaphor and emotional content may distort events as the context changes (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000). Memory is filtered through emotional responses to an event (Fitzgerald 1994). Reflection is a method of deconstruction to attempt to understand what has taken place (Johns & Hardy 1998). Arguably, it is the reflection which is significant, mental filtering is part of the process (Saltiel 2006). Nevertheless, a personal account may not provide honest explanations of incompetent practice, especially if it is to be assessed. It can be argued that written work tests ability to write rather than on competence of practice, unless the workers are being observed simultaneously (Croton 2000). Ixer (1999: 513) identifies issues of power endemic in any relationship where there is assessment. He makes the point that if an assessor's ability to reflect on practice is poor, it is likely to "compound the imbalance of power between them". Whilst this may be the legitimate power of an assessor, other differentials relating to race, gender and other perspectives all potentially exacerbate this situation, particularly if reflections are personal thoughts or perspectives, which would have cultural relevance.

2.2.7 Models and Social Learning

Conducive to reflective practice, based on the principles of Dewey and Lewin, Kolb (1984: 41) identifies learning as "the transformation of experience", and as a continual cyclical process. Adapted from a model developed by Lewin (Kolb 1984: 8), the cycle revolves around experience, observation, reflection and use of abstract ideas. These are then tested, applying cognitive understanding in adapting to the environment. This model of adult learning has a significant role in developing reflective practice as a concept (Buckley & Caple, 2000, Evans 1997, McMahon 1999). However, although experience is crucial in terms of learning from practice, it is argued it is not greatly debated (Pierson 1998, Scanlan et al 2002), but it is demonstrated, for example, in the importance given to practice placements during qualifications (Crawford et al 2002, Smith et al 2007, Ward 2005). Kolb (1984) developed a self-diagnostic experiential model of learning styles based on the cyclical model. This establishes that adults learn differently, but can possibly lead to rigid self–labelling. For instance, if individuals see themselves as 'active' rather than 'reflective', it may influence how they approach reflective practice. Kolb has been criticised for his theory being scientifically unreliable (Koob & Funk 2002) and gender biased (Brew 2002). Ramsey (2005: 219) asserts that Kolb's theory presents one reality and does not take into account changing constructs. It over-emphasises the individual, which does not open it to other perspectives.

However, I contend that Kolb's theory challenges rote learning and positivist approaches to individual knowledge and skill development. Because of its emphasis on experience, this model is adopted in professional training (Buckley & Caple 2000, Harrison 2000). It offers a "holistic perspective on learning" (Kolb 1984: 31) facilitating reflective practice. Armstrong and Baron (1998: 224) argue that it describes how concepts can be translated from practice experience and transferred into how individuals deal with issues, situating it within performance management. Life experience is viewed as relevant, consequently informal learning is valued. Experiential learning therefore suits settings where adults present skills, knowledge and attitudes drawn from work environments (Armstrong & Baron 1998, Mullins 1999). It debatably supports people who have not been in formal learning settings for some time (Yelloly & Henkel 1995), therefore is particularly relevant for mature learners irrespective of age or class (Gardner 2001). This theory does not explore complexity around issues such as metacognition, but does give a framework for adult development (Armstrong & Baron 1998, Buckley & Caple 2000). Kolb's theory has been an influence on learning which requires self–awareness and ability to examine personal attitudes (Gardner 2001) and leads to examining diverse practice approaches (Payne 2002), also conducive to reflective practice.

Identifying the term 'situated learning', Lave and Wenger (1991) are researchers who view learning as located within a social context. Their work establishes learning as integrated within cultural processes. Reflective practice in social work is identifiable in this analysis, as a system of mutual learning (Nähri 2002). Learning is a cultural and social activity and takes place in a workplace setting through participation in the environment (Adruske 1999, Eraut 1996) and sharing practice issues with colleagues (Allard et al 2007, Taylor 2003). Arguably, all work environments are communities of practice, but they do not always generate positive learning (Atherton 2005). The cases of child abuse in residential units for children are examples where staff may have adopted negative practice, seemingly acceptable at the time (Barter 2003, Levy & Kahan 1991, Wardhaugh & Wilding 1993). The literature on reflective practice can be identified as having its basis within different communities of practice, whether this is nursing, social work or teaching, but needs consideration as to how it is used effectively (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond 2005, Loughran 2002, McMahon 1999). Nevertheless, reflective practice potentially generates inclusiveness through being a part of the social work community. For student social workers who may have little experience prior to training, shared language creates expectations of good practice. It may facilitate engagement with the profession and learning (Nixon & Murr 2006). Schön (1991: viii) describes this phenomenon as "epistemology of practice …kind of knowing in which competent practitioners engage". This may also create support within a stressful job. Pietroni (1995: 39) notes that peer

groups in social work can create or suppress good quality practice through a "mediated structure", which is dependent on the quality of team leadership.

2.3   **Current and Contextual Issues**

2.3.1   A Profession

I would contend that one of the reasons why reflective practice has been adopted by social work is that Schön (1991) portrayed professional work as highly skilled. He also perceives practice experience as contributing to continual learning. This message is conveyed through social work education, particularly the assessment of practice alongside academic work. There is common use of an assessed comprehensive portfolio in social work training. Students provide a range of written evidence to demonstrate ability through critical thinking (Coleman et al 2002, Swigonski 2006), including reflecting on practice through theory and research (Saltiel 2003, Taylor et al 1999, Taylor 2008), which Schön (1991) advocates. Reflective practice provides a conceptual means for a range of intellectual levels and roles. It is a model that can be applied within the classroom, the field and individually (Yelloly & Henkel 1995) and for different types of written analysis (Brown & Rutter 2006). Hall (1997) believes that such written accounts applied reflectively "justify" social work practice and demonstrate professional activity (cited in Taylor 2006a: 190). Ultimately, theory contributes to social work knowledge and is

incorporated into reflective practice, which is perceived as a process also derived from action, thus developing tacit knowledge and sound practice (Taylor 2006a).

Schön (1991) explores public perception of professions hampered by scandals and well-publicised cases, relevant to social work internationally (Velde 2000). Schön (1991) identifies that the self-image of professions is affected by public cynicism towards whether societal issues are being addressed through professional intervention. According to Dominelli (2004: 3) social work is still "suffering a crisis of confidence" as it faces criticism from institutions and the public. Arguably, this has deepened due to press coverage of social work intervention, which according to Aldridge (1994), is hostile and exaggerated. Social work within the UK is suffering through accounts of tragedies over the last thirty years (Taylor & White 2001), such as Maria Colwell who in 1975 was killed by her stepfather, despite being known to Social Services. In 2000, for 8 year old Victoria Climbié, lack of access and poor supervision contributed to neglect by different services and she was killed by relatives. Most recently there has been further criticism of social workers due to the death of a 17 month old child named "Baby P" (The Guardian 12.11.08, Haringey Local Safeguarding Children Board, 2008). These children are seen as "failures of the system" (Parton 2003: 23). Reflective practice is seen as a vehicle for

developing ability for "practice wisdom" (Saltiel 2006, Sheppard 1995, Sheppard et al 2000); expertise constructed from experience and critical reflection.

Yip (2006) believes that reflective practice starts with social workers feeling uncomfortable about aspects of practice, enabling resolution of conflicts, resonant of Dewey's (1910) "felt difficulty " and Boyd and Fales' belief that it starts with discomfort (Powell 1995). However, Yip (2006) also claims that this can potentially be destructive, particularly if tapping into unresolved personal issues. Ferguson (2003) argues that there needs to be an emphasis on 'best practice'; what works rather than a deficit model analysing what went wrong. This could involve different stakeholders including service users who critically reflect through evidence-based considerations (Cooper & Spencer-Dawe 2006, Stevens & Tanner 2006).

2.3.2 Reflection and Competence

From 1989 until five years ago, social work qualifying training was based on a competence-based learning outcomes model. These have been replaced by 'Occupational Standards' (TOPSS 2002), which have integrated the need 'to reflect' (Rai 2006). Segregated into six 'key roles', these are a list of detailed knowledge, skill and value

based outcomes which the role requires. Qualifying and post-qualifying courses are required to base their curriculum on these standards with emphasis on 'evidence-based' practice. Despite dilution of the rigid competence model, the need to meet outcome-based requirements still debatably creates a 'tick-list' mentality (Preston-Shoot 2004) and emphasis remains competence-focused to meet specific requirements set by the regulatory body.

As the work for assessment has shifted to evidence-based practice, it is argued that reflective practice remains confusing for students (Ixer 1999, Rutter 2006). The unlikely combination of competence and reflection has evolved within theoretical literature on social work methods, and in social work education as a learning process (Evans 1997, Brown & Rutter 2006) and is seen as contributing towards the governmental drive for 'new managerialism' (Dominelli 2004: 90, Lymbery 2003) by developing practitioners. However, Snell (1995) believes that attempts have been made in work contexts to regulate people. He argues that certain behavioural patterns demonstrated by employees or managers are suppressing the subjective nature of communication within the workplace. In their analysis of how competence-based training has been used within nursing to create greater accountability and consistency, issues synonymous with social work training, Nelson and Purkis (2004: 255) identify what they term "mandatory reflection", creating

self-regulation and personal accountability leading to internalisation of the "new ethos of self government". This debatably contradicts the ethos behind reflective practice, although self-monitoring can be adopted through the process.

Whilst there are major advantages in terms of consistency and clarity of the new requirements (Higham 2006), there has been criticism that continuing fragmented approaches makes reflective practice problematic (Lam et al 2007, Lymbery 2003). Outcomes based on competence have been defined as uncreative, mechanistic and reductionist within current learning and teaching methodology (Currie 1999, Ecclestone 1997, Lymbery 2003, McDonald 2003, Short 1984). A holistic approach is viewed as central to practice judgement as a process of integrating issues (Jones & Joss 1995, Pietroni 1995). However, not all agree with those criticisms. Wilson et al (2007: 14) argue that reflective practice and competence-based approaches complement each other avoiding "an arid quest for superficial proficiency in technical knowledge and skills". Karban and Smith (2006: 5) argue that the two concepts are "inseparable", a point also made by Fook (2002).

2.3.3   Assessing Reflective Practice

A consultation and review of social work post-qualifying training in 2003 identified the need for "critical thinking and reflection" (GSCC 2003). Initially, there had been poor rates of submission and low success within these awards (Brown & Keen 2004) and there was concern overall whether students could meet requirements. The outcomes require reflection to be integrated (GSCC 2004). Ixer (1999: 514) claims that it is not measurable and because it is a "vague notion" this treats students unfairly. Assessors' ideas on reflective practice are not always conveyed to students (Ixer 1999). Boud (1999: 124) contends that there will inevitably be tension between assessable work whereby students want to present good material and reflection which is an honest exploration of problems. It has been demonstrated that there is diverse interpretation of what constitutes reflective practice (Healy 2005, Rutter 2006 Taylor & White 2000, Wilson et al 2006). As written reflection is required specifically in courses (Taylor 2006a: 191) there should be stated criteria. Furthermore, it is acknowledged as difficult to achieve, reflection could be seen as a process rather than an outcome (Rogers 2001). Ixer (1999: 515) argues that without transparent criteria, assessment is not available for scrutiny by quality assurance systems, questioning whether reflective practice should be used in course work. Relating it to teacher education Cole (1997:12) describes it as "the most frequently used (and misused) term…which has made it unusable".

Nevertheless, reflective practice is viewed as essential to good practice within the caring professions and a way of developing ability to perform (Brown & Rutter, 2006, Fisher & Somerton 2000, Johns & Freshwater, 1998). The requirement 'to reflect' seems synonymous with requirements 'to analyse' or 'critically evaluate'. The verb 'to reflect' appears to emphasise an approach that embraces theoretical underpinning (Noble 2001, Payne 2002). The expectation to 'be reflective' is prevalent through qualifying and post-qualifying awards outlined in learning outcomes (Brown & Keen 2004, Taylor et al 1999). For example, within a social work handbook one objective is: "to reflect and critically appraise an individual's situation and make sound knowledge-based decisions alongside service users" (Kearney et al 2003: 7).

Being reflective is construed as academically elevating levels of critical thinking and learning (Lam et al 2007). According to Birmingham (2004) it links to personal and ethical development. However, it is not clear whether language is interpreted consistently and leads to mutual understanding. Moon (2004) asserts that assessment of reflective practice is not only possible, but desirable; assessment is not about applying grades, but a sophisticated procedure of level descriptors. She offers what she terms a "common sense definition" as: "mental processing-like a form of thinking- that we may use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome" (Moon 2004: 82). She sees reflection as

the outcome of a process (Moon 2004: 83), arguing that assessment should enhance learning. She suggests a two-stage progression; the learner engaging in reflection by initially writing non-assessable material regarding practice. Subsequently, assessable material is the outcome of what students have gained from reflection. This is consistent with requirements for PQ, where practitioners need to be critical and analytical. It can therefore be argued that it is possible to assess reflective practice, as long as the process and agreed criteria are clear. Assessing reflection is a way of checking that practitioners are committed to the value-base (Nähri 2002), and can identify 'fitness to practise' issues (Regan 2008); it is essential to be able to practise within any community and make culturally appropriate decisions (Dominelli 2004, Thompson 2001). Social workers need to demonstrate emotional intelligence (Goleman 1996) and interpersonal skills (Morrison 2006). The role cannot be divorced from awareness of power perspectives and personal dilemmas (Thompson 2001). However, assessment is currently of written work within portfolios, except for practice assessment. There is an argument for oral assessment, which takes place in action research (Singh 2008). This could be particularly useful to assess reflective practice and does not need to replace all written assessment.

2.3.4   Is Reflective Practice a Formula?

The teaching of reflective practice invariably sits within models written in handbooks for practice development (Brown & Rutter 2006, Moon, 2004). It is often presented as a "framework", an "approach" (Bolton, 2006, Boud, Brown & Rutter 2006, Keogh & Walker 1994, Moon 2004, Rearick & Feldman 1999) or a "paradigm" (Evans 1997). Although it is argued that there is no single perspective on what constitutes reflective practice, writers offer models through structured frameworks with progressive steps (Green Lister & Crisp 2007) or as a hierarchical ladder involving three or four stages (Fisher & Somerton 2000, Rai 2006). Larrivee (2008) argues for four distinct levels leading to critical reflection and consideration of moral perspectives. Other writers use maps or diagrams (Moon 2004, Payne 2005). Schön's (1991) contention that reflective practice is an alternative to technical rationality arguably contradicts current literature on reflective practice which appears to offer mechanistic, formulaic approaches (see Brown & Rutter 2006, Johns & Freshwater 1998, Taylor 2006a). It is commonly presented as the assessment of a situation, analysis of it and an evaluation with consequent learning for the future (Brown & Rutter 2006). Social work training has stimulated a number of academic sources to enable practitioners to produce portfolios for assessment (see for example Graham & Megarry 2005, Rutter 2006). Described by Boud (1999: 126) as uncritical "recipe following", manuals provide suggestions on how to demonstrate reflective practice for writing assignments, journals and personal logs (Crisp & Green Lister 2002, Rai

2006), debatably offering a "reflection by numbers" approach. One guide for nurses and midwives offers what the author calls a "Taylor model of reflection" (Taylor 2006: 70-85), taking the reader through a checklist of reflective activities alongside case studies.

Bolton (2005: 3) believes reflective practice to be a "state of mind, an attitude, an approach and therefore elusive to curriculum planners". People do not necessarily go through logical staged thinking; past actions are cognitively embroiled, reflection is not sequential and is affected by emotions (Clegg 2000, Mazhindu 2003). Formulaic approaches to becoming reflective are potentially presenting it as a "commodity" (Bolton 2005). Boud (1999: 126) argues that if presented in such a reductionist way then it is no longer discernible as reflective practice. However, these formulas could be considered as a need for order, to simplify complex processes or for assessors to have greater clarity. Models or frameworks enable students and assessors to consider issues methodically, offering professional guidance (Moon 2004). These formulas may be providing manageable ways of examining issues which are not easily decipherable or definable.

Healy (2005: 101) maintains that intuitive knowledge generated by reflective practice is difficult to teach, however, this argument has been contested by a number of academics

(Bolton 2005, Brown & Rutter 2006, Doel et al 2002, Moon 2004). Her point is that knowledge developed from practitioners' reflections lacks formal credibility, for instance it could not be used in court. However, this supposition could be viewed as simplistic; it is the process of reflection leading to conclusions supported by theoretical and research-focused evidence (Dominelli 2004). Arguably, reflective practice mirrors a lack of precision within social work, which is difficult to teach and assess. I contend that the formulas create quantifiable methods from a qualitative process, possibly replicating mechanistic competence-based approaches prevalent in current social work training. However, it can also be seen that for practitioners searching for a simple way of delivering their work in a limited time, it offers comparatively understandable processes and recipes for achievement. Methodical processes for exploring practice may be welcomed by busy practice teachers and practitioners. Taylor (2006b) notes that people enjoy telling stories; for practitioners a manageable way of constructing such narrative about their practice may provide a sense of order from "messy" practice situations.

2.3.5   Postmodernity and Language

Reflective practice has been viewed as critically challenging modernist perspectives (Crawford et al 2002, Morley 2004, Ruch 2002). Despite criticisms of his work, Schön's (1991) questioning of dominating theories offers opportunity for diversity to be addressed. For example gender, race or disability, can be appropriately taken into account (Clegg

1997, Ruch 2002). Coined 'the reflective turn' by Schön in 1991, reflective practice has

been linked with the "postmodern, linguistic and narrative" (Crawford et al 2002: 172).

This study considers whether reflective practice is transmitted through verbal and written

language. It also questions whether it is primarily a subjective process, raising issues about

identity and self-awareness (Rai 2006), or if it is mainly used in an objective capacity to

explore professional scenarios. Clarity about its use may also indicate how and where it

should be undertaken within social work training. Crawford et al (2002) describes how

through using narrative, students are able to draw on practice to share issues to develop

practice.

The development of theories about learning mirrors historical development of positivist

and phenomenological processes (CLMS 2000a). Current emphasis on postmodernism

and diversity is influential and reflective practice is, debatably, part of that phenomena, as

one author suggests:

> "If being in a critical, self-reflexive, de-centred and deconstructive state of mind
> captures the mood of postmodernity, then social work too, might be said to be in a
> postmodern mood" (Howe 1994: 523).

The postmodernist drive is demonstrated by prominence of critical thought and individual perception, even when considered in accordance with others (Healy 2000). Emphasis is on there being no specific answer and for each problem to be individually considered for future action (Howe 1994). It questions the nature of truth and how that is perceived (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000). Fook (2002: 18) claims that critical social work challenges dominant power structures and behaviour, recognising that such social orders have been created historically and are changeable. She states that theory helps to understand material structures, but self-reflection enables an understanding of professional power. Reflection alongside theory leads to "reflective ways of knowing" (Pease & Fook 1999: 202). Thompson (1995: 84) describes "narrowing the gap" between practice and theory by the use of reflective practice. However, Murphy and Atkins (1994) identify reflection in the nursing environment as critically analysing practice situations, but include feelings as well as knowledge. Gilbert also identified that it is attitudes and feelings that are meaningful. Ruch (2005) discusses how facing up to complex emotions, for example in child protection work, can create resistance to reflection.

Interpretations of reflective practice have factors in common: they describe internal cognitive processes and a critical stance for self-improvement through analysis. However, all have a different emphasis. Rogers (2001), who explores reflective practice within

higher education, identifies that the term is used alongside others such as 'critical reflection'. It is argued that it plays a part in transforming learning as an adult; the educator enabling students to be open and question assumptions, creating skills for "adult reasoning" (Mezirow 2003: 63). I would argue that the juxtaposition of the words of 'reflective' and 'practice' is significant as the two words are generally contradictory, which Schön (1991: 278) acknowledges. Reflection suggests a contemplative thoughtful individual process, whilst practice could be perceived as active and community-orientated. There is suggestion of an intellectual and critical nature to reflection, alongside the pragmatic terminology of the word 'practice'. This contradiction has provoked criticism as well as support for the concept from academics and practitioners (Johns & Freshwater 1998, Fowler & Chevannes 1998). Nevertheless, Healy (2005) states that reflective practice enables workers to develop their own knowledge-base, setting practice rather than academia at the centre.

2.3.6 Reflexivity and Power

According to Giddens (1991: 20) reflexive modernity shapes self-identity in pursuit of self-fulfilment and choice through external knowledge and continual assessment of risk (Giddens 1991: 171). Arguably, reflective practice is consistent with that philosophy as people seek knowledge and thus identity from "experts" as well as internally (Ferguson

2001), using theory as well as practice as a source for expertise. Reflective practice has also been interpreted as ethical self-management, creating self regulation (Gilbert 2001). Whilst attitudes and behaviour are important whilst dealing with the public this can also be a way of ensuring smooth and uncontested running of an organisation or even a profession. This issue is exemplified with registration and expected achievement of PQ, linked to career progression. Those who are able to explore themselves, their motives, their values and attitudes are more likely to succeed. However, Ferguson (2001) sees such reflexivity as an opportunity to be creative. As practice knowledge emerges from within self there is no overriding theory providing answers (Murphy & Atkins 1994, Ruch 2002, Schön 1991). However, D'Cruz et al (2007: 4) argue that this relies heavily on tacit knowledge and that emotions may affect responses, even to the point of paralysis. Knowledge derived from individual practice may mean that is not shared amongst professionals, negating opportunity for scrutiny and comparison with theory (Healy 2005, Taylor & White 2000). Reflective practice has been viewed as narcissistic and self-indulgent (Ixer 1999: 519, Johns & Freshwater 2006: 2). There is an argument that current emphasis on the individual dilutes political and social commitment, particularly radical social work, which endeavours to change structures rather than individuals (Dominelli 2004).

Conversely, critical reflectivity offers opportunity to improve lives through mutual exploration with recipients of social work services (Cooper 2001, Stevens & Tanner 2006). Schön (1991: 338) also argues that exploring practice through reflection-in-action can lead to questioning structures. Any organisation encouraging reflective practice should enable criticism of "organizational principles and values" (Schön 1991: 336). Reflection as a source of knowledge generation can challenge assumptions about bureaucratic decision-making (Ferguson 2004, Sheppard 1998 in D'Cruz et al 2007). Ixer (1999) agues that reflection has to be viewed as a social construct and therefore situated within place and time, pointing out that the timing of decisions taken by social workers may be crucial. However, Schön (1991) has been criticised as not examining the concept of 'time' within reflective practice (Eraut 1995, Ixer 1999). This is seen to have high significance, particularly in relation to reflection-in-action. A length of time between the activity and the process of reflection is bound to distort reality, potentially misinforming professional judgement.

Sitting alongside current requirements for continual accountability, reflective practice has been considered a managerial process of surveillance (Gilbert 2001, Saltiel 2006) and a Foucauldian "technology of governmentality" (Dominelli 2004: 13) and control. Ruch (2000: 100) contends that there is a "gulf" between individualised reflective learning and current managerial practices, which she identifies as "positivistic". There is scrutiny of

attitudes as well as competence within social work education and training, although there is no consensus regarding appropriate values (Adams et al 2002, Ixer 1999). Postmodern and post-structuralist perspectives identify that individual reflections will be formulated according to people's position within power structures (Healy 2005, Howe 1994). According to Crossley (1994: 27), perception involves "an interface of consciousness and the world".

Karban and Smith (2006) argue that self-reflection often fails to take account inequality and power issues. However, power should not be just perceived negatively and is inevitable in professional relationships. Foucault (1994) challenges the notion of power as only situated within a force which is repressive. It lies within institutions and is culturally reinforced and permeated, but can be negotiated to legitimise it, as appropriate (Dominelli 2004). Practitioners establish their own perception of truth and power in ethical and structural frameworks within which they work, drawing on that through reflective knowledge. This may be a difficult notion for individuals to grasp as they have been conditioned to search for 'truth' in theory. However, the use of confession can be seen as reflexive and self-regulating (Gilbert 2001: 200). Reflective practice allows practitioners to disclose areas of weaknesses and act upon them; subsequent practice is then accountable. Nevertheless, Gilbert (2001) contends that this is a subtle form of power

through surveillance by those evaluating the work. Managers may hold ethical 'high grounds' in maintaining standards, not easily challenged by practitioners (Ecclestone 2002). There are parallels with assessment of student social workers on placement, tutors assessing within universities and PQ practice assessors, as well as line managers making judgements.

Research conducted by Saltiel (2006) explored 'critical incidents' discussed between team members. The cases they chose were those working in potentially volatile situations where social workers felt vulnerable. The workers had differed with their managers over whether intervention should be resource-led or person-centred, the managers invariably preferring the former. This led to dilemmas amongst the team members. A further outcome was that the workers primarily did not feel they drew on theory, but personal skills and knowledge. However, it is not clear how much theory can become internalised and drawn on unconsciously. Payne (2005) identifies that social workers demonstrate accountability through using theory to justify their actions. Reflective practice can therefore contribute to that monitoring process.

2.3.7 <u>Identified Issues</u>

The literature review identifies specific debates and arguments regarding reflective practice largely derived from academic sources. It is my intention to focus primarily on respondents views in conjunction with my own. Respondents' perceptions of the following areas will be explored as they are identified in the review as significant to reflective practice, however, topics identified by respondents are prioritised in subsequent chapters;

- Respondents' definitions of reflective practice and use of language.

- Links between respondents' past learning and current reflective practice processes.

- How does reflective learning enable practitioners to critically evaluate their practice?

- The application of reflective practice professionally and personally.

- Reflective practice as a problem-solving process.

- Assessing reflective practice.

- How is reflective practice scrutinised?

- How does reflective practice improve practice?

- Reflective practice as self-monitoring or surveillance.

2.4 **<u>Conclusion</u>**

This review was divided into two major sections, critically analysing academic literature relating to reflective practice primarily within social work education. The first section initially identified definitions and perspectives relating to reflective practice. It offered a critique by evaluating significant theorists who have contributed to its development through adult learning theory.   The work of Schön was identified as particularly significant. I explored the social and experiential context of learning where reflective practice is situated. I critically evaluated reflective practice as contributing to resolving complex practice situations. The literature identified that different definitions may confuse students and practitioners and that it is not clear exactly what it is, but overall the concept is perceived as useful and appropriate for social work.

In the second section I analysed current and contextual issues in relation to reflective practice and social work education, initially evaluating its importance to social work as a profession. The use of reflective practice in assessment was examined, particularly competence and evidence-based frameworks. I offered a critique of reflective practice in literature used within curricula at qualifying and post-qualifying levels. I then explored the political context of reflective practice, situated within a postmodern perspective and examined diversity and power. Finally, reflective practice as self-regulation and the

relationship to accountability were explored. In addition, I have drawn out particular issues identified as significant within the literature review. These will be explored alongside respondents' perspectives.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 **Introduction**

This chapter analyses the research methodology, demonstrating a transparent rigorous process. Methods chosen to collect data need to be consistent and appropriate to the subject area and the researcher's perspective. I therefore employ a qualitative reflexive approach conducting thirty two interviews with respondents in two academic institutions and different social services offices. I examine why this method was selected and present arguments for the data analysis and presentation of findings through a thematic approach.

3.1.1   Outline of the Chapter

The chapter divides into four main sections. Firstly, different overall theories and approaches are explained, presenting a rationale for the methodology and reasons for others being discounted and I examine ethics in conducting the research.   After the introduction in the second section I critique a pilot study, exploring its contribution. The respondents who participated in the research are outlined. I analyse power and identity with explanation of gender, race and job role. I then evaluate the reflexive interviewing process. The third section investigates the framework for analysis, how validity and reliability are addressed and approaches I use for interpretation of data. Section four

examines the creation of themes through data analysis. This leads on to the next chapters which critically analyse the findings of the study.

3.2   **<u>Rationale and Research Methodology</u>**

3.2.1 <u>Different Approaches</u>

I considered different approaches to explore reflective practice. Representing a dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln 2003) two major methodologies, positivism and interpretivism were examined (Roth & Mehta 2002). Positivism, based on quantitative scientific enquiry, transcends personal attitudes and views in attempting to establish the truth, independent of interpretation (May 2001). Bryman (2001: 12) defines it as: "an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods for the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond".

Knowledge is derived from facts, often based on statistical enquiry (Denzin & Lincoln 2003). Theory is generated by a hypothesis which is tested by collecting and collating factual information. Interpretivism, on the other hand, is concerned with how the world is

perceived, providing "an interpretation of others' interpretations" to create theories and concepts (Bryman 2001: 15). It is based on the principle of diverse perspectives, subjective understanding (Bryman 2001) and "human consciousness" (White 1997: 741). Robinson (1993: 208) notes that social science is involved with human action carried out with intention and "underlying meaning". Goodwin and Horowitz (2002) state that there is no unified theoretical view linking qualitative research. According to Elliot (1999: 253), language is the main ingredient of qualitative research, providing meaningful constructs rather than statistical analysis. In summary, positivism leads to explaining human behaviour and interpretivism towards understanding it (Bryman 2001).

The research focus determines the methodology, based on the epistemological position of the researcher towards the status of knowledge and their ontological perspective about the nature of reality (Bryman 2001, Creswell 1994, Wetherell et al 2001). Yin (2003) argues that it depends on the nature of the study and whether it is historical or contemporary. A qualitative approach was therefore considered appropriate to address the research question, which is centred on current social research. Qualitative data is used within social science and the human disciplines (Denzin & Lincoln 2003). Its central feature is that it challenges a positivist "cookbook version of research methods" (Silverman 2004: 1). As well as exploring essential 'meaning,' this includes use of interactive language and

representation. As the research is exploring respondents' views on a concept, the methodology must enable people to have a voice; I therefore use interactive dialogue in interviews (Mason 2002: 62). Challenging "objectivist and rationalist perspectives" (Steier 1991: 1), the research focuses on opinion and knowledge through a constructionist ontology, acknowledging that reality is socially constructed (Bryman 2001). Presented through language (Alvesson & Kärreman 2000), social constructs are not definitive, but accounts by social actors (Bryman 2001: 18).

A positivist approach was rejected as this research is not seeking statistical information. I conducted it with a view that there is no one 'reality' surrounding reflective practice, but perception and understanding of the concept identified through interpretation. It could be argued that unless evidence supports statistical information, objective conclusions cannot be drawn and the research is limited (Bryman 2001: 12). However, theorists have argued that "all research is interpretive" (Marshall & Rossman 1999: 3). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003: 35) positivism, despite its scientific base is not necessarily valid and reliable, but has specific criteria for truth. Based on phenomenology, an interpretive approach allows for individual views from a sociological perspective (Bryman 2001, Williams 2000). It attempts to eliminate preconceptions and acknowledge human complexity in social and organisational contexts (Myers 1997). Miller et al (2004) argue

that qualitative research is appropriate for organisations such as social service departments due to organisational complexity and the need for flexible design and new information. A holistic qualitative approach can explore issues dynamically, investigating from the inside. Researchers are inevitably influenced by their own socialisation, as is evident by historical ethnographic studies and argued by phenomenological and cultural relativist perspectives (Potter 2000). This debatably produces honest accounts of reality, but is "partial", "situated" and "relative" to the researcher's views and values (Wetherell et al 2001: 12). I have ethical responsibility in representing others' perceptions and I endeavoured not to distort data.

3.2.2   Critical Realism

Bhasker (1998: 3) argues for an "anti-positivist naturalism, based on an essentially realist view of science", which, he states, enables researchers to study social sciences in an equitable way to the study of nature. Realism advocates that there is an external reality which requires explanation. Ontologically, in order to comprehend and view society the questions need to be asked about what actually exists (CLMS 2003: 25). Critical realism recognises that in order to effect change within the social world, the structures and events within it need to be understood, identified through theory and practice within social science (Bryman 2001). Further, critical realism recognises the role of language in

constructing the world, although that does not mean that there are no other media to inform our understanding (Mutch 1999: 328). This research therefore assumes that there is a perception of reflective practice that respondents may have collectively which may productively inform social work practice and education.

Critical realism also recognises that these perceptions are socially constructed and may alter in different conditions. Sayer (2000: 11) describes how, whereas empirical realism presents as being able draw conclusions about the world as a series of observable objects, critical realism is layered, differentiating between the 'real', the 'actual' and the 'empirical'. The real refers to what exists and the powers and structures surrounding their existence, which indicate capacity for change. The actual is the outcome of the activations of those powers and structures. The empirical is defined by Sayer (2000:12) as the "domain of experience…with respect to either the real or the actual", depending on if the real or the actual is known. Therefore, critical realists acknowledge a causal relation to factors which exist.

Bhasker (1975 cited in Sayer 2000) distinguishes between 'transitive' dimensions of knowledge which are theories about the phenomena under scrutiny and the 'intransitive'

dimensions which are the structures within the phenomena that do not change. In other words, the interpretation and concepts surrounding phenomena or objects may change, but not the phenomena or object itself. The fundamental nature of critical realism rather than realism, according to Benton & Craib (2001), is that there is the capacity to change phenomena which is found to be unacceptable or oppressive. Specifically, as well as the principle of an object of enquiry, critical realism argues for a hermeneutic, reflexive approach to consider conceptual or linguistic representation. Therefore, although there is a 'reality', whether or not the research is conducted, superficial appearance may falsely portray the nature of something and this needs to be investigated at deeper levels. This is also the reason why such phenomena may be open to further interpretation through research. Consequently, critical realism identifies that there are layers or stratification to the process of interpretation and each layer is emergent, but not reducible to others, with ability to create social phenomena (Mutch 1999, Sayer 2000). Further, these layers are not necessarily hierarchical but can be intertwined. For example, in the human sciences physical characteristics do not supersede psychological factors. Nash (1999: 446) summarises such argument by the following:

> "In the end, it is explanation that is important, and theoretical arguments are useful in as much as they contribute to the construction of sensible accounts in terms of social mechanisms."

Consequently, applying a critical realist perspective implies that the concepts identified from the research process is a way of knowing the reality, a way of explaining things that are independent to thought. These may not be directly observable, but can be seen by their effects. The critical aspect means that this can lead to change through "generative mechanisms and the contexts of those mechanisms" (Bryman 2001: 40). This outlines opportunities for reflective practice to be considered from a critical realist approach, framing the data accordingly. Houston (2001: 854), describing it as a "depth theory", argues that critical realism is particularly useful in relation to social work as it allows for qualitative methodology which enables respondents to present their own perspectives and causal reality. Furthermore, reflexive practices allow for the questioning of social workers' assumptions.

3.2.3. Other Considerations

Reflective practice is concerned with cognitive and emotive processes that affect people differently (Murphy & Atkins 1994). I considered using focus groups (Wilkinson 2004) but felt that respondents need to speak without being influenced by group processes (Bryman 2001). Written questionnaires are linear and do not stimulate contextual interaction (Potter 2004). Structured or closed interviews asking specific questions are contained, but limited in how they obtain information (Bryman 2001). They could produce

consistent, manageable results focusing on specific topics, but the process would counteract diverse perspectives and over-privilege my views. Qualitative semi-structured or unstructured interviewing with individuals is a powerful way of eliciting information. By using a combination of questions and discussion it encourages the sharing of information (Blaxter et al 2001) and topics can be introduced from different angles. Silverman (1997: 100) argues that such interviewing gives insights into "social worlds". In-depth interviews allow participants to be in control, provides mutual opportunity to generate information and opportunity to move to new areas. I revisit other methods during the research, but continue with in-depth interviewing on the basis of these arguments.

Whilst data is primarily drawn from interviews, I have worked with reflective practice since 1984, teaching and assessing students at different levels. Reflective practice is a genre within social work academia. I took notes at conferences and group discussions where it was addressed. I contend that a triangulated approach to the concept contributes to authenticity in terms of background knowledge. Emerging themes are a concern for the wider social work community. This type of observation parallels the reflexive research process and as a way of increasing awareness of the subject by: "...socially constructing a world …with the researcher(s) included in, rather than outside the body of their own research" (Steier 1991: 2).

3.2.4 A Reflexive Approach

I decided to use an approach based empirically upon "reflexive interpretation" (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 238). Hertz (1997: vii) presents reflexive research as interpreting and creating knowledge through "insights". Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000: 5) identify two significant features. Firstly, the researcher is clearly situated within the study and secondly, knowledge is developed through interpreting interwoven "linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements". Lawson (1985: 7) defines reflexivity as "self-awareness", recognising "language, theory, sign and text". Visualising and exploring reflective practice through applying a reflexive approach, with language as the medium for eliciting information, requires that my involvement is as transparent as possible (Wetherell et al 2001). An aspect of reflexivity is awareness of self as researcher as well as the respondent (Ramazanoğlu with Holland. 2002, Woodward 2000).

I argue that knowledge, identified through dialogue with respondents, is political, specific and contextual and relevant as a contribution (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000). I recognise that dilemmas and contradictions are endemic throughout reflexive interpretation, but also that the approach is fluid and linked to postmodernist, poststructuralist and critical discourses (Benton & Craib 2001). The perception of 'reality' varies as it emerges from people with diverse backgrounds. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000: 152) separate

postmodernism and poststructuralism as concepts emerging from different philosophers

but combine them within a research context:

> "postmodernist and poststructuralist researchers draw attention to the problems surrounding the way that theories are constructed, their assumptions, their rhetoric strategies and their calls to authority. Instead of an integrated theoretical frame of reference which guides analysis towards unequivocal, logical results and interpretations, the idea is to strive for multiplicity, variation, the demonstration of inconsistencies and fragmentations and the possibility of multiple interpretations".

Postmodernism challenges myths of western "grand narratives". These are "truths", viewed as scientifically proven and therefore taken for granted (Ahonen 2001, Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 148, Sarup 1988). However, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) base reflexivity on basic principles. They argue that the methodology must be rigorous, systematic and logical with interpretation linked to theory. There must be critical interpretation of ideological and political considerations and the researcher's reflection based on critical self awareness to ensure that authority and representation of the subject matter lies within the text. They contend that the text "lives its own life". (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 8) and include hermeneutics as an important element in identifying underlying meanings (Steier 1991), facilitating understanding of other people's viewpoints. Hermeneutics is a cyclical process whereby the interpreter is continually delving between one part of text and the whole. A part can only be understood in relation to the whole (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 53). Hermeneutics is pertinent in reflexive

methodology through interpreting "hidden meaning" of words within whole narrative (Alvesson & Sköldberg 200: 228, Steier 1991). However, meaning alters with new interpretation within the hermeneutic circle, until whole meaning becomes apparent.

Central to reflexivity is acknowledgement of power relations and mutual creation of knowledge between researcher and respondent. Bryman (2001: 470) describes reflexivity as:

> "the researcher …as implicated in the construction of knowledge through the stance that she assumes in relation to the observed and through the ways in which an account is transmitted in the form of text".

Nevertheless, reflexivity is acknowledged to have its risks. Macbeth (2001: 39) describes questioning positivism in research as setting aside previous assumptions, but also abandoning "comforts of clear lines and destinations". D'Cruz at al (2006) acknowledge that researchers may have tacit knowledge which inevitably influences outcomes. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) state that reflexivity requires the researcher to be clear about pre-assumptions, but there is little information as to how that is achieved. They acknowledge that influences, political beliefs and experiences are bound to affect interpretation. However, contesting the notion of 'objectivity' in research, they argue that reflexivity provides ethically sound and intellectually robust research because the

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researcher is clearly placed within it. The methodology and interpretation is open to scrutiny in the mutual construction and understanding of knowledge (D'Cruz et al 2006). Interpretations are reliant on perception by the interpreter. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) primarily contend that the reflexive researcher needs to work at two levels, reflection on the data and reflection on reflection, integrating social, political and theoretical factors; to consider the act of thinking itself. Calás and Smircich (1992: 240) identify reflexivity in terms of knowledge: "reflexivity…constantly assesses the relationship between 'knowledge' and 'the ways of doing knowledge'".

Using the interview as a basis for researching a topic debatably leads to outcomes of uncertainty and inconsistency. If establishing knowledge based on 'truth', I contend that dialogue is one of the most unreliable sources as people's language is inconsistent. Conversely, I argue that it is subjective 'truth' for individuals. The 'truth' in this context changes, even with the same person. However, people behave inconsistently within other research methods, for example observation, where there may be different interpretations (Blaxter et al 2001).

3.2.5 The Gatekeepers

Prior to the study, I investigated how research proposals were considered by a college ethics committee (Abbot & Sapsford 1992). However, I was informed that there was no procedure. I expressed concern given my role and that students were being interviewed. The proposal was therefore sent to a management forum which includes an HE consultant and post-doctorate colleague. Reflective practice was considered to be a curriculum subject area and the study was approved. The sample widened to practitioners, therefore I made similar enquiries in the agencies. Because users of services were not being interviewed, formal committees were not seen as necessary. Conditions were made that neither respondent nor agency was to be identified, nor was any claim to be made about an agency. I assured employers of anonymity and confidentiality and agreed to immediately destroy any tape recordings after transcription. Essential permission and support was therefore gained for the study (Bell 1999, Bryman 2001). In this research, people and time were resources, primarily me as the "key research tool" (Reinharz in Hertz 1997: 3), but also respondents.

3.3   **Respondents and Research Process**

3.3.1 The Pilot Study

Qualitative research does not preclude taking a systemic approach (Bell 1994). I conducted a pilot study of 5 interviews to test out initial ideas, explore potential themes and eliminate anything which did not produce data (Bell 1999). It established whether the methodology elicited appropriate information and if people were able to engage with the topic (Edwards & Talbot 1994). The pace and timing of interviews were tested and 'questions' or 'prompts' reformulated, helping to "firm up the intellectual puzzle" (Mason 2002: 46). It was initially envisaged that the majority of respondents would be student social workers. Most students are also experienced practitioners. I foresaw that students would discuss learning, with contributions from educators. During the first two interviews, the subject area quickly widened from previous learning to exploring reflective practice more generally, including within training. Subsequent respondents introduced additional areas, particularly narrative about their professional and social lives (Somers 1994). The study quickly changed shape therefore I recognised it would be enriched by gaining views from people specifically in practice. I widened the pilot group to include practitioners, academics and trainers. Those teaching the subject offered further observation, thereby a triangulated process (Mason 2002).

Respondents in the pilot study consisted of a black female student, a white female student, a white male academic, a white female practitioner and a white female practitioner/training officer. This diverse group is a small representative sample of the social work population. I initially designed a draft questionnaire to be used flexibly, which was altered over the first four interviews and then abandoned in favour of discussion areas (appendix 1). Miles and Huberman (1994) believe that a study should contain a dozen questions at the most. The interview was initiated with a "grand tour" question about reflective practice in broad terms (Cresswell 1994: 70) allowing respondents to present an initial perspective and make them feel comfortable. Mason (2002: 67) argues that it is imperative to plan interviewing to ensure that "intellectual and social dynamics" of the situation are orchestrated by the interviewer, even when interviews are intended as semi- or non-structured. Subsequent interviews were semi-structured to enable respondents to expand, whereupon I referred to a prompt list "general enough to permit exploration but focused enough to delimit the study" (Marshall & Rossman 1999: 38), which I added to as I interviewed different respondents with different issues (appendix 2). Confidentiality, anonymity and transparency of approach were established before each interview. I asked if notes could be taken, however, this developed into writing down occasional words as eye contact was necessary to maintain the interview relationship. Topics were kept continually under review as is the case with qualitative research (Cresswell 1994). The pilot interviews offered opportunity for unanticipated issues identified by respondents.

Respondents' priorities were drawn on from the early stages to avoid privileging my views.

The pilot study established that the style of interview worked in terms of eliciting relevant information, therefore I continued with that approach. Cresswell (1994) states that research questions are constantly under review; the research relationship is complex and people will talk if they feel safe (Letherby 2003). Questions evolved into discussion, enabling the interview to be "a conversation with a purpose" (Burgess 1984 cited in Mason 2002: 62) but sensitive subjects were left until trust was established (Bell 2001: 131). I learned helpful practical things, for example, to state approximately how long the interview would take and not to fill silences. One of the main tasks of the pilot study was to test out reflexive interviewing as a process (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000, Denzin & Lincoln 2003, Letherby 2003, Mason 2002). As an intersubjective activity, I initially identified areas and presented them to respondents. However, on the basis of their response I took interviews to new areas, trailing topics into subsequent interviews, which become 'shaped' by the process (Mason 2002). Consequently, the pilot study proved useful in establishing interviewing techniques as well as the respondent population. The pilot interviews were absorbed into the main body of the research. There was a saturation point when individuals started to repeat themselves or significantly move away from the

topic, offering signals for closure. Letherby (2003) identifies that ending the interview needs to be considered as much as initial negotiations.

3.3.2   <u>Power Dimensions</u>

Maintaining an ethical approach in terms of recognising power contributes to the integrity and validity of the research product (O'Leary 2004). I recognise my own as a manager responsible for social work curriculum and assessment (Knight et al 2004) as well as being the researcher (Ramazanoğlu with Holland 2002: 156). This could affect the interview process by people not coming forward or people responding as they think they should, rather than giving honest accounts. Conversely, individuals may enjoy shared professional knowledge; a dynamic Letherby (2003: 124) terms the "kindred spirit". According to Miller and Glasner (2004), a research relationship is interdependent; the research cannot take place without mutual co-operation, although the notion of shared power is an ideal (Byrne-Armstrong 2001). Nevertheless, I needed to develop trusting relationships, so that respondents would be open with me.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000: 200) identify language, gender and power as dimensions complementing and contributing to reflexive methodology as they conduct "our social lives and create our symbolical existence". I assert that race should be included.

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Orientations of gender, race, disability and sexuality affect people's perception, can influence interaction (Dominelli 2004, Letherby 2003, Truman et al 2000) and shape the way people are perceived by others (Thompson 2001). Identity affects beliefs, knowledge acquisition and recognition and validity of people's experiences within which the research relationship is socially situated (Ramazanoğlu with Holland 2002). The reflexive process means mutual recognition of identity between researcher and respondent (Gilgun & Abrams 2002). Acknowledging identity is important to balance "subjectivities" (O'Leary 2004: 50). I involved a diverse respondent group in terms of gender and race, recognising that different perspectives contribute to knowledge. This is not to say that personal identity affects people similarly, but social construction is relevant as it is connected visibility of those dimensions in relation to power (Letherby 2003). Although other constructs of disability or sexuality are relevant in terms of identity, selecting people with these specific characteristics was inappropriate as these issues were not a specific focus of the study (Mason 2002). Therefore establishing less visible characteristics could be viewed as intrusive. I did consider addressing age. However, whilst age is another power dimension in terms of identity (Blytheway 2005), it was not specifically relevant. I did not want to make ageist assumptions or consider issues that did not seem any more appropriate than, for example, differences in practice experience. However, people were not interviewed specifically because of their gender or race; the respondents were not 'representative' of others, but spoke for themselves. Nevertheless, the diversity of the

group contributed holistically to the validity of the research as a "microcosm of the [social work] population" (Bryman 2001: 85).

The study predominantly presents views within a western, UK perspective where respondents are being or have been social work trained. However, some respondents originated from non-UK cultures. I acknowledge political and social issues surrounding the existence of structural sexism and racism (Dominelli 2004, Ramazanoğlu with Holland 2002, Thompson 2001). Fook (2002) asserts that in the West, social work is a profession mainly run by women for women; nevertheless, men are influential within decision-making, including creating theoretical concepts underlying practice. McPhail (2004) argues that the majority of policy-makers and academics within influential social work schools are men. Whilst she draws her evidence from the USA, there are parallels within the UK. Smith and Deemer (2003) identify that moral responsibility is central to the researcher's role, particularly when interpreting or 'constructing' as it is a social process. I attempted to provide a balanced gender perspective throughout and within supporting theory. According to Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) a reflexive feminist approach includes clarity of ethical considerations and accountability for the epistemological position taken. Whilst this study is not pursuing feminist research specifically, feminist thinking has influenced it. It shaped the epistemological perspective, affecting choices

within methodology. Historically, privileged knowledge claims have been primarily male, white and western and have failed to fully represent perspectives (Letherby 2003, Ramazanoğlu with Holland, 2002).

3.3.3 The Sample

Judging sample size is a crucial part of the research. It has to be large enough to address the research focus, but not so large that it counteracts analysis (Sandelwoski 1995: 183). Initially, I decided to interview around twenty five people; an appropriate number to carry out in-depth qualitative interviewing for reflexive interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000, Denzin & Lincoln 200, Wetherell et al 2001). However, the number expanded to thirty two, to ensure adequate representation. To recruit respondents, I presented the research focus to all students in the college, identifying it as separate from teaching and assessment. I asked them to consider participating, making it clear that it was their choice. The students received individual letters including a response form which drew replies. Interviews were arranged offering a time and interview room away from phones and interruptions, with a proviso that they could change either if inconvenient. The students were interviewed before or after classes to avoid disruption to learning. On widening the sample, at my request three agency representatives (employers) with whom the college works in collaboration, contacted staff to ask for participants, however, this produced only one response. There is some evidence that people are declining to take part in research,

possibly due to the amount undertaken (Bryman 2001). I accepted this as inevitable. Two 'academics' were interviewed who have a particular interest in reflective practice, offering opportunity to discuss the issue from an academically informed perspective, balancing practice-focused respondents. My job changed and practitioners were accessed from contacts within the West Midlands. There was a 'snowball' approach as practitioners introduced me to others (Edwards & Talbot 1994). As I had not worked in that geographical area people were unknown to me and vice versa, therefore there was no pre-conceived knowledge.

3.3.4   The Profile of Respondents

Thirty two interviews were conducted, of seventy to one hundred minutes duration, generating around forty six hours of data. These took place in England in the North West and West Midlands. All respondents are qualified in social work and/or higher education teaching or are on their second year of undergraduate courses. The academic respondents teach on social work programmes. One of the 'students' qualified with the Diploma in Social Work, as have most of the practitioners. I believe that self-identification of respondents is significant as previously explained and the sample needs to be statistically representative of the sector.

The classifications reflect the fact that respondents fell into more than one category. For example, most students are also practitioners and practitioners are sometimes practice teachers. The composition was as follows:

	Male	Female	Black or Ethnic Minority	White	Total
Practitioners	7	15	6	16	22
Practice Teachers	4	7	4	7	11
Student Social Workers	1	8	2	7	9
Academics	6	5	4	7	11
Training Officers	2	1	2	1	3

Table 1

There is approximately a four to one ratio of women to men on social work degree courses in England. Less than one third of social work registered full-time students do not classify themselves as white British (Hussein et al 2009). The research sample was initially random and under-represented black and ethnic minority social workers. This was addressed when interviewing practitioners and academics. The black community is around

twenty per cent amongst social work students and staff. Ultimately the number of men and black and ethnic minority people interviewed were numerically representative of the sector within their roles. A further category included people from minority ethnic groups. Through self-classification four respondents were of Greek Cypriot, Italian, Polish or Northern Irish heritage. Initially, the male sample was positively skewed as the profession is predominantly female. There was also a predominance of students. This was resolved by interviewing more women practitioners. The number of men can be justified as the respondents include social work educators. Statistics relating to the gender ratio in academic posts are elusive, compounded by social work departments having different titles. However, anecdotal knowledge of social work courses throughout the UK leads me to believe that the gender split is about equal, reinforcing the fact that male social workers are more likely to move into academia and management posts (Mclean 2003, Moriarty & Murray 2007, Payne 2005).

Overall composition in terms of gender and race				
Men	Women	Black/EM	White	Total
11	21	9	23	32

Table 2

All but one of the students were employed as social workers or social care workers. Some have performed other social work roles and if it was in the last 3 years I acknowledged it. Most of the academic respondents have been practitioners. Additionally, knowledge of practice was informed through tutor contact with practice placements. Fifteen of the qualified workers had completed part of their post-qualifying awards. Practitioners were drawn from urban and rural local authority employers. Although the data can be collated to some extent through analysis of role difference, this is complicated by respondents working in different roles and students combining work and study. It also reflects the fact that many 'students' in social work commence their degree with professional experience (Moriarty & Murray 2007).

3.3.5 The Interview Process

I was honest with respondents about the research leading to a qualification and my intention to discuss the research at seminars, conferences and within articles. On request, transcripts were sent to two people. This was an excellent checking procedure, although there was no request for modification. Half way through I began to offer this to all respondents, which all but two accepted. Retrospectively, I should have offered this from the beginning, as it facilitates sharing power. As outlined, the interviews were initially partly semi-structured, but then took I followed topics of respondents' choice (Bryman

2001) alongside specific areas. As interviews progressed they became more unstructured and more discursive.

I took account of O'Leary (2004) in balancing subjectivity with other's views. I questioned my assumptions and worked to remain non-judgemental. I endeavoured to include less dominant viewpoints (Letherby 2003) and ensured I clarified the meaning of dialogue, finding that this also engaged respondents (Steier 1991). Anti-oppressive language is important to social workers and I was careful to use appropriate language and value respondents' comments. Reflective practice can be perceived as an 'academic' subject; I clarified that I was a researcher in this context. Language as a research tool is complex, is not static and has integrated hidden meanings (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000). Respondents' roles influence responses, although most have more than one. Students and managers may respond differently for example, although all respondents engaged freely in discussion.

It is an 'expectation' that all social work students and practitioners use reflective practice whilst it is also acknowledged that this is not easy, particularly in written course work (Brown & Rutter 2006). This is replicated in other disciplines (Loughran 2006, White 2007). Communication as part of my professional skills enabled respondents to share

views and experiences (Holstein & Gubrium 2004). Drawing from discourse analysis theory, rationale lies in language and communication towards shared understanding (Silverman 1997). Smith and Deemer (2003: 428) identify that: "as knowing subjects we are intimately part of any understanding we have of what counts as knowledge or of any claim we make to knowledge".

The narrative used in this research is not "naturally occurring" as in discourse analysis (Wetherell et al 2001: 27), but should have enabled people to be frank. However, Miller and Glassner (2004: 125) identify there is always a dilemma between "authentic accounts" and "cultural tales" in an interview setting. There are ethical considerations in using tape recorders (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). A running tape may affect what people are prepared to say and speech patterns can denote positions of power (Gutting 2005). My contribution was intended primarily to initiate response and maintain a flow of discussion. I commented on general issues, but attempted to restrict personal views, which could over-influence the response, but I made individual judgments depending on the respondent. Non-verbal clues prompted interviewees and informality encouraged conversation, impossible with written surveys (Fontana & Frey 2003). I analysed how much speaking time I had compared with respondents when transcribing, to check that I was facilitating respondents' dialogue and not dominating. The researcher influences interaction and

interpretation, whether it is statistical or narrative evidence (Silverman 2004). Blaxter et al (2001) describe unstructured interviews as "naturalistic" and "non-directive" (171). However, I argue that the interview must remain relevant and focused and not over-lead respondents. Holstein & Gubrium (2004: 147) identify what they term "mutual disclosure"; the interviewer sharing enough to gain respondents trust.

Interviews are shaped by combining respondents' views and my changing perspectives, influencing the research outcome. This approach is consistent with metatheory (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 253), a combination of postmodernist and critical theory, drawing a flexible approach to collecting data and following emerging themes. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) identify that metatheory questions privilege of specific approaches, avoids rigidity of positions and offers ability to mediate between representations on different levels. I listened to respondents, rather than any prevailing arguments about reflective practice, questioning seemingly obvious interpretation of the material. I avoided taking the authoritative position, which also meant challenging my own perspectives and assumptions. Metatheory is a framework to structure reflexivity (Holland 1999) and embrace different levels of research analysis and interpretation. To think beyond convention is crucial to the method, the "interpretive repertoire" (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000:253). I took advice from Bryman (2001) who believes that a diary maintained by the

researcher provides a further source of data. I wrote reflections on the research process, interviews, unanticipated areas and the reflexive methodology, endeavouring to analyse and represent outcomes appropriately. After twenty eight interviews I initially considered there was enough material. On further analysis, I felt the practitioner's voice was not strong enough and so I interviewed further respondents.

3.3.6 Transcribing

The major disadvantage of face-to-face contact is the time it takes to interview and transcribe. However, it produces rich amounts of data (Bell 1999). Holstein and Gubrium (2004) state that respondents actively construct knowledge in conjunction with their interviewer. I preferred to transcribe interviews myself as a source of analysis. To avoid dangers of de-contextualising interviews as much as possible, I identified not only words, but emphasis within language, pauses, repetitions and so forth. Each was transcribed before the next to take issues forward. Transcripts are a permanent record and easily retrievable (Lapadat 2000). As they were typed, I monitored my contribution, separating it from the respondents' through colour coding. However, transcribing interviews can be problematised. Speech is not exact and I still had the choice of whether to include interruptions, gasps and other non-speech acts (Lapadat 2000). I feel this mirrors ethical considerations encountered when controlling dialogue and interpreting material. Scheurich (1997) argues that, problematically, interpretation is still led from a modernist perspective;

the analysis often simplified by omitting contextual factors such as pauses, utterances and so on. I tried to capture them as much as possible through added punctuation, such as dotted lines, but these do inevitably lose emphasis when typed.

I outlined where people contradicted themselves, as is inevitable. I needed to make other choices, for example, do I capture a local accent? Does this present as patronising when transcribed and relocated with a thesis? In addition, the meaning may not be what appears as speech text. Lapadat (2000: 208) states that transcripts do not represent 'reality' as if they are neutral. They are "theoretical constructions" which are contextual to the interview. However, re-reading text provided opportunity to further explore subject areas, facilitating reflexivity (Mauthner & Doucet 2003). I was close to the text and it felt to be an organic process (Lapadat 2000, Mason 2002). I found that I could monitor the sample, judging when saturation was reached (Bowen 2008). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000:1) describe language as "ambiguous, unstable and context-dependent", with sub-plots taking place. Participants may demonstrate "respondent behaviour", (Fontana & Frey 2003: 69) offering stock phrases as a response with "particular kinds of speech acts" (Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 84). Defences, justifications or constructs about how people want to be represented affect response. People's accounts are contextually and politically bound. I used techniques to check consistency, such as raising issues in different ways, however,

people do not respond consistently, even within the same interview (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000). There has to be acceptance of this and recognition of "situated use" within any research phenomena (Wetherell et al 2001). Just as people respond to others from the point of their identity and experience, the researcher also impacts on how they respond. This does not devalue the results, it is argued, but sets them in a framework, generating theories and ideas with cultural understanding (Coffey & Atkinson 1996).

Language does not represent complexity well, is figurative and spoken in metaphors to illustrate ideas (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 202, O'Leary 2004: 124). The nature of the subject can attract 'well-worn' arguments and 'rhetoric', which can become like an endless of hall of mirrors. Whilst the research is not based specifically on discourse analysis, drawing from the theory informs interpretation:

> "I see discourses as ways of representing aspects of the world- the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the 'mental world' of thoughts, feelings and beliefs and so forth, and the social world" (Fairclough 2003: 124).

There was a need to look for micro patterns and their relationship to wider issues. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000: 201) note that "it is rather naïve to think that social realities can be depicted in unequivocal terms". Initially, emphasis is on building the interview relationship; later conversation created different meanings (Holstein & Gubrium

2004), but with greater depth. Abbott and Sapsford (1992: xi) describe what they term the "methodological imagination" through awareness of how respondents interpret situations. Potter and Wetherell (1987) advise exercising caution in over-interpreting motives, as conversations stand in their own right.

3.4 **A Framework for Analysis**

3.4.1 Validity and Reliability

Silverman (2004) identifies that interaction has been maligned as a source of bias, leading to misunderstandings. However, if conducted appropriately, the interview is "a pipeline for transporting knowledge" (Holstein & Gubrium 2004). I argue that even within reflexivity it is important to eliminate as much bias as possible to maintain validity and credibility (Peräkylä 2004). A need for reliability and validity can be presented as "positivist" (Lapadat 2000), but is also about fair representation; an ethical as well as technical issue. Data should be presented as accurately as possible to reflect views (Woodward 2000) as reflexive analysis needs to allow for multivocal interpretation (Mason 2002). I would argue that it is important to recognise diversity as people's perspectives are derived from personal experience as well as theoretical knowledge and must not be re-interpreted to meet the researcher's political ends. Validity is achieved by

presenting different opinions (Baxter et al 2001, Bryman 2001) Carspecken and MacGillivray (1998: 171) note that in reflexive research the rationale is to "conscious-raise" rather than solve problems. Findings are unique to that research situation and those respondents, although conclusions can still be drawn by validating contributions "as a key to new insights" (Maso 2003).

The notion of validity within reflexive research differs from what Dockery terms "conventional research methods" such as observation and surveys (in Truman et al 2000: 97). Steier (1991) questions the notion that the world is constructed at a distance, holding knowledge in which researchers seek the truth. Steedman (1991: 53) argues that "it is no longer possible to separate knowledge from the knower". Until the 1960s, research theory saw interviewing in scientific, masculine terms with the interviewer striving to be as impartial as possible. Abiding by certain rules of detachment was felt to provide objectivity (Letherby 2003). However, participatory interviewing (Brayton 1997), is perceived as less hierarchical (Cook & Fonow 1986, Denzin & Lincoln 2003, Letherby 2003, Oakley 1981) and I contend that the framework intended for analysis needs to be epistemologically consistent. Robust design and rigorous interpretation with evidence to support claims and generalisations also contributes to validity (Mason 2000). Despite scientific, positivist connotations attached to the notion of reliable and valid evidence

there needs to be authenticity in arguments made from the results of qualitative research to draw "trustworthy" conclusions about findings (Lincoln & Guba 1985: 363). Good design fosters consistency and potential for analysis, the latter enabling replication of a similar process with similar results should that be desired (Bryman 2001, Miles & Huberman 1994, Peräkylä 2004).

Whilst reflexive research is culturally specific (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000), a systematic process still checks bias. By handling data in a thorough and orderly manner, it enabled me to specifically focus. I needed to keep the material organised to feel in control, as the data produced was extensive. Miles and Huberman (1994: 262) recognise that research is often one person defining the subject, designing instruments, collecting data and interpreting it. However, they question personal bias being more prevalent in qualitative research and indicate major areas of risk; over-interpreting patterns, privileging people with higher social status and the researcher not owning their own perspective and I took those issues into account.

3.4.2 The Use of Technology

Video recordings were discounted as unsuitable, breaching confidentiality. Tape-recording was individually negotiated, with a view to respecting potential refusals, although this did not occur. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) note that computer programmes used for analysis must not dictate methodology and should correspond with the interpretive epistemological position. I used the computer for storing, indexing and coding, flicking between transcripts and data tables. This was painstaking and time-consuming, therefore I considered software such as Nvivo8, using a "free trial". However, I returned to manual interrogation, finding that intense personal knowledge of transcripts facilitated analysis, less thorough when using 'off the shelf' technology (Lapadat 2000). Understanding professional language and social work culture enabled me to identify significant areas. Intimate acquaintance with the data is time-intensive but indexing allows for instant retrieval through different modes of analysis. I was able to work at several levels simultaneously on the computer. For example, I searched for specific words to explore preceding and antecedent dialogue, taking a hermeneutic approach, examining individual transcripts and then the data as a whole (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 249). I returned to transcripts continually to re-check topics raised. Mason (2002) claims that returning to the data at a later stage facilitates objective scrutiny. Re-reading transcripts recalled the richness of data, particularly having undertaken further academic reading in the interim.

3.4.3 Indexing, Coding and Categorising

Mason (2002: 148) identifies that placing material in order is not "analytically neutral". She describes exploring data through "literal, interpretive and reflexive" processes, which I initially followed as stages. I immersed myself in transcript text judging whether questions were being answered, identifying different issues for analysis and keeping lists of topics. I analysed underlying meaning, registering issues which triggered comments. However, I abandoned this method as the sole approach as I felt it to be too narrow ontologically, pre-empting what might emerge. Creswell (1994) asserts that there is no correct procedure for analysing data; the approach needs to be eclectic. Attride-Stirling (2001) states that many qualitative researchers omit information on data analysis, as there is a dearth of material available, however, I drew from different models (see Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000, Attride-Stirling 2001, Bryman 2001, Coffey & Atkinson 1996, Creswell 1994, Denzin & Lincoln 2003, Mason 2002, Miles & Huberman 1994, Silverman 2004, Wetherell et al 2001) creating an approach working on multi-levels. Taken from 'grounded theory' techniques, I created individual systems for analysing data through indexing, coding and categorising, keeping an open mind about the outcome (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Terms are used interchangeably in literature on research methodology (Ryan & Bernard 2003b) and therefore require explanation. For clarification, within this thesis, 'theme' is the term describing an overall interpretive subject area, discussed in the

chapters which critique findings. However, there were stages prior to establishing the themes.

3.4.4   Thematic Analysis

This section examines the decision-making process which established significant specific themes. There are a number of ways of establishing these within transcript data. I felt that there was a fine balance within choices made between issues I had outlined in the literature review and new issues that were drawn out though interviews. I therefore used a variety of techniques, which are outlined for transparency. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000: 276) remind us that:

> "Empirical material should be seen as an argument in efforts to make a case for a particular way of understanding social reality, in the context of a never-ending debate"

I was mindful to explore the data from an ethical perspective so as to privilege the accounts of the respondents, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the qualitative, reflexive methodology and therefore my own contribution (May 1999). An initial question needed to be asked about the nature of the data in order to inform the analysis. Miles & Huberman (1994: 9) conclude that qualitative data is "raw experience…converted into words". However, this statement also requires caution, as words do not always truly represent the view that respondents may be attempting to express. Indeed, it relies on people making accurate, articulate claims to reality,

which is not realistic (Ramazanoğlu with Holland 2002). Therefore, techniques needed to be employed exploring how the language was formed within the whole context of the research process and through respondents' narrative. The converse argument is that it does reflect "real life" as the respondents relate issues as close to the subject area and the data's complexity also provides its richness (Miles & Huberman 1994). Eder & Fingerson (2003) argue that with children when the language used is informal and appears to replicate what they would use with people they know well, it indicates a level of rapport, thus achieving validity. To some extent this argument can be replicated with adults by examining the degree of informality used in the language, for example, I found that the presence of humour was an indicator that respondents were relaxed enough to share information. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) state that identified themes need to relate to the research subject. They argue that reading and re-reading the research material facilitates the distinguishing of patterns. The researcher also uses their own prior knowledge, which influences the analysis, but can skew the findings. Guest and McLellan (2003) identify that it can be difficult to decipher a holistic picture of what is being presented in the data. Additionally, coding the data in the first analysis can create a disjointed approach, making the task of finding themes problematic. For example, jargon used and so forth may be known to the researcher, but use of language by people is not straightforward and can be ambiguous (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000). I needed to be mindful to explore further if people used phrases that were not easily understandable, as that clarity also gives knowledge of the meaning. Nonetheless, Ramazanoğlu with Holland

(2002) state that interpreting the data is not just identifying meaning but it also constructs it. Bailey & Jackson (2003: 61) describe their own struggle with inductive coding and their pre-conceived notions, recognising that they were using both, providing logic as well as referring to identified theory on the subject.

Attride-Stirling (2001) identifies that whilst methodology is outlined within academic material, there is little provided on how to analyse data. This needs to be systematic and methodical in order to ensure nothing is missed and to give value and credit to the respondents. She describes the process and outcomes as "thematic networks" (Attride-Stirling (2001: 386). Hence, initially, through a hermeneutic approach, I recognised recurrent topics, identified through constant analysis of the data (CLMS 2003b). The second method of establishing themes was to "read the transcripts with a purpose" (CLMS 2003b: 84). This involved identifying the use of speech, for example, if a particular issue was identified as important through intonation or the language that described it. For instance, one respondent used the expression when talking about social work as "not just a job" which was expressed emotively and also constantly repeated, indicated how much she felt this to be the case. However, some other issues were not immediately obvious and there needed to be further examination and interpretation of the language that was used by respondents.

Toulmin (2003) describes how arguments can be analysed in order to explore links between statements that people make and what these actually mean. He outlines that from data, a 'warrant' is made which leads to a 'claim'. Warrants are the structures by which claims are made within arguments. However, this is not a simple process and he identifies what he terms 'backings' which support arguments which make claims, 'qualifiers' which validate the claim, 'rebuttals' which invalidate the claim and alternative claims. This process enables people to negotiate to make decisions and solve issues within speech, but it needs to be unpacked and presented in a way which makes sense. Attride-Stirling (2001) makes the point that thematic networks present opportunity for exploration and organising things said at different levels, including ideas that are expressed. Toulmin's theory gives a backdrop for the process, not the analytic method itself. I would also argue that his analysis of argument identifies that speech is complex and, consequently, hidden meanings need to be addressed as people justify their statements through 'claims'. For example, the statement made by Tom:

> **That's basically what reflection is, it's looking back on things…and improving... I think it's an essential part of social work practice. Otherwise we'd make the same mistakes time and time again and hopefully we…. each experience is different and we improve our practice by looking back on things we have done before.**

There is a 'claim' that 'reflection…is part of social work practice', which Tom validates by saying that "otherwise we'd make the same mistakes time and time again'. However, there is an alternative claim which states that 'each experience is different' which could

present as contradicting the argument. Nevertheless, Tom validates the claim by defining 'reflection' and stating 'we improve our practice by looking back at things we have done before', thereby supporting the concept of refection and reinforcing its validity as 'an essential part of social work practice'. The words 'I think' and 'hopefully', can be defined as qualifiers. Overall, Tom's account adds to the claim made in the findings that social workers find reflective practice "essential".

Attride-Stirling (2001: 388) establishes different order processes as having three levels; initial indexing, coding and then ultimately categorising. This is achieved through the breakdown of the data transcripts and exploration of the dialogue through a hermeneutic process and the interpretation of speech patterns. This requires the exploration of correlation between events, statements and respondents' whole perspectives (Guest & McLellan 2003). The combination of these factors led to the establishment of the main issues identified through analysis of the data, offering the narrative and the stories of what has been found from the accumulation of the thirty two interviews. Glaser (1965, 1967 cited in CLMS 2003b: 15) in establishing grounded theory describes what he terms "the constant comparative"; the examination of different data, looking for similarities and difference in the transcripts and interweaving between them. This was the initial process when I established the framework for analysis (appendix 3). This created thematic

networking in order to look for significance through an interpretive approach and develop understanding (Attride-Stirling 2001). This constant immersion into the text is a process of balancing the individual respondents' perspective alongside the data collectively and making choices as the researcher. The reflexive process of combining researcher and respondent to identify mutually significant themes was therefore borne out through this process.

It has been stated that within a reflexive interview the stories told are a product of the reflexive relationship "as a form of knowledge creation and inquiry" (Etherington 2007: 600). The questions that are asked stimulate responses which enable respondents to reflect on their experiences as they relate them. Therefore, I would argue that the reflexive relationship enables validity of the analysis, as I was a significant contributor and also an audience to the respondents. Further, the interviewer interprets according to their own experience. The transparency thus presented through the thematic analysis identified both what has been discovered and how that process occurred, which Etherington (2007: 601) describes as crucial "ethical, moral and methodological issues", as we need to be aware of the cultural and personal factors which influence our research choices.

3.4.5 Process of Analysis

As interviews were manually transcribed, I analysed during and after typing each transcript, including interaction between myself and respondents. Logging data from the interviews, a virtual table was constructed with a separate 'box' for each respondent, identified by 'indexing' initials and profile. Key phrases were selected and placed within each 'box' (appendix 3). In illustration, respondents' statements that reflective practice is linked to 'improving practice' were coded and cross-referenced to other contributions with the same or similar meaning, thereby interpreting through collation of material (Mason 2002). Statements are then 'categorised' through "clusterings" with comparable characteristics (Miles & Huberman 1994: 249), using different colours. Respondents referred to reviewing and improving practice as a personal and professional process for "working through" issues. Identifying reflective practice as a 'problem solving process' therefore was a result of drawing together related comments. This is made into a grid within virtual tables (appendix 5).

I maintained a reflexive approach, locating myself within the structure of the study, but prioritised respondents' statements. Letherby (2003) describes how feminists argue that it is impossible to be objective, there is always a risk of bias in any research and therefore overall values should be explicit. People relate their experiences as "plausible accounts of

the world" (Silverman 2003), which need to be represented accurately (Alvessson & Sköldberg 2000). One decision was whether to code phrases as "analytic induction" (Bryman 2001: 389), which seemed to fragment the data or maintain whole sections of narrative (Somers 1994). As ontologically the data centres on perception, induction from short phrases and words was combined with narrative, providing a holistic approach (Mason 2002). Professional stories that people tell are interwoven through values and belief systems (Taylor & White 2000). However, systems for analysis need to also address dialogue, acknowledging that data is in "sentences, not in numbers" (Tesch 1990: 2). For example, I recognised that reflective practice was being linked to personal and professional identity, which could be lost if text was fragmented.

Text can be used for dialogue, narrative, words and phrases and interpreted on several levels (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000). According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996) coding provides opportunity to conceptualise, explore interaction and raise issues in subsequent interviews. It is a major stage in identifying links, understanding phenomena, addressing research gaps and provides a form of rigour (Weston et al 2001: 382). Conversely, over-coding runs the risk of becoming lists of verbal statements (Ryan & Bernard 2003a). It can also become a conceptual trap whereby text is manipulated to fit into categories. There is

also a temporal aspect to narrative as meaningful life history. Somers (1994: 606)

identifies that:

> "It is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that constitute our social identities".

In illustration, this section of transcript is from an interview with a student and supports

the argument for whole representation, but can also be split into meaningful phrases:

> **… (Social work) has drifted me away from some people, but I think that's natural progression if you're going off on your own. …It's not easy because you do sort of mature and progress and sort of move away from ……because…It's not just a job. It's not just a job. It's not just a job, is it?.... It's part of you, I think. It's part of who you are….**

Through initial analysis I surmised that phrases describe the respondent's feelings of being

different from people she had known prior to training and how she felt she had changed.

Through language such as "drifted me away", "move away from" and the emotive

repetition of "it's not just a job" and "its part of who you are" I concluded that this

respondent is describing personal as well as professional feelings of adjustment, affecting

her identification with the profession. Further analysis connects her whole narrative to

issues within themes identified.

3.4.6 Interpreting Meaning

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) argue that interpretation is complex, imposing false organisation risks privileging an order when there is none. People are inconsistent, contradictory and fragment their statements. According to Scheurich (1997: 62):

> "the language out of which the questions are constructed is not bounded or stable; it is persistently slippery, unstable and ambiguous from person to person, from situation to situation, from time to time"

It is important during analysis to examine the context, as meaning might not be immediately obvious. One method of interpretation is to examine imagery expressed through metaphor (Coffey & Atkinson 1996) which aids reflexivity through metatheory (Holland 1999) (appendix 6). Metaphors offer a constructive process through comparing one phenomenon by describing another (Coffey & Atkinson 1996, Denzin & Lincoln 2003), revealing contextual underlying meaning and shared understanding (Coffey & Atkinson 1996). Metaphors like 'thinking on your feet', and 'part and parcel of what we do', indicate that people see reflective practice as integral to the work and a 'cluster' of such phrases suggest people use reflection in everyday practice. Whereas a comment stating that reflective practice is something that 'everyone should do', can be interpreted as a moral statement, categorised accordingly.

One significant indicator was the amount of times respondents referred to an issue (Borbasi et al 2005). Phrases may also interconnect, for example, 'professional accountability' could link to 'self-monitoring' or 'evaluating practice'. I judged where a category might fit with links from related areas. As an example, two major subject areas I perceived as important to respondents were 'values' and using reflective practice as a method of 'evaluating and improving practice' as they repeatedly occurred. Discussion also focused on where and when reflective practice happened; whether or not people used it in verbal interaction or for writing. This was dependent on why it was being used, for example, for a qualification or to 'talk through' cases. This also connects with 'communication' and demonstrates whether it is viewed as an individual or communal process.

Commitment to improvement was commonly discussed, for instance, but overall this presented as about 'doing a better job' to help service users. These issues of course may indicate people's desire to present acceptable values, rather then their true thoughts, and one does not preclude the other. Reflective practice is also presented academically as a medium for self-improvement which respondents may feel they need to iterate. However, I took respondents at face value, otherwise I could be making assumptions. When similar metaphors or phrases were grouped together patterns emerged, which I categorised into a

matrix and cross-referenced linking them to topics. These were then tested with further respondents as different issues were introduced. One method for analysis was through using the computer 'cut and paste'. Twenty per cent of the interviews were randomly accessed and five questions in order were copied. As the interviews progressed, the questions responded to what was being addressed and the subject areas diversified. This technique enabled interrogation of the data and my own contribution (appendix 7). Another method was taken from Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000); exploring combinations of opposites and shared and contrary perspectives. Ultimately, text was interpreted within what Mason (2002: 149) refers to as, "reading through or beyond the data in some way".

An example is presented to show the significance of trailing issues, illustrating how new information can lead to alternative significant areas. During an early interview, an academic said that he believed that reflective practice is related to managerial surveillance. This is found in academic literature, but within nursing rather than social work (see literature review). I raised this in subsequent interviews with other respondents. Few shared this view, but it stimulated people to discuss formal supervision. In social work, 'supervision' is a management task. A mixture of accountability and support, supervision is a formal meeting between practitioners and line managers to discuss practice. It varies as to quality and frequency, but is usually once a month for about two hours. This model

is endemic within social work organisations, recognising the complexity and legality of the work. Therefore, accountability and professional support became an area for exploration instead and led to discussion concerning the employment of reflective practice as a support mechanism.

3.5   **Identifying Themes**

3.5.1   Interrogating Data

I critically analysed respondents' speech and language and identified significant subjects, sometimes several in one small piece of dialogue (Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 41). This was time-consuming, but combined with other techniques allows for thorough consideration. Miles and Huberman (1994: 10) describe data reduction involving "focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data" as a continual process throughout the research and central to the analysis. I made analytical and critical decisions about relevant data based on professional knowledge as subjects are referred to in a variety of ways. Exploring data to decipher connections is the heart of the analytic process and possibly the most relevant in developing theories and identifying themes. Miles and Huberman (1994: 151) describe it as: "a process of progressive focusing and funnelling…as we collect data we can see…the apparent flotsam and jetsam of local

events into a meaningful pattern". However, patterns are neither static nor linear (Attride-Stirling 2001). Respondents also react through "familiar narrative constructs" (Miller & Glassner 2004: 127), which need to be analysed for deeper meaning. One source to consider, for instance, is the use of linkage words such as 'because' and 'since', as well as verbs such as 'is' which connect ideas; 'something is like something else' (Ryan & Bernard 1993b). Nonetheless, people use particular phrases that convey general rather than specific meaning. Interpretation also needs to be made with caution and in context, mindful that interviews are people's personal accounts (Coffey & Atkinson 1996). Analysis takes into account different roles and characteristics of respondents as perception is filtered through awareness of social agency (Somers 1994: 605). A reflexive approach enabled change in my perspectives. For example, all respondents stated that they use reflective practice in some capacity and listening to stories of its importance to people altered my initial view of it as being primarily to meet assessors' needs. Indexing, coding and categorising continued until there was saturation (Morse & Field 1995, Sandelowski 1995) and themes were generated from the pertinent issues identified within transcripts (Ryan & Bernard 1993b) alongside issues identified in the literature review and overall analysis. Some discussion areas were predicted and explored in the review, but some were unforeseen or new interpretations.

3.5.2 Themes as Conceptual Models.

Miles and Huberman's (1994: 245) list of strategies establishes a process of identifying themes, bringing a pragmatic as well as analytical dimension. If significant issues were recurring, I raised them during interviews, creating fluidity of emerging patterns (Warrington 1997). This analytical thematic process is a method of joining networks of similar perspectives. Attride-Stirling (2001: 386) refers to "rich exploration of a texts, overt structures and underlying patterns" whereby significant subject areas emerge. As well as using outlined methods of coding, to step back and analyse whole language enables understanding of respondents' motivation. The themes have to link ideas, but also incorporate the variety of opinions expressed throughout (Attride-Stirling 2001). As an example, I noticed through analysis that there was a persistent reference to develop practice to 'improve the lives' of service users. This is also referred to as a motive for entering the profession. The success or otherwise that the respondent has in achieving this from their perspective affects them personally. It is commonly referred to as a form of 'goodness'; being a 'good social worker' or 'good person', which connects to using reflection for personal improvement and to skills and training. This led to exploring a sub-theme of 'morality' which connects to the global theme of 'identity and emotional labour'. It moved reflective practice much further than just a process for ensuring values have been adhered to, to examining a way of life, lived fundamentally from an ethical basis, examined through data analysis.

In the following dialogue, I show how one comment can be categorised through interpreting metaphor, leading to exploring common patterns and ultimately thematic approaches. Diane identifies reflective practice as a "safeguard":

> **Diane: It's a safeguard for me and I guess it's a safeguard for the families that I'm working with because if I'm not using it or the students that I work with aren't using it, its not reflection. If we're not using it we can end up in dangerous situations.**

Diane refers to reflective practice as a way of monitoring practice but also protection for both worker and service user. Diane views the lack of it as potentially dangerous, suggesting a professional responsibility to use it. I cluster this into the 'monitoring and assessment of practice' and simultaneously within the 'morality' theme. The allegation implies consequences; the implication is one of neglect. Even when themes are identified, choosing where comments, phrases or narrative lie is not straightforward and can be identified in more than one area.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest looking at comparisons within the research to identify themes. By presenting differences in perspective, it deepens knowledge and represents diversity, contributing to fairer representation. Whilst investigating themes, chains of evidence are also explored. These links have a logical sequence, making sense to overall concepts or theoretical underpinning surrounding data. I therefore make choices with regard to the status of topic areas within findings, which I colour then code (appendix

5). These are the main thrust of research discovery. The final stage is theorising the data transmitted through themes and generating ideas integral to the research (Coffey & Atkinson 1996). Denzin and Lincoln (2003: 275) acknowledge that themes are "abstract (often fuzzy) constructs". I also considered how to present them. Bryman (2001) identifies that texts exploring narrative should retain meaning. By isolating slices of speech this removes the context. The themes are therefore largely presented through dialogue, including my contribution where appropriate, consistent with a reflexive process (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000, Miller & Glassner 2004). This recognises the interests of the researcher (Wetherell et al 2001) and conversation is contextualised.

3.5.3 The Themes

This brief section introduces the content of the themes. Significant issues identified in the literature review were generally raised by respondents but, as established, I prioritised respondents' perceptions. The themes therefore address these issues but other subjects are also examined. I found that the focus shifted from the literature review. My aim is to present themes as outcomes of the "reflexive interview" process (Denzin 2001). Through the inductive approach outlined I established that reflective practice and its link to identity and emotional labour is a significant theme, consequently that is the main focus of the findings. However, this area connects to five sub-themes. The concepts overlap, but also

require discrete exploration. In the next chapter I examine three of these, followed by another two in chapter 5, examining the 'global' theme in chapter 6.

Firstly, values and ethics emerge as highly significant throughout the research. It is appropriate therefore to 'set the scene' with a theme of **values and morality.** This is evidenced through narrative showing respondents determination to improve their practice, to be good social workers and people, striving towards being anti-discriminatory, non-judgemental and honest. Secondly, I feel it is important to identify where and when reflective practice takes place. This establishes its context and relationship to the work and the respondents personally. Therefore, I present a sub-theme of **time and place**. Thirdly, how people involve others in using reflective practice is fundamental to respondents and I investigate it from the standpoint of **relationships and communication**, exploring the influence of professional and personal relationships and the value of reflective practice**. The subsequent two sub-themes outlined in chapter 5 relate to the essence of how reflective practice is presented in academic literature. The fourth sub-theme **problem-solving and development** encompasses theories of learning and change, the original primary focus of the research. Finally, where respondents discuss reflective practice as consideration of how to deal with professional issues and judgements of performance I analyse under the heading of **monitoring and assessment**.

Overall, throughout the data, reflective practice is viewed as providing emotional support to deal with the work. This was not just related to practice or reflection-in-action described by Schön (1991), but connected with respondents' roles throughout life, on a personal as well as professional level. I believe this shifts the focus from major concepts outlined in the academic literature. The final data analysis chapter therefore encompasses the sub-themes and introduces new theoretical analysis. The material provides overriding messages from respondents of an emotional attachment to social work, but linked to skills identified prior to entering the profession. There is a strong sense of social work identity derived from personal values which is examined within the global theme of **identity and emotional labour.**

3.6 **Conclusion**

This chapter was divided into four major sections outlining the methodology to construct the research. Initially, the choice of method was addressed, presenting a rationale. I provided a critique of the thirty two respondents and their profiles, exploring power dimensions. I then presented details of a pilot study. The framework for analysing data was critically analysed. Whilst the ordering of data has been ongoing since the first interview, I established that it was important to scrutinise individual transcripts as well as holistically explore the data. A rationale was offered for using a thematic, eclectic

approach. I argued that I needed to examine the data through a detailed inductive process as well as explore whole narrative. The final section presented examples of thematic analysis, examined in detail for transparency. The next chapters investigate the data analysis. The respondents are speaking as individuals and do not represent others with the same profile. However, the sample is representative of the diversity within social work. Perspectives from all the respondents are presented.

CHAPTER 4

SUB-THEMES - VALUES AND MORALITY: TIME AND PLACE: RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION

4.1 **Introduction to 3 Sub-Themes**

This chapter explores three sub-themes that are core to understanding how respondents use reflective practice. Entitled 'values and morality' the first section incorporates social work values, which are central to social work. There is a brief introduction before a critique of respondents' contributions. This discussion then moves on to a wider analysis. Terming it 'morality', I explore respondents' personal perspectives as they speak about themselves in relation to social work and their feelings about attitudes and behaviour. The second sub-theme is entitled 'time and place' and examines how and where reflective practice takes place. It analyses whether it is a personal or professional activity and seen primarily as formal or informal. The third part of the chapter is the sub-theme entitled 'relationships and communication'. It examines the role reflective practice plays in developing and maintaining relationships and offering support. There is an underlying reference to identity and emotions throughout all these sub-themes and these are addressed more fully in chapter 6.

4.2 **<u>Values and Morality</u>**

4.2.1 <u>Introduction</u>

The title of social worker has been protected by law since 1st April 2005. Requiring "public trust and confidence" (GSCC 2002), every social worker, including students, has to be registered (GSCC 2009) and follow the code of conduct to ensure 'suitability for social work' (GSCC 2007a). Those that do not and come to the attention of the General Social Care Council are publicly de-registered. The code of practice is integrated into training, for GSCC approval alongside university validation processes. Social workers found to be unsuitable, including through undeclared criminal histories and/or health reasons are withdrawn. In addition, as in teaching and nursing, a criminal records bureau (CRB) check is made. Certain previous convictions disqualify entry into the profession, particularly if of a violent or sexual nature or where trust has been breached. Therefore, behaviour in social workers' previous and current personal life is assessed and monitored.

Dominelli (2004: 62) outlines key values which she terms the 'cornerstone' of social work; dealing with structural inequality, social and personal problems. She identifies that the code of ethics requires self-regulation; social workers have power, which must not be

misused. There are basic values, expounded since social work's inception, such as respect for others and confidentiality. Social workers are required to promote social justice though anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice, valuing diversity, regardless of age, gender, race, disability, culture, religion, sexual orientation and so forth. In summary, the ethics relate to valuing human life, regardless of personal characteristics, spiritual or political allegiances or sexual preferences. It is against this backdrop that reflective practice is promoted.

4.2.2 Respondents' Values

Payne (2005) sees reflective practice and values as the consideration of power dynamics, essential to evaluating practice for good social work. Through the use of a reflective model for teachers, Larrivee (2008: 345) sees it as staged progression. Exploring the right way to practise leads eventually to "higher order" reflective practice though which consideration of moral issues and the questioning of assumptions occurs. Within this research data there is an overriding sense of social work values permeating respondents' language, indicating its importance alongside reflective practice and commitment to the profession. When defining how reflective practice helps them, respondents offer words and phrases such as "being caring", "ethical practice", "not judging people", "it enables work with vulnerable people". Words like "honest", "truthful" are frequently used,

particularly when describing reflective practice in written form. In the following

quotations, Stella for example, specifically states that reflective practice is primarily about

the value base of social work, even more than theory. Patsy views it as ethical practice:

> **Stella: Suppose it's actually looking at your own value base and the ability to reflect on how you are interacting, as a professional; more important than looking at the theory, which does not really always help.**

> **Patsy: .. to be able to get through to people and not judge them. It's saying you can be using it in work as well as your personal life. It a way of being ethical in your job …it's right with our value base.**

Patsy specifically identifies that "getting through" to people also means not judging them,

which she sees as ethical. However, she also points out that she also does this in her

personal life, intertwining this with her reference to work.

Amir is one of two respondents who equate social work values with religious beliefs. As a

Muslim he feels he cannot share his beliefs, nevertheless, he is presenting it as influencing

the values which guide his work:

> **Amir: … clearly as a Muslim I have certain views around religion and the part it plays in informing your values, yet there is no discussion about religion …so when I reflect on those kinds of issues, I try to keep those kind of reflections either to myself or share them with the people I know well.**

Jane is Buddhist and she feels that this philosophy is consistent with reflective practice

and values within social work:

> **Jane: Reflective practice is part of enlightenment for me. It's so important for the students to learn this to enable them to work effectively and is consistent with values. …that's another way of encouraging people to share practice.**

Jane feels that sharing practice has to be encouraged, but also for students to be autonomous and self-reflect, identified as important for reflective practice to be effective (Preston-Shoot 2003). Jenny, a practitioner and line manager feels that reflective practice is linked to the value base of the work, but that it is also an emotional concept:

> **Jenny: Well some of it is about – reflection is about looking at your values and how values might have affected how you've dealt with something or how someone has responded to you. I think that's what it is about and I do think that values are partly emotional aren't they? I think they have to be… The value base is all to do with yourself and it is therefore to do with emotion.**

Jenny also states that the values affect how social workers deal with people, suggesting that values also relate to practice skills. Both Jenny and Jane relate values to 'self', which Jenny then links with emotion. Both identify reflective practice as a way of exploring values, interwoven though most interviews. All respondents relate their values to good practice and therefore professionalism, at the heart of Schön's theory.

4.2.3 Morality

Presenting a wider values perspective, the data suggests that social work for respondents equates with attitudes and behaviour towards being a moral person. This is recognised as a pre-requisite to being a social worker. Vélez García and Ostrosky-Solís (2006) connect

morality and emotion, arguing that in terms of social constructivism, emotions are socially

learned to meet needs for cultural identity. Moral emotions relate to the welfare of others,

but ultimately are intrinsically based on self interest and as desire to feel part of a

community (Haidt 2003). Foucault describes this as the "moral code" (Foucault 2000). It

is argued that respondents are identifying themselves amongst the social work community,

their views derive from a western perception of morality which allows for individuals to

make their choices "as primary moral authority" (Arnett et al 2002: 70). This is replicated

within social work philosophy, with 'rights' and 'choices' being paramount when

providing services for people. Claire describes what she "wants" from reflective writing

from the students she teaches. Her language reflects the significance for values in terms of

presenting assessable work and expectations of students:

> **Claire: …what I want from a reflective piece is that recognition of different perspectives and recognition of different choices which could have been made and I don't know whether or not what else matters. It's difficult one to judge isn't it, because obviously in terms of ethics and values I want honesty as well?**

The following comment by Brigid, a student and practitioner, is consistent with other

respondents who see themselves as needing to be 'good' people behaving in a professional

manner. This is referred to on a number of occasions and is threaded within dialogue:

> **Brigid: You've got to do your job. You've got to do it as best you can and you know, whatever you're.. who you're employed by, you've got to behave in a professional……what their code of ethics and values are.**

> J McD: …Can you explore that a little bit further?

Brigid: You see I believe, even though I'm very passionate about it, it's still a job as well because I think you, …you take that home constantly and you have to think about the affect you have on people as a person. Its your duty to be good all the time …otherwise …it would impact on their lives….When I mean you're a social worker, it's innate…the person you are. You have to be a good person, I think.

The word 'innate' encompasses the notion of the work as a vocation; using the self and personal characteristics for required skills and reflecting a relationship with the job that goes beyond working hours and part of who some respondents believe they are. Patrick also feels that capability for reflective practice is 'innate':

Patrick: I think with regards to the reflective practice process all in all it's, it's about- the whole thing that we're good at in social work is reflective practice. It's innate amongst all of us.

This combination of a focus on beliefs and a desire to be 'good' widens to personal conduct for some respondents. For example, many students find that this was an issue for them when they started training. There was a personal as well as professional need to reflect for self-development. Patsy describes how she uses the "same techniques" not to judge friends as she would in professional relationships:

Patsy: Since I started my course I've started to analyse my relationships and my friendships with people. And I think that is a good basis for relationships with work as well. Although they're not going to be personal it's using the same techniques to be able to get through to people and not judge them.

Jadwiga talks about the need to know yourself:

Jadwiga: …the expectation of a qualified social worker or one going through qualification, you need to 'know thyself', as they say. In knowing thyself I think you have to go through those processes and take those risks because we do it to

service users. We make those judgements. How can we do that without making judgements about ourselves…

Jadwiga's point that social workers must have high expectations of themselves because they make judgements about service users is also a common perspective amongst respondents. McBeath and Webb (2002: 1016) argue that the moral and therefore good social worker is one where, contrary to current emphasis on accountability, the social worker emphasises "judgement, experience, understanding, reflection and disposition", acting reflexively in interaction with service users. Making moral judgements is inevitably part of a social workers task and many respondents make links between reflective practice and ethical decision-making as the core of the role (Dominelli 2004). Participants describe how they feel that values cannot be separated, believing strongly that people's rights and choices cannot be 'switched on and off' within working hours.

This notion of reflective practice as contributing to being professional and a good person is threaded throughout dialogue. Dave attributes his ability to deal with difficult people, whether in his personal or his work life, to being reflective and striving to be "totally accepting". Brigid defines reflective practice as "your thoughts on the way you behave" indicating, that values affect how you act. Pauline states, "I use it all the time in my life really. I like to think about things and reflect on them. I think it makes you a better person". Maggie describes the process of reflection as exploring the ethical basis of

practice and doing what's "right". These statements have a moral overtone to them, which I argue goes further than the job. It indicates that the choice of profession is vocational, requiring a way of life perceived as good and moral. Maggie brings together much of the respondents comments in the following:

> **Maggie: the whole point of reflection is that you're doing things to the best of your ability and you're working with families in an anti-oppressive manner and that you are challenging yourself. Rightly or wrongly we all have our own 'inset' beliefs. And you know we….as a department we say its wrong to be racist, its wrong to be this, its wrong to be that, its wrong to be the other but be all have our beliefs and …it's very, very difficult to change those. You know what's right and what you should be thinking, but it all comes across in your work and so that's why we should be all be reflecting all the time to make sure that you're challenging yourself.**

Maggie feels she needs to scrutinise herself through reflection "to make sure" her values are consistently sound. This belief is also apparent in other transcriptions and consistent with theories in the literature review expounded by Yip (2006), for example, where he describes using self to reflect on and evaluate practice.

4.2.4 Personal Commitment

Jane teaches on undergraduate courses and feels strongly that she needs people to genuinely commit themselves to the value base in every sphere of their life and be passionate about social injustice:

Jane: I'm talking about congruence and…genuiness and the difficulty sometimes that we have in dealing with different and difficult situations and being genuine. What I'm saying to students I guess is: 'Look, this is the value base. some of this has come from.. our definition of social work. It's come from the codes of practice...the BASW codes of ethics. This shouldn't just be lip service, this should be how you feel, so we do expect that you will change if you are…do not already feel that value, that value base, do not already feel a sense of social injustice at the inequalities in the world and want to do something about that.

However, Jane's dialogue suggests that the congruence around values she is referring to is the basis of being in the profession. It is a way of life essential to social work identity, denoted in the phrase "this should be how you feel". Conversely, this notion that you have to be 'good' all the time was also spoken about by Jane and others as restricting:

Jane: When you step into the role on the Monday morning it is about putting tighter boundaries round it, but in terms of how you feel about people and how you feel about society, then that wouldn't be that much changed. You have a job of work to do. You're constricted by the legislation, by the framework, by that value base, by being a social worker all the time. And yet I recognise that sometimes, sometimes I don't feel like listening actively to some people…on a Saturday night *(laughing).*

As well as expressing fears how social work will take over her life, Patsy believes that in order to maintain strong values in every aspect of life that she needs to constantly reflect:

Patsy: It's using the same techniques to be able to get through to people and not judge them. It's saying you can be using it in work as well as your personal life. It's a way of being ethical in your job.

Sue describes using reflective practice as a way of trying to maintain a balance between personal and professional anxieties and "doing things right". Reflective practice is seen in this context as a way of keeping equilibrium and adjusting to pressures of maintaining a

moral stance. Leanne describes how she feels personal experience can "get in the way" of being a better social worker:

> **Leanne: …If you don't reflect as a person, personal experiences can get in the way. I think it's really important to get those out the way so that you can be a better social worker, otherwise you might get er..er…. involved, involved with service users er problems if they are similar to your own. You sometimes .. you have to be good…better…you can't have those feelings...**
>
> J McD In what way?
>
> **Leanne: Well – we have to be er…unblemished. It can be a pressure too.**

Leanne indicates moral aspirations that to be good at her job she has to strive to be "better", to ensure her personal life is not going to impede her professional practice. Describing herself as needing to be unblemished may indicate some need for purity, but she admits that it does cause pressure.

4.3 **Summary**

This section explored respondents' perspectives on connections between reflective practice, values and issues of morality. From thematic analysis it emerges that respondents give significant consideration to values when engaged with reflective practice, viewing ethical considerations as central to that process. However, the data also reveals a wider perspective which explores respondents' views of the need to feel 'moral' in all aspects of

life, not just in relation to the job itself, but within personal commitment to specific values. These beliefs about equality, justice and service user's rights, reinforce identification with the profession. Only two respondents refer to religion or spirituality, despite some social workers declaring religion to be a motivator in their career choice. Others declare political views or strong perspectives about humanity.

4.4   **Time and Place**

4.4.1   Introduction

This sub-theme analyses how respondents use reflective practice temporally and contextually. Initially, I examine whether reflective practice is used "in-action", exploring application of Schön's theory. I then examine whether respondents see it as primarily related to written work for courses they are undertaking, or if used through other methods. The keeping of reflective logs is critiqued. Finally, reflective practice is linked to formal supervision, examining whether it takes place within this professional relationship. This offers opportunity to analyse the significance of reflective practice within social work and for understanding its practical use.

4.4.2 Reflection-in-Action

The literature review identified that one of the criticisms of Schön's theory (1991) relates to 'reflection-in-action'. Schön (1991: 54) describes this as considering practice whilst "in the midst of a performance"; reflection during practice. Teekman's (2000) research on reflective practice with nurses found that they used reflective practice as an anticipatory process, describing it as 'reflection-for-action'. However, I have not found this with social work respondents in this study, perhaps because people are considering it as a concept retrospectively. All respondents begin by suggesting reflective practice is learning from previous practice to make improvements in the future, seeing reflective practice primarily as retrospective. "Looking back" is commonly referred to. Sue is a student social worker, but also a practitioner:

> J McD: Can you tell about reflective practice. What does it mean to you?

> **Sue: Mm looking back at stuff I've done, mm not necessarily just college work, but life skills, just what happens in life. Looking back at things… mistakes I've made and ways… and not necessarily doing them again. …**

Sue, like most respondents, describes reflective practice as a way of avoiding repeating mistakes rather than exploring practice during an event.

Many respondents describe the difficulty of thinking reflectively whilst in the situation or even ahead because of the pressures of the job, such as Ellen, a practitioner working in a 'safeguarding children' team:

> **Ellen: I think when you've got a heavy caseload in a duty team, quite often you're reacting to circumstances, rather than an opportunity to think, you know, plan it out. And I think when we have time to sort of use supervision to look at sort of reflection and practice, there are often ways we could have done things differently and we can talk about it then.**

Reflective practice is described as reactive. Ellen further refers to the work being crisis based and having no time, nor opportunity, despite practitioners being "conscientious about what they are doing". Christine, who practice teaches refers to the work being 'crisis-based' consequently offering little time for reflection.

Rolfe (1998: 23) describes what he terms reflection-on-action, suggesting a different meaning from reflection-in-action, despite reference to Schön's analogy:

> "a way of generating knowledge from the messy and unpredictable 'swampy lowland' of the practice setting, by actively processing experiences after and usually away from the situation".

This suggests objectivity with regard to how people use the concept, which is supported in this study. Jenny, a child protection manager feels like many of the practitioners that it is an automatic process, but used away from the event. She feels that she is too busy to reflect properly, as "life in an area team is so hectic" and considers that there is too much going on to reflect-in-action. Overall, the lack of time to reflect is referred to on a number

of occasions and also identified in a similar study made by Brown et al (2005) who interviewed post-qualifying students on how they perceive reflection. Practitioners are aware that they are constantly influenced by reflective practice, but not always aware of using it. This suggests that reflective practice takes place anywhere and may be a continuous or short term process. Thinking through what had happened whilst 'in the car' or 'in the bath' was commonly referred to (e.g. Stella, Diane, Tracey, Maggie). However, Diane offers support for reflection-in-action. She works in adoption and fostering, which I would argue has a slower pace than child protection and is less prone to crises. She is one of three respondents who feels that she does reflect "in-action":

> **Diane: ..for me it's thinking about a situation I've been in – best reflecting is while you are in it …If I'm working as well as I can, there's part of me reflecting as I'm working. So...catching it in action…**

Tajim, talks about his present job as a manager and having to 'think on your feet' to make decisions quickly. Reflection-in-action therefore becomes part of the decision-making process:

> **Tajim: I understand …the different types of reflection as well, maybe reflecting–in-action and on-action. Because I think generally, I think it's easier almost isn't it to reflect-on-action, after the event? Er in –action, we certainly have to do that as part of our.. the job here... We have to make decisions very quickly.**

Maggie, a practitioner who works with children and families feels that it takes place in between actions facilitating change. Through her answer she supports Schön's theory, although does also mention using it in the car, suggesting a retrospective approach:

> **Maggie: …you just do not have time to reflect …as you're practising you become quite skilled at reflecting when you are in the car..and reflecting actually while you're doing an action.**

Others talk about using it "all the time" (Patsy, Sue, Brigid, Dawn), however, that phrase maybe seen as a cliché than literal action:

> **Brigid: I think with social work as well, you get to talk to people. There is time to reflect. I do it all the time.**

Interestingly, it is female students who say that they do it all the time and one practitioner feels she reflected 'all the time' when she was a student. Maggie believes that good practitioners should be "doing it all the time".

4.4.3   Written and Verbal Reflection

Respondents describe reflective practice as a concept used verbally or in written work, as this was not stipulated in the questions so that people could freely identify how they perceive the concept. When formally written it is invariably described as work submitted for course assessment and used for personal logs. Requirements demand that PQ (post-qualifying award) students write reflectively. Maggie feels that academic writing is a highly reflective process and develops ability to discuss issues with others:

Maggie: For me the self-critical analysis has been absolutely learning…when you sit down and think about the strides that you've made in your personal development and how your confidence is raised and how your ability to talk about social work is raised and …how you feel, you know.

Alison, a team manager identifies that factual case notes are kept which are not reflective. Issues which arise tend to be discussed informally with colleagues or with managers in supervision. However, she identifies that it is used in written form for PQ:

Alison: That's what I record- the facts of the cases really. We discuss things rather what was felt, so rather than write about it. We make time deliberately, you know as a team, as otherwise people get really stressed out worrying about things. I offer supervision but it's not enough I don't think. That tends to be more formal in terms of cases and current workload.

J McD: It needs to be verbal rather than written, I suppose?

Alison: The only time people really engage in it in written form is that it tends to be the focus of PQ.

Alison's comments are representative of what many respondents say. Martin does not feel you can "separate it from the PQ framework". Some say they were introduced to it during PQ training. Diane gives examples of how she learned it with PQ, but how she might use it with undergraduate students on placement:

Diane: I think there's definitely a technique to learn and I don't think I had it already. I learnt it when I was doing the PQ.

J McD: OK. How did you learn about that?

Diane: You know by using certain phrases. ..you know I did a workshop with our students… you use phrases like .. 'on reflection', looking back', 'at the time I', 'in

the future I'. If you use those phrases it's helping you make reflective statements, isn't it?

Respondents produce different accounts of spoken and written reflective practice and do not specifically isolate reflecting alone or with others as it depends on the situation. It is employed informally though discussion within and outside of work. Some respondents describe how they learned to keep a log or diary when they were undergoing Access to Higher Education courses prior to training, finding it so useful that they continued it personally and for professional work. Students are encouraged to keep a log in the first year of their degree and some respondents feel that is helpful to develop self- awareness and self-evaluation (Palmer et al 1994). In fact, all respondents who mention keeping logs are female students. Dawn is a student who describes it as a "habit" she acquired as she finds it so useful, despite initial reservations about it being potentially a "waste of time". Patsy, is another student on the degree who uses it in all aspects of her life:

> **Patsy: I do it in all aspects of my …my life really, you know in my personal life as well as for work. We were taught to do it at college on the Access you know.. follow a process for reflective practice. I think it's useful, you know, as a way of considering things.**

Patsy writes things down to work through what she feels and thinks, seeing it as a way of organising her thoughts on paper and believes it makes her more focused. Brigid feels that she reflects a lot, stating "I analyse too much" about personal and professional issues. She feels that it would be difficult to write reflectively for formal purposes, but a diary is kept to organise her "thoughts". Pauline sees keeping a log as a way of "dealing with things"

and working through difficult issues. If Leanne wants to "work through stuff" she keeps a personal log. Safia believes it enables her to develop confidence and tracks her progress as a student. Sue feels that she could write anything in a personal log, particularly if she had had a bad day, as she could not be judged:

> **Sue: You've had a really crap day and this has happened. …If you are keeping a diary at home and it's only for you, it doesn't matter how you do it. There is no right or wrong way...**

For these women their log was something they can control as they can choose what to write, as it is not be read by anyone else. Reflective logs enable them to build confidence and manage boundaries between personal and professional experiences (Duke & Copp 1994). This could also be seen as what Taylor (2003) refers to as "case talk". Social work contains ambiguities and uncertainties; reflective practice is a way of managing "messes" (Schön 1991). Their comments also suggest that that it facilitates transition from non social worker to professional, enabling reflection on values and an opportunity to consider how people make them feel and how they 'should' be feeling. Such reflections have been described as a confessional (Allen & Cloyes 2005, Bleakley 2000, Saltiel 2006). Attard and Armour (2005) found, as new teachers, that writing enabled a way of sorting out new emotional experiences. The emphasis on values during training requires a lot of personal challenge, referred to by many respondents. For example, Leanne feels it helps her see things from other perspectives, but also helps her cope with controversial comments made by other students:

> **Leanne: Reflective practice teaches you to see things from another perspective. I think of myself and reflection as, as.. internalising the learning. …before this you know, I always had moral, you know er..ethical views, but I would let things go. I always knew what was right and that, but I wouldn't challenge. Now when people say something you know racist or whatever, I become really irritated...**

> J McD: You mentioned you might keep a log…..
>
> **Leanne: Oh yes it all goes in there, trust me!**

The use of the reflective diary is advocated as a process for reflection about practice (Crawford 2006), however, it can also be romanticised and three respondents admit that they were supposed to keep one as a student, but either did not bother or it was 'haphazard'. Patsy feels that written reflective practice presented for assessment could be fabricated as "you're going to make it look as though you've done something good**",** an issue I expected to come up more frequently. On at least one occasion the practice teacher expected the student to keep a log, but did not really consider its purpose. This is the difficulty with any contemporary technique where the purpose is not fully considered. Tajim describes, with humour, his experience as a tutor visiting a student on placement:

> **Tajim: The practice teacher was very keen for the student to write a reflective log and the assumption was made that the student …knew what the expectation was…He was looking for me for guidance. I did …say, what is it you are looking for exactly? Do you want her to reflect on … personal learning or …to reflect on how she is developing as a professional or training social worker? ...I don't think he knew necessarily … He said…it's sort of a mixture of everything really…** (*laughed*).

Overall, the log seems useful when it is chosen as a personal diary for reflective purposes.

4.4.4 <u>Supervision</u>

One of the major ways that practitioners discuss issues that arise from practice is through formal supervision with their line manager. The quality of supervision is notoriously criticised by social workers. In a study of a team in a Social Services Department delivering children's services, Holt and Lawler (2005) outline how social workers view experience of supervision. It is described as occurring rarely and when it did it was "snatched dialogue concerning pressing case management issues" (Holt & Lawler 2005: 40). However, in this study, most respondents mention that this was where reflective practice was utilised. A few respondents feel that there is not enough time to reflect properly in supervision. Patrick as a mental health social worker believes it should have been available for him through his manager when he found a service user one morning had committed suicide. His story refers to support he expected and did not receive, highlighting where he feels he should have been able to formally access reflective practice. Although this is a substantial piece of data, it presents the context of Patrick's views:

> **Patrick:…I went round to this young guy who had hung himself at the weekend. …and it's like, I need some support, well there isn't anybody about. No, I need some support, he's hung himself. Well, there's nothing that we can do. No, I need some, I'm not telling you, I NEED support and he** (line manager) **just …pissed me off. … He wouldn't offer me anything so I went off on the sick... Doctor said, 'Here's a fortnight'. … 'work–related stress'. …. as soon as I got back to work they offered me counselling. ..I didn't want counselling a week after, I wanted counselling on the day that I came back …when I found out he had killed himself.**

J McD: Do you think reflective practice can actually contribute to the process then, in that situation?

Patrick: With …reflective practice, it gives you the ability to, to …check out what you've done, how you've done it and also about future work. About how you can develop and improve things and not be so critical upon yourself, because as regards this young lad, there was absolutely nothing I could have done. I did everything for him; risk assessments, care plans, support to the family, everything.

J McD: But I suppose to come to that conclusion you had to go through some thinking processes?

Patrick: Sure. I didn't do that with staff at work. It was with a friend who was outside of work who talked me through that. So I did my reflecting with a friend and not with work and it should have been through work… that should have been the manager's job.

Patrick uses someone outside of work as do many respondents, but believes that he should have been offered opportunity to reflect with his manager when needed, in a highly emotive and difficult situation. This contrasts with other respondents who state that they drop everything to offer support to colleagues. However, it is interesting to note when analysing that section of dialogue that after describing the incident and his manager's reaction, Patrick still describes reflective practice as useful. He feels let down by his manager not by the reflective process, which he uses outside of work. He continues by saying that it had taught him to be available for people when he became a manager himself.

Conversely, Dave feels it more important to discuss management of cases, rather than use supervision for reflective practice:

> **Dave: …I think the manager needs to know about what is happening.**
>
> J McD: Do you think you can use reflective practice for that process?...
>
> **Dave:…I suppose I have always thought that the chats and..er..discussions … I have with the team here are the reflective bits. We ponder on alternatives and stuff. My manager wants to know what we are doing next to protect the kids mainly. She has no choice. ...time is limited.**

Dave identifies the "chats" as "the reflective bits" indicating its informal but vital use with colleagues instead of his manager. He demonstrates good understanding of why she has no time, but does have supportive colleagues for reflection and support. Maggie is positive about a reflective approach in different situations with colleagues and her manager. She describes informality with colleagues and reflective practice in supervision, but appears to find both equally useful, offering opportunity for feedback from her manager:

> **Maggie: … it's like informal supervision between your colleagues in a way, but drawing on their ideas and their experiences is…really useful. And It does help you to reflect and you think perhaps there was… I was a bit wrong about that and perhaps you go back and think of another way of working with that family…**
>
> J McD: Do you use it in supervision?
>
> **Maggie: I do. I use reflection often in supervision… and I reflect about things and … my manager will say to me 'You're reflecting and that's really, really nice piece of work' and I don't know I'm doing it sometimes…**

Alison is a team manager providing supervision, therefore perhaps viewing it positively, but in her dialogue there is a commitment to enabling staff to deal with feelings generated by difficult decisions:

> **Alison: Reflective practice? I think it's multi-faceted I think when you look at it. I think it can be readily….., I think if you look at the reflective practice more that you use in supervision, it can be as detailed or as superficial as people choose to use. Erm my own feeling is I quite like to use the 'feelings' model, how did you feel at this time, what made you feel like that, why did you choose to do that? I think that varies, as it's an emotional thing as well for people…**

Her mode of questioning clearly recognises the link with decisions and feelings which staff need to be offered opportunity to discuss.

Supervision is also used with student social workers during placements. Patsy describes how her practice teacher facilitates reflective practice whilst recognising the role of feelings as a learning tool:

> J McD: Do you think you would use it in supervision?

> **Patsy: What talking about ..... Yeah, I think that would be quite useful. It's most of what my practice teacher is doing with me, because at the moment we're just kind of observing things and we come out and he said 'How would you have done that? How did you feel about that'?**

Respondents value supervision as a way of improving their practice, without exception, and there are many more examples. Most respondents are able to reflect with their manager or as a manager. The literature review identifies criticism of managers for being

overly concerned with accountability management and discussing casework only in policy or resource terms, due to lack of time (Jones & Gallop 2003, Warman & Jackson 2007). However, this is not the findings presented in this study. It was apparent when visiting social work departments that reflective practice is encouraged by managers. Some respondents, such as Alison and Jenny are team managers and welcome talking about reflective practice. This view of reflective practice may be local phenomena, but respondents were in mixed settings in different locations. I asked people about managerial surveillance which Martin had raised, suggesting that reflective practice could be a way of managers checking on staff's work. Respondents did not agree with this; managers were viewed as a source of support. Keith argues that managers should be encouraged to be involved:

> J McD:...is that it is a form of managerial surveillance- that actually if you get your practitioners doing PQ, you can get your targets met without having to deal with the softer stuff; a …way of managers being able to control. What do you think about that?
>
> **Keith: I think if it helps a manager to control effectively then it would be a very good thing.**
>
> J McD: (*both laughing*) yes that's true. We always see it as a bad thing.
>
> **Keith: I mean, I suppose exactly that really. It depends on the lack of surveillance in some respects and lack of awareness of what's going on in practice. The more we're aware of what going on in practice …the better.**

Respondents' feel that managers should facilitate reflective practice and this was further evidence that respondents feel it is linked to good practice.

4.5 **<u>Summary</u>**

This section of the chapter specifically isolates when and where reflective practice is and thus the sub-theme of time and space. I contend that this analysis is fundamental to understanding how reflective practice is used, by whom and in what context. It seems that all respondents value reflective practice and therefore engage in it, but that it is commonly a retrospective process to improve future practice. However, it is used to scrutinise practice in an ad hoc way as well as formally and there are no time boundaries to its use. It is also used personally. All respondents use it, but there are differences between people. Female students are more likely to keep a log, managers and practice teachers to use it in supervision. Many respondents state that involvement of the 'team' is important and their answers suggest that is where informal reflective discussion primarily happens. This section does overlap with the next, but there are discrete issues which are further examined.

4.6   **<u>Relationships and Communication</u>**

4.6.1   <u>Introduction</u>

This section examines communication using reflective practice as a medium for relationships with friends and colleagues. Initially, there is discussion on reflective

practice as a solitary activity. It then explores whether it is perceived as offering support for respondents. The section then examines good practice through reflection and feedback, in particular, reflective practice culture and team cohesion. Finally, there is exploration of how reflective practice is utilised to develop knowledge and good practice.

4.6.2   Sharing Practice Issues

Many respondents describe personal and solitary reflection as an introspective process for considering practice. Terms such as "I like to think about things", "I like to think back". However, personal situations are included. For example, Brigid states "I think back about how I've handled situations in my personal life". Yip (2006) believes that practitioners need to be self-reflective for it to be generically useful and enhance people's knowledge of practice. However, he argues that practitioners need to be comfortable to share practice issues. Martin presents reflective practice as an opportunity:

> **Martin: It's a wonderful opportunity for people to share practice…who are given to doubt, who find themselves with the most opportunity to be reflective, to look comfortably at their practice and to look at their own experience.**

Martin's comments infer that it can develop confidence, which has been supported by others (Duke & Copp 1994). Taylor (2006a) argues that as social workers become more experienced, their need for reflection may recede. However, this is not what emerges within this research. Respondents, including experienced practitioners, describe how they

use it for support and to support others. Furthermore, sharing information appears to develop camaraderie between social workers, creating their particular culture, with mutual understanding of the societal and legally complex issues they deal with. Most respondents present reflective practice as informal discussion with colleagues 'in the office' as a shared social work activity. The use of teamwork is prevalent within academic literature (Thompson 2001, Lishman 2002), and supports other studies (Molyneux 2001, Frost & Robinson 2004). Maggie relates it to learning together, creating cohesion:

> **Maggie: You can put things right yourself through reflection. Its all learning, I think in social work, we continually learn, things continually change. We do talk about things in the team all the time and it's always easier. It makes us quite close really.**

This notion of sharing and learning with others is interwoven through interviews. Patsy believes she needs it to discuss difficult practice issues to receive different views:

> **Patsy: If you have someone else to bounce off you can get further than you maybe would do on your own. You might say, have you not thought of this, you can … I still think it's something you can only go on your own, but with someone else they can direct you a little bit more, when you might not question yourself.**

Fook (2003) aligns a participative research model with critical reflection through empowerment of respondents who are enabled to contribute and share informed experience, thus creating knowledge and change. Communication of people's experience presented through research material is therefore crucial (Bloor 2004), provided regard is given to validity to ensure representative accounts (Holstein & Gubrium 2004). Similarly,

verbal and written reflection, if utilised to transmit knowledge can help inform others or at least present issues for debate. Andy feels that reflective practice is a way of sharing methods of practice:

> **Andy… a certain depth of thinking- …that you are constantly questioning things….. to achieve clarity on a subject or a topic, but it's…also about sharing practice and ways of dealing with things.**

Leanne talks about the importance of sharing ideas about practice with others and her preference for doing so:

> **Leanne: You can discuss what's bothering you and get er ideas… you know. I prefer it to writing stuff- as you think about things and … Although you can reflect on what you've done with written notes, but then you can reflect back with discussion…**

> J McD: So you prefer to reflect with other people do you…?

> **Leanne: I prefer to talk about ... things with the others; sharing ideas and stuff.**

4.6.3 Support Systems

Documenting things are seen as helpful by respondents and social workers have to formally record information. Thirty years ago social workers would analyse the situation through written case notes, some details of which would now be questioned as judgemental. It was commonly stated for example that families were 'dysfunctional' or

'demanding'. The Freedom for Information Act 2000 and Data Protection Act 1998 rightly helps to ensure that nothing is recorded that is not accurate or factual. However, as acknowledged, many situations social workers face are difficult, creating feelings which are difficult to formally express. Reflective practice offers opportunities for sharing with colleagues who understand the issues. Jadwiga feels that this is not the case in modern social work agencies. She expresses concern that it is so 'accountability driven' that this is not possible:

> J McD: …can we bring it back to the feelings bit again and how we truly feel about a situation …… look at office banter in a social services situation.
>
> **Jadwiga: You don't get much of that these days, There's very little of it around. Because people are so busy... You wonder what people had to do before computers were here. It's heads down, targets and paperwork. There's no time to do it properly. People are on your back. It's not like years ago. People don't have time to reflect. I think that's a problem... You can't say what you really feel at times.**

However, Jadwiga visits social work agencies as a practice teacher. This may be an impression rather than reality, as according to respondents, reflective discussion is still commonplace. This research suggests that reflective practice is welcomed at different levels of the hierarchy.

It is identified in the literature review that communication between professionals within the 'modernising' agenda is extremely important. Reflecting on joint work contributes towards working together harmoniously, potentially improving services. The use of

reflective practice in supervision identified previously is particularly significant, as that is often seen as the most important source of support (Doel & Shardlow 1998, Thompson 2000, Payne 2005). Despite Ellen and Jadwiga's observations, there does seem to be involvement of reflective practice from colleagues and personal friends, as well as it being a solitary activity. Yip (2006) identifies that if practitioners use self-reflection, they can become aware of when they need support. He states that experiences in social work may be difficult, frustrating or unpleasant; reflective practice can be a way of ventilating feelings to colleagues, friends and relatives. However, he also argues that the environment needs to be supportive in order for reflective practice to be successful. Phrases that respondents use to describe reflective practice at work are "sharing problems" and "using each other as sounding boards", but also "it doesn't happen often enough in busy teams". Nevertheless, most respondents describe how they discuss issues as a team and deliberately make time, even if limited, to support each other. Doel and Shardlow (1998) outline how it can be used effectively in group supervision as a way of using knowledge through a shared process as well as gaining feedback. This is referred to in interviews, such as with Alison who refers to team cohesion:

> J McD: So going back to reflective practice, you don't tend to use it in written form, it tends to be factual written notes?

> **Alison: That's what I record. We discuss things rather …than write about it. We make time deliberately, you know as a team, as otherwise people get really stressed out worrying about things. I offer supervision but, but it's not enough I don't think. That tends to be more.. er formal in terms of case discussion and**

> **current workload. Sometimes we all laugh at things together… as there are always funny incidents. I think it helps for team cohesion.**

Alison also identifies that it tends to be discussion rather then written which has to be factual records. This also raises a question as to differences between informal chatting and reflective practice, but respondents seem to be interpreting reflection as any sharing of practice. Frascuelo refers to team camaraderie and, like Alison, mentions humour:

> **Frascuelo: I think we have an open attitude in social work. We're pretty honest really. That's partly why I like the work. I couldn't do the job without that... closeness really. It's serious too with the values and that, but you can also have a real laugh. Social work can be very funny, the things people do or say…**

However, Frascuelo also refers to honesty which he aligns with the closeness of the team.

Pauline, a student and practitioner talks about relating reflective practice to theory and honesty:

> **Pauline:** …**It helps you to be honest with yourself and use good judgement… helps you focus on work... reading and talking about the work at university has helped me focus…on my work and my assignments.**
>
> J McD: Can you use it then with others?
>
> **Pauline: Oh yes, definitely…You can be honest about whether you think you are doing a good job. You can share things and also at university and on my placement and …at work too.**

Pauline also feels she can transport her ability for reflective practice to different situations. Schön describes reflective practice as an antidote to technical rationality, which focuses on

problem-solving rather than making "sense of an uncertain situation which initially makes no sense" (Schön 1991: 40). This is possibly the way it is viewed by the respondents, but additionally, it offers opportunity for a process of joint analysis. The narrative of respondents suggests that in a work environment it seems to take place more informally, but is no less valued.

4.6.4 Tacit Knowledge

Taylor (2006) reminds us that Schön saw reflective practice derived from the root of practice, rather than theory. Several participants refer to Polyani's theory of 'tacit knowledge' (Eraut 2000, Smith 2003) as relating to the outcome of reflective practice, when theory and skilled practice becomes implicit. Benner (2001) describes how nurses become adept at reading situations and through previous experience learn assess situations quickly. Alison refers to "gut feeling" and then explores how practice knowledge becomes internalised into automatic behaviour:

> **Alison: my… way of working is …based on very much what you could call gut feeling, but I think that's a bit of an underplay. I think that people who work like that tend to be very astute at body language, can interpret intonation of people's voices, being able to just say I think they are saying this, but that's not what I'm actually hearing or reflecting something back. I'm not sure it is a gut feeling, I think they are picking things up as signals through their knowledge…They are using their experience and knowledge …they are using reflective practice in a day to day situation.**

Keith has published work about reflective practice and portfolio writing, stated that it provides opportunity to consider non-verbal cues. This is consistent with Alison's 'gut feeling', essential for social workers who need to understand much of what is not actually verbalised by service users**.**

Jenny gives a good example of how she integrates reflective practice into her daily working life and how she and colleagues reflect implicitly. She describes how it becomes less of an obvious process, but nevertheless, relevant to how she and others operate as practitioners:

> **Jenny: I think as a person I am quite reflective…I would have said that I analyse things too much... there are similar parts to analysis as there are to reflection..I was talking with a colleague yesterday …she didn't feel she was reflective very much at all.... that surprised me because I always thought (she) was really a reflective worker…when we have supervision the discussions that we have about cases shows that she has reflected back on what she's said and what she's done and whether there are better, different ways of doing things...the more I thought about it… I think that 's probably what I do. I don't think I've stopped reflecting, I think I've just stopped recognising that I'm reflecting. … It just becomes part of the way you operate as a social worker.**

Although Jenny does not explicitly talk about theory, it is probable that she and her colleague have internalised theory so that informal discussion incorporates it "part of the way you operate as a social worker"; the essence of tacit knowledge. Andy teaches on the social work degree and feels that to enable it to be used effectively you have to 'objectify'

issues, which requires feedback from others. This therefore presents reflective practice as a process for analysis, consistent with theories on it identified in the literature review. It identifies it as versatile for written or verbal exploration of practice (Brown & Rutter 2006).

4.7 **Summary**

The data presents strong evidence that reflective practice is highly valued and used for personal and professional support with colleagues and managers, as well as with people outside work and alone. The method of communication differs according to its purpose. Social workers keep factual records but are expected to write reflectively for pre- and post-qualifying courses, using reflective practice flexibly when dealing with unpredictable issues on a day to day basis. Although it is expounded as a method of applying theory to practice in a planned way (Thompson 2000), it seems to be used more spontaneously by respondents sharing issues with colleagues, where theory is implicit. Arguably this creates team cohesion, providing mutual identification with the challenges of the role and opportunities for ventilation and support.

4.8 **<u>Conclusion</u>**

This chapter investigated three sub-themes in relation to reflective practice. Initially, it examined issues in relation to values and morality; the core issues which social workers commit to and integrate within reflective practice. The concept of values was widened as respondents described their commitment to an ethical perspective that encompassed their way of life. The chapter then moved on to explore reflective practice in relation to time and place. The research found there were no boundaries to when or where it took place. It was identified that reflective practice is primarily used informally to discuss issues and where respondents need to work through difficulties, as well as for decision-making. However, it is also valued as a process in formal supervision with managers to consider past and future practice, as well as for course written work. Respondents describe using it to share practice issues and as a source of support with others. It was argued that this willingness to share openly enables strong relationships within social work, offering both formal and informal systems to consider practice issues. This develops a social work culture and camaraderie. This involvement of the whole self within a moral framework, the need to interact with others and lack of divide in terms of how the respondents use reflective practice as personal or professional development also links to the overall theme of identity and emotional labour examined in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5

SUB-THEMES - PROBLEM-SOLVING AND DEVELOPMENT: MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

5.1 **Introduction**

It is acknowledged that social workers require "practice wisdom" (O'Sullivan 2005: 221) and ability to develop critical thinking (Taylor 2003: 244). Reflective practice is consequently advocated as a source for self-improvement (Payne 2002). Through analysis of respondents' perspectives on problem-solving, development, monitoring and assessment, this chapter explores whether reflective practice is viewed as linked to adult learning and contributes to change and development. The two sub-themes within this chapter connect to the rationale of reflective practice as conveyed within academic literature and at the centre of Schön's theory, questioning the basis of scientific professional knowledge. Reflective practice presents an alternative which takes into account "complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value-conflict" (Schön 1991: 39). As the literature review identifies, reflective practice is promoted due its flexibility and it draws its basis from experience (Schön 1991, Payne 2002). This chapter analyses the data in relation to those arguments.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first examines reflective practice as a method of problem-solving and development. The way it is presented as an academic model to identify and resolve issues is initially examined. The section then seeks to establish how respondents view reflective practice as a conscious process. The second section analyses respondents' views on the monitoring of improvement in practice through reflection. The section then follows this through to observation of practice and analyses competence-based training in relation to reflective practice. Finally, I examine whether respondents feel that it is assessable.

5.2   **Problem-Solving and Development**

5.2.1   Formulaic Approaches

The literature review explores how reflective practice is presented within theory books for practitioners as a teaching aid. These commonly have a formulaic, recipe–based approach (Moon 2004, Bolton 2006, Brown & Rutter 2006, Knott & Scragg 2007). Moon's (2004: 185) handbook, for instance, offers guidance for practitioners to follow a "map of reflective writing". Jadwiga who teaches reflective practice on PQ courses sees it as a skill and welcomes these approaches, raising this spontaneously. She believes reflective practice is "personal" and therefore difficult to teach otherwise. In the following dialogue

Jadwiga refers to 'frameworks'. 'Frameworks' are discussed within handbooks in terms of reflective practice (see for example Osterman & Kottcamp 1993), but with little clarification about how they actually work:

> **Jadwiga: … What you made me think about …is…having a framework- I thought about …working with those involved in children… it hangs on frameworks doesn't it? … it needs to hang on frameworks…**
>
> J McD: What do think is good about frameworks?
>
> **Jadwiga: I think the good thing is that they are writing and they are coming out with frameworks, because for every framework you come out with for it to be effective you have to really understand what that effectively means.**
>
> J McD: How do you see the frameworks?
>
> **Jadwiga: Well I'm not sure. Its something to hang on to isn't it?**

Despite probing, Jadwiga is unable to explain what she means. This suggests that jargon encouraged by formulaic approaches discourages creativity as terms are sometimes used without clarity of meaning. Balen and White (2007: 200) argue that there is merit in what they call "not-knowing students" who can be developed to critically reflect through their career rather then repeat meaningless phrases. Attard (2008) believes that uncertainty is a positive element, which enables reflective and good practice through self-questioning. Reflective practice has been seen as jargon by some respondents and therefore risks equally superficial regard. However, Hondo welcomes methodical processes for reflection and feels that they lead to creativity. He describes how he uses them through a process:

> **Hondo: ... I suppose it is formulaic, but it is a useful formula to be able to look at your work. I like to think that I can look at my practice critically… It can lead to being creative and innovative.**

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> J McD: How would you use the formula?
>
> **Hondo: Well, I usually follow a system… I identify an incident. I then try and examine what happened, then I look at what my role would require … you know legally and the situation, then evaluate it.**

Hondo believes that he can use it to examine his work critically and applies a formula in practical terms, for example through legislation. His dialogue presents stages quite clearly.

Conversely, Tajim, an academic, feels that formulaic approaches means that students all submit similar work with no originality. Martin, a practice teacher, believes formulas are because of the requirements for competence-based assessment. He argues that these approaches adopt common language so that social workers and corresponding professions can be conditioned to think similarly, providing work acceptable to assessors. The formulas seem reductionist in their strategy, although this argument seems too conspiratorial for academics and the regulatory body. Nevertheless, it is debatable whether formulas create practitioners who can imaginatively reflect. As Martin suggests, they provide processes for students and assessors, but possibly over-simplify complex theoretical approaches. Nonetheless, opinions are divided; for example, Frascuelo feels that there are "buttons you have to press", which formulas help students achieve. Christine feels that a formula is helpful to teach students consistent reflective practice.

The main reason why respondents use these books is to produce portfolio work for PQ. Practitioners feel they need time-saving and facilitative routes to support them to achieve. Keith, who publishes material for portfolio building, recognises criticisms of people like Ixer (1999) who questions whether reflection should be assessed at all, but believes that reflective practice is a complex concept and it is important to help people. He feels that signposting students and practitioners to ask themselves pertinent questions is especially helpful. He does point out however, that the mode of assessment is significant. If students are provided with models for reflective practice, then assessors must also be familiar with them:

> **Keith: it shouldn't be restraining but it should be ample so that we have an idea of what the purpose of the practice is…, we can compare a piece of practice with that piece of practice because we have a template and so I think the reflective practice that I've described, where we're asking people to look at description, then analysis and then reflection, is a good model.**

Keith believes that practitioners think in stages and the model offers consistency. Overall, respondents welcome the academic material which they could use to help them with written work for assessment, but it is debatable if any learning which takes place creates reflective practitioners.

5.2.2   Conscious Practice

Närhi (2002) discusses how development of knowledge has changed; expertise and 'practice wisdom' are increasingly valued and transmitted between practitioners. This is consistent with a postmodernist perspective, which values diversity and individual knowledge, as Applegate (2000) states, "the subjective construction of events takes precedence over objective reality".

Jenny implies that reflective practice becomes an unconscious process with experience:

> **Jenny: …I don't think I've stopped reflecting I think I've just stopped recognising that I'm reflecting.**

Jadwiga, a trainer who assesses students on placement identifies that events can initiate it. This particularly raises whether people reflect consciously or unconsciously and whether it is only the conscious reflections that are relevant. She relates it to consciousness and emotions:

> **Jadwiga: For me it happens all the time. It can happen all the time or…. It depends if I'm thinking consciously about it.   It actually arises in your conscience …when something emotional happens.**

Jadwiga's comments suggest that it is continually happening, but she is only aware of it consciously on particular occasions, perhaps when dealing with difficulties. The

implications of reflective practice from respondents' descriptions are that it can be conscious or unconscious, but it is also a way of internally processing emotive events requiring a 'thinking through' process, alone or with others. Analysis of data outlines how experienced practitioners particularly use it for problem-solving with colleagues, which therefore demonstrates a conscious process, but used spontaneously. For example, Anne describes its use on an everyday basis, but informally:

> **Anne: … but I mean we're a very busy …multi-disciplinary team and …you might turn …round at your desk and say to someone 'Look I've got such and such a case and I thought perhaps we ought to do this'. And they might you know add …bits or perhaps I've done an assessment and been out to see someone and perhaps I'm a bit unsure and feel a bit uncomfortable. Perhaps I need to talk to other colleagues about it, but it's not done in a formal way… I certainly don't pull it to pieces and say 'Oh, erm what approach have I used, what model have I used?'**

It is noted that Anne describes the need to feel reassurance as she is "a bit unsure "and "a bit uncomfortable". She also comments on her lack of conscious use of "approaches" and "models". Reflective practice as a sharing process to discuss issues to allay fear and worry about practice is interwoven throughout respondents' dialogue. Exchanging views on difficult practice situations offers opportunity when there is a need to make decisions and take action with insufficient information (Lizzio & Wilson 2007: 277). However, as Anne and other respondents describe, reflective practice is not used to analyse theory explicitly. Rather than used formally for professional development, reflective practice presents as opportunity to be given feedback on practice. Informal learning can also take place, such

as Alison outlines below. Her dialogue suggests that people returning from visits with service users in a "distressed state" is not unusual. It therefore becomes important to prioritise support:

> **Alison: but I mean in our team we like to share stuff and talk about difficult issues…support each other, I suppose. Like if we are having lunch and we'll….mind you if someone comes in anxious or back (**to the office**) from a visit distressed ….if we can, we just drop everything to listen….or we make sure someone is available...**

Colleagues are used as informal immediate 'sounding boards' for practice issues as part of the culture with a lack of time boundaries, which may include evening telephone conversations. The need for spontaneous discussion was referred to by a number of respondents. Overall, many of the practitioners discussed reflecting in the work situation, but also with friends who were "in the job". Students like Leanne, who was also a practitioner working with young people, referred to her friends, but who were possibly other student social workers:

> **Leanne: When I've done something…. like at work… I can't stop talking about what happened. I ring friends to talk about it and think about it, you know. You're not sure about why you …. Why your feelings are like that- it's just such complex work, isn't it? It's so important and I worry about it, if people are ...you know don't agree with my decisions.**

Leanne used verbal reflection as she needed to keep talking about what happened. Again, she relates it as wanting to discuss issues and feelings.

Exploring metaphor gives insights into the way reflective practice is perceived. A 'learning to drive analogy' was used by five participants, suggesting initial awareness which becomes automatic. Tajim, an academic who had been a practitioner until three years ago links it with the phrase of 'unconscious competent', as does one other academic:

> **Tajim: Consciously it is more difficult when you are asked like I am now to explain why. Because I think it's the bit about being unconsciously competent because I think you get to a point in a job where …for example it's a bit like learning to drive, isn't it. You have to consider every move at first and then it becomes automatic?**

13 respondents describe reflective practice as 'conscious' practice. However, if conscious reflective practice is using explicit theory then most respondents use it unconsciously except when used within formal learning or supervision.

5.2.3   Continual Improvement

The question that these issues raise therefore, is whether it is advocated as a way of continually improving, if it is used as a problem-solving process through analysis of theory as the literature review identifies or whether it is primarily practice analysis. Is reflective practice a term for something that would occur naturally or a combination of all these factors? Alternatively, it may be regarded just as a formula, primarily used to produce work for qualifying and post qualifying training, meeting a practical need for competence-based courses. Overall, respondents are positive towards reflective practice as

a method of developing their practice, however, are vague about how it improves their

performance!

I attempted to establish whether respondents perceive it as a method of problem solving

and if they referred to theoretical material regarding reflective practice. This was drawn

out as part of the discussion, such as in this dialogue with Amir, a practitioner and practice

teacher who used it as a way of developing others:

> **Amir: What do I think of when I hear the term reflective practice? …thinking about what worked well, what didn't work according to my plan and I guess thinking about what I need to do next in order to improve the action, that practice.**
>
> J McD: and when you hear the term used in what context do you tend to hear the term used? Do you use it yourself?
>
> **Amir: I guess I use it. I use it personally. I've been familiar with the term for quite a while. …I use it with my social work students and my colleagues to get them to think about their practice. I try to get them to think about reflection a way of enhancing their learning, understanding… of enhancing their practice.**

A few respondents initially learned about reflective practice in other work situations. Amir

explains that he learned about reflective practice alongside adult learning theory when he

was working in a different job role, he then identified how he could facilitate social work

students to use it. Hondo referred to it as something he studied on a management course

for strategic problem-solving:

> **Hondo: I have heard it used here** *(at college)***, but before that I have heard it on a Human Resources Management course... It was used to look at strategies at**

work. People worked in groups to explore a problem and …..then they described the situation, considered what the positives and problems were and then, then they er.. evaluated it. They then considered ways of working in the future. They worked together to discuss a possible solution.

Students Dawn and Barbara volunteer that they have not read books about reflective practice, using information given to them at college. Despite it being presented as something to do whilst in practice, for many practitioners books on reflective practice are specifically for qualifying and post qualifying course work. Many respondents speak about "doing it for their PQ" or to support students, rather than for themselves. Joe describes how he had "a teaching session" on reflective practice when he did his PQ:

Joe: We had a teaching session on it at the uni when I was doing PQ1. It was quite good, but I forgot it when it came to writing. I couldn't find the hand-outs… I had to re-do my work as it wasn't reflective enough. I got referred then found a book on it, so… I was ok the second time round.

However, to achieve success in his PQ he found a book to help him. Overall, practitioners acknowledge that unless they have to provide written work for courses that they would not read books on reflective practice, but might suggest that students use them.

A final point within this theme is the notion of whether some people reflect more than others; whether it is related to an innate ability for learning. Respondents with different roles mentioned that some reflect more than others, despite reflective practice being presented as essential. Doel and Shardlow (1998: xvii) state:

> "the (reflective) activities develop an ability to learn, which we believe is a necessary condition to develop competence to practise".

Whilst this argues it can develop learning, if people struggle to reflect that could potentially impede further learning for competent practice. Renata, an academic who trains teachers, reveals that she believes that people are more able to reflect if they have innate intelligence:

> J McD: I'm very interested in the link between people's ability for people to reflect or to demonstrate it and their previous learning experiences. Do you think there is a correlation?
>
> **Renata: Yeah I think, and.. but this sounds very behaviourist, but I think that ability to do that is to do with innate intelligence and some innate emotional intelligence as well, but………**

A similar response comes from Amir, a practice teacher who also believes it is to do with intelligence. This may be true of any learning, which reflective practice contributes to. If the ability to reflect is a pre-requisite and reflective practice is so highly valued, then monitoring and assessing reflective practice is important for development and good practice. It can be argued therefore that it is important to establish whether potential practitioners have that ability for reflective learning. According to Schön (1991), reflective practice relies on drawing from experience, suggesting that the more experience you have it becomes an easier process, which might potentially make it more challenging for younger students.

Nähri (2002) identifies that current knowledge is derived from practice experience alongside theoretical knowledge. This implies that, in order for reflective practice to be a problem-solving process, experience need to be harnessed. However, Tajim creates an interesting analogy about experience, as he believes students do not need to have a lot of personal experience:

> **Tajim:.. It's about practice wisdom as well and that can only be achieved through experience. You don't necessarily have to have lived the experience. You don't necessarily have to stand in the middle of the road with the lorry coming at you to know the process. I think we all know probably what would happen.**

He describes transferable skills that students could bring with them at any stage and sees the role of the lecturer as enabling students to make links through reflective practice. These respondents identify that the link between previous learning and reflective practice is primarily experience, although theory may be so internalised it is less definable. Diane has a slightly different perspective drawn from the many students she had practice taught. She feels that reflective practice is a necessary technique regardless of the person's experience, but it is how it is taught that develops the student. She facilitates students to think and discuss reflectively, believing that in practice the technique dissipates because of the factual requirements of report writing. She states that "Yeah, unless you're in uni (versity) you're never going to write reflectively". However, she continues to say that many practitioners utilise reflection as a form of problem-solving, as a solitary activity for self-development and as a personal thinking process.

5.3 **<u>Summary</u>**

This section explored whether respondents find reflective practice enables them to problem-solve and if it is used for personal development. There is no doubt that the respondents find it useful. Overall, however, it is used differently according to need. For everyday problem-solving, particularly for practitioners, it is a process used with colleagues informally and line managers in supervision, as was demonstrated previously. People outside of work also help respondents to consider issues in an informal capacity. For formal written work, respondents find the various formulaic manuals helpful particularly for required coursework, despite the irony in offering a mechanistic approach for something which is meant to be more creative, intuitive and flexible (O'Sullivan 2005). The respondents generally do not correlate previous learning with ability for reflective practice. Nevertheless, learning from practice experience requires exploring theory which most respondents refer to. However, two of the academics/practice teachers feel that innate ability influenced capability of the students to reflect on their work.

5.4   **Monitoring and assessment**

5.4.1 Introduction

This section explores data with respect to the role of reflective practice in monitoring practice performance as well as the monitoring of the use of reflective practice. It then focuses on formal and informal assessment of reflective practice; primarily, its application in qualifying courses. Respondent's narratives address observation of practice and the competence framework. Overall, this places the academic debates in context through exploration of respondents' views.

5.4.2 Monitoring Practice

In order to initiate interviews, I ask every respondent a similar question about what they think reflective practice is. Interestingly, no-one asks if this means verbal or written reflective practice, but all give me an anticipated 'stock' answer primarily stating that it was to reflect on things that they had done in the past in order to improve. For example:

> **Patsy…think of work that you might think about and try to improve on or do better next time. It's a way of looking back at what you've done and thinking about it.**

Although I have no doubt of the sincerity of this answer, I feel people are also telling me what they believe I expect. Further, I was not sure how people saw how it would improve

practice or if that could be evaluated. Respondents do not just relate it to their professional

life, however, but personal experiences and self-development. Other similar answers are:

Sue: That you look back on how you dealt with situations, you've learnt from .. and if you could have done it any differently…so that it's your own self– development.

Christine: Mm looking back at stuff I've done, mm not necessarily just college work, but life skills, just what happens in life. Looking back at things… mistakes I've made … and not necessarily doing them again.

Rectifying mistakes was a common reason for reflecting. Reflective practice as a way of

recalling and monitoring performance is advocated through critical self-reflection (Lizzio

& Wilson 2007). King and Kitchener (2004) distinguish reflective thinkers as those who

provide rational and reliable validation and evidence to support decisions. However, this

raises questions about how these reflective processes are monitored. For example, line

management and peer supervision can be where practice is examined, evaluated through

colleagues providing reflective feedback. Some respondents suggest that observations are

a positive way of monitoring a reflective approach, although most suggested good formal

supervision with a line manager as a monitoring process, as described previously. Jane

includes self-monitoring as well as written work and describes in detail what she feels is

involved:

Jane: …it's the way to develop your knowledge, skills and values …It's about looking in reflection, at the time and after a particular event, on your practice…how you communicated, how you came across, how that person responded, whether you were aware of what you wanted to get from that incident,

that intervention in advance, whether you got some of that, what that process is for the future, how you'd improve, what you'd change.

J McD: How would that be monitored do you think?

Jane: Self-monitoring of course. Good supervision and it's in written work too, obviously.

Jane does teach reflective practice, however, this was not a formulaic response, just a very thorough one reflecting the complexity. Some respondents say that they need to be reflective to represent a case appropriately. This identifies different modes for monitoring practice, through written reports, verbal reports or in supervision as well as through self-analysis. Respondents stipulate how reflective practice contributes to good practice by using phrases such as "I have to really think what I am doing" and "It's useful as a way of evaluating practice". In comparison with other professions, Jane feels that social work staff are well scrutinised because of the system of supervision. Although currently working in social work teaching, her previous job was in a hospice working in a multi-disciplinary team which included nurses, who she feels were disadvantaged:

Jane: It was a case of nursing staff in the hospice that I worked in never having any sort of supervision …. Never had any formal exploration of their practice. Some of that may have been done through workshops, day courses…but in terms of sitting down on a one to one with your line manager… sort of you know social services type of language … that wasn't done. ..this is what the evidence-based practice is about.

Supervision offers opportunity to monitor verbal descriptions of practice and the problem-solving process. Moreover, Jane argues that monitoring happens through feedback from users of the service, although that may be primarily on outcomes of practice, rather then the contribution of reflective practice plays in making practice judgements. However, it could be argued that if appropriate decisions are made then the practitioner must reflect on their work (Payne 2002).

5.4.3 Observation of Practice

One major way to gain feedback is through practice being observed by a third party; a process where a piece of practice is planned with specific performance indicators. Observers may be peers, line managers or practice teachers. Social work qualifying and post qualifying courses require students to have direct observations as part of assessment. In addition, as part of formal assessment, service users may provide feedback. Peel (2005) identifies that literature on reflective practice suggests it is difficult to connect practice through observation. She believes that reflective practices are "soft, personal and individualised" (Peel 2005: 131). Ixer states that when reflecting we do not have the tools to align thought with action (Ixer 1999: 520). Whether it is observable and assessable through observation, he argues, is therefore open to doubt. Wilson et al (2007: 3) describes reflection as "ill-defined" which makes it difficult to identify. Renata, however, is in

teacher education and believes that reflective practice is easy to perceive; discussion and written work that emulates from it contributes to the process:

> **Renata:….if we use observation as an example…, they first have to do a rationale. Why are they doing what they are doing, why are they doing it that way, yeah? So that's at the beginning, so before they've even thought about the action, they are planning the action. And those that do it well, do it meticulously well, you know, plan every step… that's what you're looking for.**

Renata's points about observation offering clear rationale and planning define it as highly reflective, linking reflective practice to performance and observable for verification (Shardlow & Doel 1998). Taylor (2006: 182) describes reflection on observation as, "making sense of the processes, issues and constraints that may manifest in the strategic action".

Peer observations are not used formally in social work practice, although they are in teaching. However, Frascuelo has a view about their merits:

> **Frascuelo: I think peer support, peer observation and peer assessment would be good for reflective practice. Probably in some ways erm ..better because hopefully, you know, you get people telling you stuff you didn't want to tell yourself. And once they've told you that you can't hide it then.**

The notion of constructive criticism by a third party seems accepted in social work, possibly because of requirement within training for direct observation. There is also a

culture of honest evaluation, I would argue due to the necessity for a direct approach with service users. Patrick thought that direct observations were essential to ensure reflective practice was being incorporated. Other respondents feel that it verifies reflective practice addressed in written work. Jane, for example sees it as a "safeguard" of good practice. This is not always an easy process, however; defensive responses to criticism permeates throughout all professions and potentially clashes with a need to be seen as a 'good' social worker expressed by the majority of respondents. However, it is considered by respondents to be a positive method of critique.

5.4.4 Competence and Reflection

One of the main criticisms of current training is emphasis on competence and reflective practice which could be seen to be contradictory terms. Competence-based training has been argued as a process which is mechanistic and reductionist (McDonald 2003, Wilson et al 2007) and the antithesis of reflection (Ixer 1999). The competences require people to reflect on appropriate social work skills on a range of levels (Brown et al 2005, Payne 2002, Ruch 2002, Wilson et al 2007) and are, in all probability, too complex to be scientifically compartmentalised through an inductive approach. These complexities are mirrored through difficulties encountered in monitoring and assessment. Respondents have views about these arguments:

> **Jadwiga: I think it does not really fit with competence really**.

> J McD: …do you think therefore there's a contradiction with a competence model... We call it something else; key roles?

> **Jadwiga: absolutely …and I think you've got to have the reflective practice, the critical analysis … people might as well do NVQ level 2, you know it's not going to work to get a critically reflective practitioner.**

Jadwiga therefore feels that reflective practice lifts the competence level required of social workers. Although recent changes in the degree and PQ have diluted strict adherence to highly mechanistic competences by replacing them with outcome-based requirements for students to address 'key roles', qualifying training primarily remains a competence model. There is still emphasis on evidence-based practice and a scientific approach (Wilson et al 2007). Reflective practice has also been seen as a way of ensuring that values are included and theory has been incorporated into practice. Furthermore, the respondents in this study would have been submitting work prior to recent changes and therefore would have needed to have met competences. Tom however, welcomes both the competence model combined with observation as a learning tool:

> **Tom: I say to students when they're on placement, I'm aware of reflection when I'm saying it. …It doesn't matter if you set up an observed practice and it goes, you know pear-shaped… because the client does something is…. how you deal with that. Sometimes you can learn more from a situation that goes badly then from a situation that goes smoothly and it's about as a social worker you deal with those things. … and explain them in, if you like, an honest way. That's what develops competence. That's what's good about the competence model. Yeah, this could go wrong, but I …acted as a professional and worked with a real situation.**

For Tom it is important that students learn about the 'reality' of the work, which only takes place in practice. The observation does not just assess good work, but can be used as a learning tool. Martin believes it is "part of competence-based assessment" as it can develop analysis of practice. Respondents overall did not struggle with reflection being seen as an antithesis to competence, but identified it as working within the model.

5.4.5 Reflective Practice and Assessment

Ixer (1999) believes Schön's reflective model to be simplistic, as it does not take into account the implications of urgent decision-making necessary in social work. He believes that there are fundamental differences between social work and other professions that Schön (1991) specifies, such as engineering and architecture, as they do not contain the complexity of human issues. He contests the assessment of reflective practice, arguing that students and practitioners do not know what is expected. However, in response to Ixer's criticisms, Brown and Rutter (2006) argue that whether or not we can assess it, we have an understanding of what happens when it is used within the social work context. They view it as facilitating learning through dialogue between different specialist workers with a focus on service user perspectives. Its use is advocated to support interprofessional working, which is currently the practice in many social work teams, as it enables exploration of wider issues for professionals with complementary roles (Balen & White

2007, Karban & Smith 2006). It is interesting therefore to ask respondents whether they think that reflective practice could be assessed:

> **Frascuelo: Is reflective practice assessable? Mm.. I'm not sure to be honest, I suppose it can be assessable. We mark assignments and we try and apply a sort of, an element of objectivity in it as regards criteria I suppose. The question is - can you set criteria with reflective practice? …you can sort of say…you tell us what you've done, you… first …tell us whether it went well or didn't go well second thing, Thirdly, you tell us where things would need to change, or if you think it went perfectly well. Give us your rationale for saying it doesn't need to change. I suppose if you've got those sorts of criteria then it could be assessable.**

Frascuelo applies a formulaic approach to reflective practice for assessing work, which he sees as facilitating objectivity. On the other hand Andy teaches social policy to undergraduates and does not believe it is assessable, as it is primarily about values. Amir and I discuss whether observations offer a way of assessing practice which is based on a consistent and honest approach. In other words are students or practitioners being observed on their "best behaviour" thereby offering a false account of their abilities?

> J McD: Do you think we can assess reflective practice?
>
> **Amir: I think it's really quite a difficult one…likewise assessing people's values. People can choose to be politically quite correct, certainly in supervision and in their interaction with service users and colleagues, particularly as people are being assessed … if we can get them to be truly honest and open about their reflecting then …maybe we could assess, but then maybe then I suppose again its got quite a lot to do with your communication skills….if you have not got the word power...**
>
> J McD: So you're assessing people's ability to write or to speak reflectively not necessarily their ability to practise in a reflective way or as a result of reflection?
>
> **Amir: …yes I suppose you can look at it like that.**

However, most respondents thought it could be assessed. Some people felt that it was the same as "analysis" or being "critically reflective". Reflective practice is believed to facilitate application of theory to practice (Payne 2002, Ruch 2002, Wilson et al 2007). Tracey, a practitioner and lecturer and feels it can be assessed as long as there is clear criteria for assessment. Some interviewees feel that, because emotions and feelings are involved, it was not fair to assess it, believing that responses are individual, therefore difficult for assessors to make judgements. Sue for example felt that reflective practice was personal, arguing, "I don't think you can tell someone what they're feeling is wrong" However, the job requires personal skills and social workers cannot be devoid of emotion in order to make appropriate judgements. Papell (1996: 19) notes:

> "Social work learners must perceive the human situation which they confront in their practice and recognise that their perceptions are filtered through their own thinking and knowing processes, their own emotions and feeling processes and through the way they themselves integrate their own doing or behaving".

As outlined previously, many people had completed their PQ and it was therefore raised by most respondents. A dominant issue surrounding the PQ portfolio was the time it takes to complete. Ellen a busy child protection practitioner with a family struggled to complete it, but felt it had enhanced her practice:

> J McD: You've done the PQ. So you had to write reflectively?
>
> **Ellen: Yes.**
>
> J McD: …Did you find that an easy process?

> **Ellen: I suppose it's time restraints again really. It's an easy process in the sense of I don't mind sitting around analysing what I've done, what I could have or what I could done differently I don't find that analysis difficult. I do find the …time restraints the issue.**
>
> J McD: You've used the term analysis quite a few times. Is that how you see (reflection)?
>
> **Ellen: I think how we do things… I mean all out work is underpinned by, sort of obviously legislation and erm and theoretically based practice. So, yeah, analysis of how we're doing things and why we do things makes it easier to think about what we're doing and why we're doing it.**

Ellen described practice for PQ "sitting around analysing what she'd done", to indicate that that she found this process easy. It was the time to do it that that proved difficult. PQ candidates are asked to recall a piece of practice to explore positive and negative intervention. Assessment is of case analysis, understanding theory to practice and must include values and critical reflection. Practice has to be verified by the line manger, but other than direct observations, the social worker chooses the material, often relating to unaccompanied home visits.

I had opportunity to explore whether respondents feel practitioners are completely truthful about practice in their portfolios. Many feel that complete honesty is not possible, despite commitment to values and morality issues. Students of successful portfolios choose a piece of work which demonstrates sound practice, critically evaluating something within it

for future improvement. This is part of the assessment. It could be argued that writing a

portfolio is a skill in itself, influencing the result:

> **Alison: I think if you are putting work in for assessment to be really honest is impossible, if you want to know the truth …people will just write anything to get through the situation as they need to get their portfolio done. We expect a lot of busy social workers…**
>
> J McD: In terms of PQ.I think there is an issue about assessment. I suppose I am thinking that people are possibly selective…
>
> **Alison: Absolutely. Of course you say you did something which may not be completely accurate, as it's for assessment isn't it?**

However, practitioners are observed in practice for PQ, allowing for some verification. It

could be argued that it is the learning from the reflective process which is valuable.

However, this raises further issues as to whether reflection, with practitioners recounting

their own work, can be assessed objectively. It also begs the question of what is actually

being assessed, whether it is practice, analysis or the ability to write appropriately in the

correct 'genre' within a portfolio or all of these.

It has been established by these respondents that feelings are central to reflective practice.

Nevertheless, Diane feels that you can assess it as analysis:

> J McD: Do you think that it's very subjective and people write about the way they perceive things? Can you begin to judge somebody's feelings?
>
> **Diane: Well, I think you can judge people's learning...thinking about a situation a student was trying to write about... she was telling me how she felt about this situation . …When she wrote it she was …descriptive, when she was telling me**

she was telling me how she felt and I said what would you do next time?... eventually she was able to think about it reflectively.

Andy feels that reflective practice is "non-specific, but linked to assessment in some way".

He offers the following:

Andy: It's a thought process isn't it? It is cognition. We're talking about cognition with all of it, but how do you separate them out, I don't know.

Respondents feel that "it isn't easy" "it's a personal thing and "a bit hard to define". It is generally agreed that it is hard to grasp as a concept. Students often find it difficult, but it is perceived as essential. The only respondents who feel it is not possible to assess it are the pre-qualifying students and they have little if any experience of writing portfolios at this point. Tracey has an interesting analogy as according to her view, we might all be colluding with a false concept:

Tracey: (Students say) "**You're using the words 'reflective practitioner' …what do you mean'? And I've tried to explain it to them. …We don't have a firm…description of what we want ... It's like the emperor's new clothes really. We say it and then they think 'good I've grasped it. Or have I grasped it, yeah I've grasped it, but you can tell when you read it that they haven't. Then we're critical of them…I think it's something that can't be taught in some respects.**

Most respondents felt that regardless of the difficulties, assessment of reflective practice has to be attempted. Service users are too vulnerable for this issue to be ignored. However, the assessor needs to be as transparent as possible in terms of what they are looking for, linked in some way to professional competence and based on a criteria agreed by practitioners, teachers and assessors.

5.5 **<u>Summary</u>**

This section explored the monitoring and assessment of reflective practice. Respondents feel that monitoring takes place through a process of self-awareness induced by reflective practice through peer feedback, supervision and written work. Despite reservations identified by some academic writers about the value of observation of practice to monitor reflection, respondents believe it to be important. Findings suggest that although reflective practice is a hard concept to define, it is felt by respondents that it has to be assessed, as it is central to good social work practice. Reflective practice is seen as personal therefore it may elicit an emotional response, but is still facilitating objective decisions, the quality of which need to be monitored and assessed.

5.6 <u>Conclusion</u>

This chapter explored two sub-themes; firstly, problem-solving and development and secondly, monitoring and assessment. Respondents' views were presented of how they used reflective practice to work through practice issues, for solving problems which arise and for professional development. As reflective practice is recognised as endemic to good practice, the monitoring of both reflective practice and use of reflection to improve practice was examined. A critique was made of observed practice and how competence and reflective practice fit together. Respondents appeared to feel comfortable with

competence and reflective practice despite contradictions outlined in the literature review. The chapter then analysed how or if reflective practice can be assessed and respondents felt it was essential, if difficult on occasions. The next chapter takes the research forward by exploring identity and emotional labour. This links with the sub-themes and presented as the global theme identified within the research.

CHAPTER 6

GLOBAL THEME - IDENTITY AND EMOTIONAL LABOUR

6.1 **Introduction**

This chapter explores the global theme identified from the research. It focuses on personal and professional identity and links to emotional labour. The research establishes that reflective practice is viewed as connected to personal feelings and emotions generated by social work practice or training. Respondents describe how it enables management of emotion in a complex occupation requiring high personal skills and core beliefs of justice as well as theoretical and legislative knowledge. I contend that social work requires emotional commitment, which affects how respondents see themselves within the profession.

The connection between the data, identity and emotional labour was surprisingly unanticipated, therefore initially academic material is introduced which analyses these concepts. Drawing on respondents' narrative, I then explore emotional engagement in social work, identifying how this is managed through reflective practice. I simultaneously demonstrate how respondents relate this to their identity. Emotional dissonance is explored which is recognised as a result of managing the emotions. An

examination is made as to whether there is any gender differential in how emotions are expressed and demonstrated in the research. Finally, I argue that the social work environment is set within a culture which influences behaviour and attitudes.

6.2 **Identity and Emotional Labour**

People derive identity from their status and role within organisations and society, to experience life as having meaning as part of a community (Wenger 1998). This can include identity within a profession, reinforced by norms and values within employing organisations, which Kärreman and Alvesson (2001: 60) identify as a "shared cultural universe". Reinforced by the community of practice in whatever role the social worker resides, this study demonstrates how respondents' refer to feelings and identity, presented through narrative and personal accounts (Somers 1994). The diversity of the respondent group provides varying perspectives and is a rich source for knowledge (Van der Zee et al 2004).

All employment requires management of emotion, but during the last twenty five years it has been recognised as prevalent within the workplace. 'People work' specifically involves emotions and feelings as part of the professional role (Brotheridge & Grandey

2002, Mann 2004, Toerien & Kitzinger 2006). Much of the literature on emotional labour draws on Arlie Hochschild's work, initiated by research that she published in 1983. She defines emotional labour as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild 1983: 7).

She analyses how flight attendants and debt collectors use emotional skill through managing people as part of their work. In particular, she equates demonstration of particular emotions with ability and skill to carry out specific job roles, such as smiling at customers or, in an example of debt collectors; getting angry. She identifies 'rules' surrounding emotions and in personal situations, for example expressing happiness or grief at weddings or funerals. Emphasis within Hochschild's research is on emotion required within the workplace, usually in interaction with customers. She aligns this with profit and capitalism and states, "the emotional style of offering the service is part of the service itself" (Hochschild 1983: 5). Her description of emotional labour is expanded within this chapter. Building on the concept of 'managed' emotion as a skill alongside human capital, it is the control and management of emotion through reflective practice which emerges from the study.

It can be argued that most jobs contain emotional labour, as all work has emotionality within it (Battistina 1984). Within the majority of occupations, people have colleagues, managers, customers and staff to liaise with. According to Fineman (1993: 1):

> "Emotions are within the texture of organizing. They are intrinsic to social order and disorder, working structures, conflict, influence, conformity, posturing, gender, sexuality and politics"

Consequently, as all employment involves emotional labour, it has been identified as being within managerial control (Fineman, 1993, Putnam & Mumby 1993). Other studies involving people work and emotional labour focus on the emotional demands of specific occupations and include a number of different roles such as nurses (James 1992), cashiers (Rafaeli & Sutton 1990), counsellors (Mann 2004) and beauticians (Toerien & Kitzinger 2007).

The research identifies that becoming a social worker is influenced by respondents' personal awareness of their skills which are then developed during training. Payne (2004: 140) argues that social workers develop identity by building up experience "following a pathway into an occupational space". They amend their practice and thus self-perception according to their specialism. As students this involves personal change through placements until they settle on a chosen area of work. This research identifies that this process is reinforced by emotional commitment. The adjustment needs to be

personal as well as professional. The following dialogue between Leanne and I outlines how becoming a social worker affected her use of reflective practice to think through issues:

> **Leanne: I've found it useful as a social worker talking about problems. I do still…. feel a bit uncomfortable you know talking about er things.... and discussing things does trigger…. then I write it down. It helps though to talk as it means you can be more objective. This work is about talking to other people. It's not black and white though is it? People are complex things. There are lots of elements in it. So you can write down theories and that but it's not like that. You don't just go out and use task-centred theory because …you don't know what to expect or how people will react.**
>
> J McD: So you find reflective practice useful in that process?
>
> **Leanne: Oh yeah, …It depends on where you are as a person. You couldn't get into this career if you couldn't take….. if you couldn't deal with it.**
>
> J McD: So, reflection……?
>
> **Leanne: So, reflection is perhaps working through stuff before you work with service users. Personal issues on something can be a blockage. If you don't reflect as a person, personal experiences can get in the way.**

Leanne finds reflective practice useful because of the unpredictability of the people she works with, as Schön (1991) argues. However, primarily she uses it to discuss issues because of what she has to deal with, describing needing to work through personal experiences before she can practice appropriately and apply learned theory. It enables her to unblock her "personal issues". However, there is also a suggestion that personal issues had led her into the profession. Her comments suggest that she is "dealing" with these both as a social worker and a person through reflective practice. Her comment

that "it depends where you are as a person" suggests that practising social work is connected with a person's emotional state.

Hochschild (1983) contends that emotional labour is derived from two main ways of managing feeling. The first is more controlled, which she calls "surface acting" through body language such as a deliberate shrug. The second derivative she terms "deep acting", requiring feeling to be ingrained, but which potentially has detrimental effects on workers (Hochschild 1983: 35-39). Arguably, social work practice uses both. Contact with the public requires excellent communication skills, but there is integral need for deeper emotional values; belief in justice and equality and identity with the professional code of ethics. Also, it is necessary to be able to deal with conflict and aggression. Bolton and Boyd (2003: 291) suggest employees approach emotional management within two structures; firstly "prescriptive" emotion management whereby employees incorporate a pattern of demonstrated emotion which the organisation promotes and secondly; "philanthropic" emotional management, whereby the employee offers more than is required by the organisation. I contend that emotional labour within social work incorporates both those structures. Central to emotional skills it incorporates professional identity, but it also involves philanthropy and personal commitment.

6.2.1 <u>Managing Feelings</u>

Alongside colleagues in other caring professions, social workers need to deal with their own feelings as well as being on the receiving end of other's emotions. Hochschild (1983: 11) in her study of flight attendants relates it to the "handling of other people's feelings and our own" Working with people, often in crisis states or during life-changing situations, is a highly emotional activity. Safia identifies through reflection that her feelings can affect how she performs:

> **Safia: sometimes when you're reflective, personally …I take into account what else has gone on that day, how I was feeling. It was definitely an emotional thing – how people had affected me. I need to be emotionally ok as the work is so….so well emotional really. . it might make a difference to… how I respond or react to somebody.**

Working with people centres on relationships, which can raise emotions from previous experiences. Safia also believes she has to be "emotionally ok" to cope with the work. Jenny, a team manager sees her role as developing others and views reflective practice as enabling staff to express feelings to enhance performance. Diane speaks of reflective practice as a process for dealing with feelings that arise with difficult and complex issues. Both use reflective practice to identify those feelings, but interwoven in their dialogue are feelings generated by experiences and the need to regulate these to complete the social work task:

> **Jenny: Reflective practice? I think it's multi-faceted …when you look at it. ..if**

you look at the reflective practice … you use in supervision... my own feeling is I quite like to use the 'feelings' model, how did you feel at this time, what made you feel like that, why did you choose to do that?....It's about how they feel… which depends on ethical issues and values and past experiences.

Diane:… what I always say to students in that… reflect on your work. A student…met a schedule one sex offender for the first time and …she was …thinking of her child. And I was saying to her… those things are really important to remember, because it's when you don't remember that you don't have those feelings any more, that's when I see dangerous practice happening... On the other hand, if those feelings are overwhelming you can't do the job.

Exploring personal feelings is therefore part of the process of performing well in the role to avoid "dangerous practice". The need for balance is also recognised, as emotions are needed to apply good, safe practice but too many are "overwhelming". Brigid, a student practitioner on placement, feels that you have to keep control of your emotions, as involvement of personal feelings could lead to difficulty:

Brigid:... maybe a bit more feelings, maybe go into your personal (life) 'cause even though you have feelings in your professional….. You'll see things that aren't you know, not nice, basically. But, you've got to keep a lid on your feelings, as best you can, otherwise you might… internalise things . You can't be cold, but I don't think you can be any good if you're emotionally…unstable as well.

Brigid was also referring to a balance between having too many feelings; "keeping a lid" on them and not having any; "being cold". Having too many, Brigid suggests, can present as "emotionally unstable", which can also happen if the things that are "not nice" are internalised. This need for emotional balance is referred to by many of the respondents.

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Whilst labour can be identified as effort (Kemper 1990), I interpret the term (emotional) 'labour' as paid work. Despite theories on motivation (Adair 2006, Mullins 1999), a paid job can be perceived as specifically undertaken to secure income. I contend that within social work there is no easy divide. Rather than 'you are what you eat', the respondents in this research are largely seeing themselves as 'you are what you do'! This relates to background, socialisation and personal identity as well as values, attributes and intelligence. A number of respondents expressed concern that because the work is all-absorbing, needing to be congruent with personal perspectives, it encroaches into their personal lives. The connection to emotional labour in social work is not just for commercial gain as Hochschild (1983) identifies with flight attendants, but is a response to "moral emotions" (Haidt 2003: 852); emotions which are altruistic. The focus on values, particularly individual empowerment, is the culture and ethos of the profession internationally (Healy 2005, Mullaly 1997, Payne 2005) and professed by social work educators. Hondo was previously a headteacher in Zimbabwe, entering the UK as a political prisoner. I was asking him about 'ownership' of feelings. However, Hondo expressed views about who should enter the profession, due to personal experience:

> J. McD: Some professions have argued about the ownership of feelings and that reflective practice is part of that …almost to tell people what to feel. What do you think?
>
> **Hondo: I think that you need to be caring to do the work and that it must be,.. expected. I have seen situations where people are in the work and do not care …. in my own country and it was not good. It must be …..you need to be able to show that you work well with … the service users. I think it is right for people to do that and that you must be...to come into the work".**

Hondo referred to the need to care and implied a negative alternative. Caring as a pre-requisite to enter the profession is implicit in much of the respondents' dialogue.

6.2.2 <u>Managing Others' Emotions</u>

Emotional labour skilfully involves assessment of others' emotions in addition to managing the self (Wharton & Erickson 1993). I contend that this is particularly important when working with the public in situations where they there might be anger or conflict, especially because of what is represented in terms of authority. It therefore particularly affects those in public service professions (Goleman 1996). Lack of ability to demonstrate emotions and cope with them appropriately is a contra-factor for entering social work. Seymour and Sandiford (2005) describe how there are two key approaches taken by employers in terms of emotional labour; either moulding employees behaviour or drawing on employees' existing skills. In social work both are employed. Social work students are selected because of their attitudes, values and intrinsic character traits.

> "An ethic of care draws on altruistic values held by a professional who is usually selected for training precisely because those traits are already evident in his or her personality" (Dominelli 2004: 72).

The requirement for social workers to be deemed 'suitable' (GSCC 2002, 2007a, 2009) and regulation through registration raises questions about ownership of this emotional capital, currently lying with the Department of Health. Once on the course of study, the

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focus on most social work undergraduate programmes initially is on communication and ethics. This facilitates self-examination and exploration of personal experiences, shaping attitudes and examining values before students can be allowed to practise. This therefore means that students will be expected to engage and emotionally identify with the profession. These processes attempt to ensure there is not a misuse of power by social workers (Shardlow 2002). However, this also risks over-involvement, which has to be monitored. According to respondents such as Safia, reflective practice aids workers in that process:

> **Safia: I mean I find reflective practice helpful, just for myself just in life… I'll go home on the train and sit and think about how the day went and how I feel about it…it's back to…how much of the personal you allow to cross over…**

Safia views the separation of the personal and professional as something she can control. However, many respondents feel that it is difficult, reflected in respondents' dialogue, for example Sue, who when reading reflections in her diary realised how her personal life affected her professional development:

> **Sue: When I look back at things that I've written when looking at my diary last year, I can see how things in my personal life have affected how I've recorded my reflective practice or what I have learnt in class and how my studies have been going. I can see the connection … you can see how stuff in their own personal life has affected how they're written. I mean I don't think it should but …**

Sue's comment demonstrates that she even has a moral perspective on that; that it should not encroach, but does!

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6.2.3 Emotional Anxiety

Power is defined by the legislative and decision-making role, central to social work intervention (Dominelli 2004). However, this can cause emotional anxiety (Miehls & Moffat 2000) when 'off-duty', about professional decisions. Leanne started the social work course two years previously and was concerned about the responsibility for "vulnerable people". She found reflective practice useful to work through issues, potentially dealing with the "swampy lowlands" of uncertainty referred to by Schön (1991: 42) inherent in the work:

> **Leanne: …You can't be martyr to people or anything. You can only work with you know, aims and er objectives and er…offer solutions to enable them to change. You have to think to yourself 'What am I doing here?' It's not just my job, there's a lot of people involved. You need clarity ..a clear role.**
>
> J MCD : Do you see reflective practice as part of that process?
>
> **Leanne: Yeah, it's important as you are working with vulnerable people and you can feel vulnerable yourself too…. You need to put a lot of yourself into the work I'm a lot more chilled out now than was … because I've had a chance to think about…. the past and that. I can handle emotions a lot better and I'm happy.**

Her dialogue expresses her own vulnerability particularly at "handling emotions" and need for a process of "aims and objectives" and "clarity" about her role. Concern is expressed by a few student respondents who feel that they need to reflect to know how to "handle things" or "deal with challenging people". Violence and abuse is regarded as an 'everyday occurrence' in social work practice and according to the Department of Health in 2001

over half of staff within the social care sector experience an attack or threat of one at least once during their working life (Denney 2005: 24). However, despite challenges, respondents describe how they reflect on their skills as practitioners in making appropriate decisions. Alison describes the emotional effect of decision-making. Her comments demonstrate how difficult it is to 'switch off' in private time. Furthermore, the factors which cause the anxiety are continuing as families are more vulnerable out of office hours:

> **Alison: Erm.... Say on the duty team there's something, a difficult duty calls comes on a Friday and you find you leave it over the weekend, what's going in their head is – if I'd have gone out and sorted it Monday would I have treated it differently? Would I have decided the situation was so dire that I'd have seen it as a child protection issue, a case of neglect, whereas she's thinking well, it's Friday, her own child was overdue at the childminder. She decided it wasn't any worse than it was the day before that it could wait, but then she'd been sweating all weekend.**

Alison exemplifies the competing demands of professional and domestic life when so much is at stake. Responsibility within the job is interwoven through many interviews with respondents, regardless of role. Joe, a practitioner working with adults describes how he feels responsible for others even when off duty "as my decisions affect people's lives".

6.2.4 Emotional Dissonance

Not all respondents were positive about the use of reflective practice in working through difficult issues. The following practitioner presented a cynical perspective, feeling that social workers have lost their political drive:

> **Tracey: Reflective practice is a jargon term and a process of mitigation. The employers want what the government and the Department of Health think they should have…. . we're lone workers…we're quite vulnerable. I suppose it is a way of analysing things. I'm really good at reflection, but what you think is not always what you'd say in court reports. I would argue in the current social work curriculum that we're just spoon feeding social workers to do the job and that really worries me. They need to challenge more …politically.**

Considering the complexities that students are training to deal with, the term 'spoon feeding' is surprising and Tracey is the only respondent who presents that perspective. Arguably, social workers as a homogenous group identify themselves as attempting to enable others to empower themselves and therefore see themselves in a political role, recognising structural as well as individual inequality (Dominelli 2004, Healy 2005, Payne 1997). This almost certainly develops a bond through a collective ideology, creating a strong social work identity beyond 'office' boundaries. It is reinforced and advocated by social work academics and professional bodies who argue for humanitarian philosophies underpinning the work (BASW 2002, GSCC 2002, Mullaly 1997, Payne 1997). Anne is a practising child protection social worker who regards herself as different from many of her friends and family because of her values. This creates emotional discord and isolation but perhaps means the bond with other practitioners is potentially stronger:

> **Anne: You know I do sometimes think too much and I wonder if I should leave it alone. I do it all the time, I can't help it… people sometimes find it difficult. You know friends, family members- the things I believe …They say I do it too much, think too much about stuff you know and I sometimes am made to feel uncomfortable about that…**

This feeling of being different from people who are not in social work was commonly expressed. Anne describes not being able to 'help it', not being able to 'leave it alone' because of her 'beliefs', which she obviously expresses publicly. The notion of 'thinking too much about things' has also been mentioned by others. Pauline aligns reflection to being integral within the work "for their sake" suggesting a safeguard process for service users. Her description suggests she regards it as a "tool of the trade", but also ingrained within herself:

> **Pauline: I've always been the sort of person that's reflective because I've always worked with elderly care …from being young... but I always think that erm, you know , it's an important part of yourself, you know to be able to do that, but more so if you're going to work with people- you need to make sure… you know for their sake. It's a part of that work, the same as other parts of work that are important.**

However, this emotional commitment may also take its toll. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 89) argue that the employment of emotional labour may trigger emotional dissonance "and impair one's sense of authentic self". Mann and Cowburn (2005), as well as others (Hochschild 1983, Theodosius 2006) are concerned with emotional dissonance caused when required emotions do not match those felt by the individual. Their research relates to mental health nurses dealing with similar issues to social work and share potential for repression of personal feeling. Alternatively, Gray (2002) argues for social workers to be in touch with their emotions as an integral part of their work. Exploring

child protection work in inner London, he relates it to accuracy within the assessment

process for early successful intervention in families.

The social work practitioner may contain feelings in recognising and abiding by ethical

protocol. The obvious example is not losing one's temper, regardless of provocation,

which may also lead to emotional dissonance. Patrick chose to disclose a difficult situation

in his previous mental health role, when he went to visit a service user who had committed

suicide. The loss of a service user in this way inevitably has deep emotional affects on a

practitioner who may feel irrationally responsible:

> **Patrick: I think reflective practice is part of our profession, very much so... I think that we have a professional basis…to work from and professional standards. But I think we invest ourselves emotionally in the work that we do. Be it an ASW on duty at 1 o'clock at A and E, or going round to visit one of your clients on a Monday morning when he has just hanged himself on the Saturday night, you know. These emotionally take it out of you and this is not often looked at effectively or appropriately.**

Collins (2006) examines the phenomenon of dealing with social work students who

display mental health issues, linking potential mental illhealth to stress. Research

conducted by Brotheridge and Grandey (2002: 31) identifies a clear correlation between

occupations which have a high level of emotional labour and stress, stating that those who

engage in 'deep acting' are most likely to experience higher stress levels. They found in

keeping with other research (Brookings et al 1985, Mann 2004, Savicki & Cooley 1994)

that those who had to hide negative emotions such as fear and anger were most prone to 'burnout' or emotional exhaustion. Research conducted by Maslach and Jackson (1981) nearly thirty years ago measured the existence of this phenomenon and argued that such awareness should lead to better understanding to reduce its occurrence.

Within this research these issues are exemplified by exploring reflective practice as a process of mitigation. James (1998: 15) in 1989 wrote about her experiences observing care in a hospice, defining it as, "work involved in dealing with other peoples' feelings, a core component of which is the regulation of emotions". She came to the conclusion that the emotional involvement within care work could be likened to physical labour, without receiving recognition. Smith (1992: 8) also equates caring with emotional labour with the "traditional image of smiling nurses". She believes there are similarities between nurses and flight attendants as they are both required to display emotion regardless of inner feelings. Battistina (1994) also associates emotional labour with self-discipline to do 'dirty' jobs. That could be taken literally, such as in physical caring or metaphorically as the social worker faces anger and abuse from people resistant to intervention. This may generate a number of emotions including fear and anxiety (Denney 2005).

6.2.5 <u>Boundaries</u>

Respondents refer to 'boundaries', presented as militating against emotional involvement. As well as providing insurance against emotional dissonance for the practitioner, maintaining a professional stance also protects service users from exploitation and powerlessness (Doel & Shardlow 1998). For example, teaching students to recognise that making a relationship with parents is important in child protection and working in partnership is stipulated within legislation, but the task must be clearly centred on the child. In written reflections, students commonly identify the authoritative role as 'oppressive'. This is a difficult ethical issue for students to grasp, when in other situations choice and empowerment are central to social work. Reflective practice as a process can be helpful in order to remain 'professional' and objective. Patsy identifies reflective practice as a way towards objectivity:

> **Patsy: …You're just going to have to be very clear about your professional line in building relationships.**
>
> J McD: And do you think that reflective practice will help you with that?
>
> **Patsy: Yeah. I think I'm going to get better at it. I think reflective practice will work because if you feel yourself being dragged into it you need to be saying to yourself well why am I, why have I got so involved in this and finding a way to deal with it.**

Elias (1956) described the need for a continuum between detachment and involvement, although he also identified this as problematic and requiring balance. Building on Elias' views Hernes (2002: 103) describes boundaries as establishing "social limits" that can

influence identity in organisations. This is seen by respondents as necessary in order not to confuse the role with personal feelings or relationships. It is taught through the use of reflective practice throughout the social work qualification (McBride 1998), as demonstrated in the following quotation:

> **Maggie: I think erm professional boundaries are really important. I think reflection …is important because the nature of our work is emotional and it's an emotional job. You see and hear horrific things. You see and hear things that you think to yourself (Gasp) that child shouldn't be there… Your gut instinct is, remove the child from that situation…. Sometimes what's good enough for me might not be good enough for somebody else…so you've got tough decisions to make and it's all about your reflections being your deliberations.**

This need for objectivity is expressed in the language of "professional boundaries", but is also referring to emotional protection. This is interwoven in decision-making and professional judgement, which cannot be removed from emotion, as it is dealing with emotive situations. Seymour and Sandiford (2005: 549) dichotomise 'emotion rules' between those expected by an individual's employer and those which are endemic within the employee. The former may require being subjected to training or learning processes, supporting Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory on "communities of practice", identifying that learning is a social process, developed through communication with others. Interestingly, when discussing practice, certain euphemisms are used by some social work respondents to create objectivity when describing emotionally charged situations such as "concerning", and "threshold levels", consistent with studies of nurses (Smith 1998). These issues are complex, but as described there are no doubts as to the stress levels that

people in employed caring roles suffer from (Erickson & Ritter 2001, Hochschild 1983, Lewig & Dollard 2003, Mann 2004, Rafaeli & Sutton 1987). Reflective practice can provide a coping strategy.

6.2.6   Personal and Professional Identity

There are different reasons why people choose social work as a career (Payne 2002: 128-131), nevertheless, being a social worker cannot be confined to working hours. This research demonstrates that social work is expressed as an activity connected to the essence of identity. For example, Patsy, a social work student feels concern that the job could affect her identity and uses reflective practice as a personal safeguard:

> **Patsy: I feel that social work values sort of, are my own values anyway. I don't want to judge people, I want to be able to help people or enable them to help themselves…. The other thing that worries me about the job is that it is going to take over my life…that I'll go home and take everyone's emotional baggage with me. And it'll come too much …. I reflect on.. how I can prevent it...**
>
> J McD: And do you think that reflective practice will help you with that?
>
> **Patsy: Yeah. I think I'm going to get better at it. I think reflective practice will work because if you feel yourself being dragged into it you need to be saying to yourself' well why am I, why have I got so involved in this and then find a way to deal with it.**

The above example again demonstrates it affects identity, not only professionally, but in Patsy's personal life. The nature of being 'over-involved' in the work arises in a number

of interviews. However, people identify themselves with others through a sense of belonging (Ashforth & Humphrey 1993). Flam (1993: 73) states that fear of loss of identity may increase people's 'loyalty' to organisations and describes this as having "organisational morality". There is a further dimension in social work that the media has isolated the profession as a societal scapegoat (Dominelli 2004). Consequently, there is strong social work identification as a source of inclusion, confidence and protection as well as through sharing perspectives. A major issue emerging is how the work directs private behaviour. Brigid, a student on the degree expresses significance of links between vocational choice and personal identity and that has cost her relationships:

> **Brigid: It has drifted me away from some people, but I think that's natural progression if you're going off on your own. The type of work … It's not easy because you do sort of mature and progress and sort of move away …because it is, it's not just a job. It's not just a job. It's not just a job, is it? It's not just a job. It's part of you, I think. It's part of who you are.**

The repeated phrase "it's not just a job" makes it clear that personal professional boundaries are blurred, reinforced by her statement "It's part of who you are". Brigid has an aunt who is also in social work and she describes how they have had to negotiate separating the personal and professional, although rarely succeed.

Social workers also encounter frustration through lack of resources for service users. This may tap into feelings about letting people down, and feeling bad at their job, or even awareness of what they have in comparison:

> **Stella: I find it really difficult.. you know when I make an assessment and the resources aren't there. I think we've got out priorities wrong. You have to …be careful what you say to service users...not to promise anything. I find it frustrating and er I try to ..not to become …het up about it ..although that's difficult when you see who some people live… how little .. they have.**

Reflective practice it seems, is part of working though all those emotions which may be internalised. Tom, an academic describes how he works with students through reflection to find what he calls "threshold levels" to enable them to deal with emotional issues and facilitate objectivity. In his interview he argues that the work should not be about personal feelings as you are working for an organisation:

> **Tom: I suppose reflection is about personal feelings because… we've go to explain to the students. …before they go out on placement. We talk about …thresholds of intervention and they're quite … quite low for students who are inexperienced but higher for practitioners because over time your threshold levels get higher and higher. That's about how you deal with your feelings and not feeling it's a personal thing. It's not a slight on you because a situation's gone a certain way. You represent an agency.**

Tom mentions on a few occasions that social work students need to be aware that they represent an agency. This sense of rationality may also be seen as a form of self-protection. Controversially, the emotions involved in social work and the reflection which sits alongside it may also be a way of controlling the process, possibly to maintain the

power or emotional equilibrium in difficult situations, but making it more possible to predict the outcome (Ashforth & Humphrey 1993, Lewig & Dollard 2003: 368). Parkin (1993: 173) refers to social workers needing to put on a "professional front" as a source of strength for clients. Jane who teaches reflective practice feels that students go through a transition of identification with the profession as part of the learning process. She does not see separation between personal and professional identities because of the value base and motivation to do the job.

This research specifically explores individual's perspectives of reflective practice in relation to social work rather than within organisations. Goleman (1996) identifies people with such skills as having emotional intelligence, which he argues are essential within the workplace and which should become progressively valued. Emotional labour in social work therefore is not a forced process; it represents endemic skills and attitudes, which cannot be separated from the role and, with the addition of knowledge, are developed to carry out the task. Tom discusses his expectations from students in terms of a 'professional head' which he believes removes the work from the personality of the worker:

> **Tom: ..from a child protection point of view I want everyone to act in the same way. And the danger about bringing in too much personality …of course we're human beings and of course we have to be human when we're dealing with**

people…. You've got to get them to put a professional head on when they're going into a situation…

However, this does not take into account that the same personality Tom refers to are required skills and, by not acknowledging "too much personality", this might negate them. In fact, Tom is referring to being too emotional and involved as "human beings".

Hochschild (1983: 150) recognises the role that social workers play in terms of emotion in their work "Psychiatrists, social workers, and ministers, for example, are expected to feel concern, to empathize, and to avoid too much liking or disliking". However, I argue that Hochschild offers a cynical, over-simplistic perspective supported by these research findings. Her view of social workers needing to show 'concern' does not incorporate the complexity of assessment processes which social workers undertake and dilemmas presented by child protection or mental illhealth. Concern is not the major issue, but understanding of the legislative role and consideration of paramount needs in multi-faceted situations. As acknowledged by Bolton and Boyd (2003), her theory suggests that the worker has no power or control to demonstrate emotion within professional relationships. However, social workers make the decision that they wish to be in an occupation which involves particularly challenging situations, recognising those skills in themselves. This suggests choice as well as control and is true of other employed caring

roles. Teachers complain that administration removes them from contact with children, for example (Battistina 1994). For social workers, there can be a sense of pride and satisfaction in working with challenging people. Respondents frequently talked about 'having always been a reflective person', 'knowing that they wanted to work with people'. Others talked about analysing a lot and Jenny laughingly told me that her friends were not surprised about her choice of profession as she was always caring about disadvantaged people. Patsy among others told me she had always wanted to come into social work despite the challenges. These skills and traits are therefore deeply rooted to identity within the profession.

6.2.7 <u>Emotional Labour and Gender</u>

Shields (2002: 6) identifies emotion from different sociological and psychological perspectives, identifying that phenomenologically, emotion is embedded in the relationship between the person experiencing the feelings and the situational context but also that emotional responses are socially and culturally 'gendered'. Discussing or displaying emotion is shrouded in gender bias (Hutson–Comeaux & Kelly 1999, Shields 2002), particularly the way emotion is verbally and physically expressed (Erickson & Ritter 2001, Hochshild 1983, Hutson-Comeaux & Kelly 2002, James 1992, Letherby 2003). When conforming to expectations, women showing anger and men showing

distress are less acceptable within western society (Letherby 2003). If women appear to 'lose it', particularly in public they maybe labelled 'unstable' (Hochschild 1993). Men have more difficulty in expressing positive emotion and are expected to control their emotions publicly (Shields 2002). Consequently, emotional response has been marginalised, argued by feminist writers that this is due to structural sexism perpetuated by managerial and scientific theory which expounds 'rationality' and positivism (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000, Letherby 2003, Putman & Mumby 1993).

Differences between individuals due to gender, race, sexuality and disability as examples are relevant in the way people communicate and feel about each other (Fineman 1993). Such characteristics may be a cause of discrimination (Healy 2000, Payne 1997, Thompson 2001). Individual difference therefore remains highly relevant within the social construction of the development of knowledge (Martin 2000: 194). Hochschild identifies emotional labour as gender discrimination. She noted that about half of women working had jobs involving emotional labour:

> "…As traditionally more accomplished managers of feeling in private life, women more than men have put emotional labour on the market, and they know about its personal costs" (Hochschild 1983: 11).

Definitions of occupational skill are highly gendered (Cockburn 1989 in CLMS 2000b, Dex 1985, Hearn 1993, Parkin 1993) and work defined as 'women's work' such as 'caring' falls into this category despite sophisticated training for teaching, nursing or social work. These could be viewed as extensions of historically defined roles in looking after others (Payne 2005, Smith 1992). However, there is a lack of recognition of the skills involved (Toerian & Kitzinger 2007, Walsh 2006). Bolton (2001: 85-86), for example identifies nurses as "accomplished social actors", "emotional jugglers" and "multi-skilled emotion managers". Payne (2006: 16) however, believes that evaluating emotional skills alongside other skills in the workplace is "dangerous". He equates emotional labour to being able to communicate politely, believing that most people can perform the tasks, as the skills are no more complex than other daily activities. Payne (2006) does concede that nurse's work can be demanding emotionally. Arguably, Payne's arguments support a patriarchal perspective demonstrating little understanding of the complexity of activities which constitute emotional labour and the intellectual skills which marry with 'emotional' work.

Social workers, alongside other caring professions are mainly, but not exclusively, women (Denney 2005, Lovelock et al 2004, Perry & Cree 2003). Proportionally representative of the social work community, the majority of respondents are women. Whilst feelings are

described, openness may be influenced by messages of 'professionalism' given during training which argues for managing emotions publicly (Kramer & Hess 2002). Practitioners or academics interviewed may be hindered due to their role. However, during interviews I found that women were generally freer with discussion around emotion when describing their work. Further, the perception of female lecturers was that they experienced a gender difference in students in the ability to reflect on feelings. Renata said that women "do it better then men" adding "its men that really struggle with it". Jane recognised social conditioning of gendered roles, but felt it was an issue when teaching social workers. She was referring to keeping logs to deal with feelings:

> **Jane:… Maybe it's a gendered thing .. it seems to be, well I think it is a gendered thing or can be… because, I think writing a diary, …exploring your emotional self, being introspective, is something that is largely something that is encouraged by girls rather than boys… in childhood – the secret diary. The whole erm ….it's ok for girls to express emotions, it's not ok for boys to. The social construct of masculinity femininity begins at an early age.**

Outside factors such as becoming a parent may make a difference to emotion. As a practitioner, Frascuelo felt that, before having children, he separated work from his home life, unlike his female colleague, but somehow parenting changed his attitude to the work and initially he became more emotional:

> **Frascuelo: I remember …a female colleague saying that she found it more difficult to work with.. certain offenders …once she became a parent. I wasn't a parent and I thought to myself well, you know, I can't see that because you just detach yourself from that professionally…. But… as soon as I became a parent I went**

> **through exactly the same emotions…however, it kind of wore off and I dealt with them as I began to see that they needed to be treated like other service users…**

However, Frasceulo related this situation as though from a distance, indicating that he "dealt with" the feelings. This can be contrasted with Maggie's view of child protection, which is a more emotive description:

> **Maggie: the nature of our work is emotional and it's an emotional job. You see and hear horrific things. You see and hear things that you think to yourself (Gasp)… that child shouldn't be there, it needs be …taken out you know and …. Your gut instinct is , you know pick the child up… or remove the child from that situation.**

Maggie then goes on to talk about reflective practice being part of your "deliberations" to ensure the right decisions are taken through objective judgement. The focus on gender is not intended to be hierarchical or to explore justice. It is recognised that there are differing perspectives between practitioners, affecting their use of reflective practice. Hearn (1993) discusses how men are not expected to demonstrate emotion in the workplace. Although often behaving differently from women, this does not make them less emotional overall. There is a socially constructed definition of 'emotion' which excludes anger or annoyance. This potentially influences the way men think, work, the way they are perceived and can affect the support they receive. Shields (2002) argues that emotion is shown by both genders, but is represented differently and misinterpreted. Reflective practice has overall been identified as 'helpful' for people dealing with their emotions in relation to practice

and during training, where a great many personal issues are raised and examined and should be accessible to both genders.

Men who enter the caring professions may be deemed to have 'feminine' qualities (McLean 2003). It is therefore interesting to note if there are discernible differences when discussing emotions. Dave a practitioner working in child protection, when exploring his use of reflective practice, describes negative responses from a disgruntled service user, but makes it clear that the anger from him "did not bother" him and trivialised the incident, although it was significant enough to relate:

> **Dave:... When I read Schön … it was a suggested book... I thought well, I do that already… I already reflect on things. I used it though for my PQ assignments.**
>
> J McD: So you don't think emotions comes into it?
>
> **Dave: I'm not saying it doesn't, you know, come into it. I'm not saying emotions are not kind of there and that …I think we are more likely to get negative emotions, don't you? … (laughs) telling us where to get off…A guy last week called me a bastard and told me where to get off… doesn't bother me …part of the territory.**
>
> J McD: Do you find reflective practice helps you to think that through?
>
> **Dave: Well, I kind of expect it. I don't think I need to think it through so much these days……it wasn't really much…**

Dave looked uncomfortable when discussing emotions and, by choosing to describe anger from a service user, moved the subject away from himself. In contrast, a contribution from one of the women students openly talks about emotions in relation to reflective practice:

> **Pauline:… it's about what you feel as well as think. It can be quite, quite and ,… what am I trying to say? I think it's an emotional thing. It can be about the way you feel about things as well, in fact, I think that's really what I mean when I think about it. It helps you work better with service users and do your job…**

Pauline describes reflective practice as "emotional", but contributions throughout this study demonstrate a large number of occasions where emotions are brought into the discussion, particularly by women; the students most of all.

As it seemed that the women respondents were more comfortable with discussing feelings and more likely to raise the subject of emotion, I analysed the data from that perspective. In fact, I found that men were just as likely to discuss emotions and feelings, but talked about them in a different way and most times were prompted. Emotion was commonly presented as something to be dealt with or controlled and spoken about in relation to someone else, such as students or service users. Keith, for example, talks about using reflective practice with students to enable them to handle their emotions, describing how students from particularly challenging backgrounds were more able to link emotions to the work. Amir speaks about his own emotions, but from his personal experience of racism whilst at school, affecting his learning. This was with the exception of Patrick who

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describes the suicide, which could be regarded as extreme. Frascuelo does comment on

how becoming a parent had briefly affected him, but also describes dealing with emotion

through reflective practice as a "survival technique" when critical feedback was given on

his teaching:

> **Frascuelo: …I think emotions do come into it. Harking back to the teaching which I did…, this is something I had invested my time and my efforts …. When I found that parts of it maybe could have been better, then yeah, my feelings are a little bit …sort of you know pricked a little bit… I think reflective practice has to be an emotional thing as well… I suppose if you like by reflecting I'd adopted …a survival technique.**

Until two years ago Tom had worked in child protection in a highly deprived area in

northern England. He speaks about remaining detached and objective:

> **Tom:. A lot can go wrong. You have to keep emotionally detached in that way. We can't get upset. That's the nature of the job… You work for the state not yourself and you need to act as a professional.**

Tom argues that emotion needs to be managed to do the job effectively, linking emotional

distance with professionalism. He feels that reflective practice enables students to separate

out emotions from their authoritative role.

Simon and Nath (2004) identify that there is little research on gender differences of how

emotions are expressed. Based on North American studies, their research found little

difference. However, 'gender issues' is a social work curriculum area. Male respondents are aware of this and would be conscious of me as a woman interviewing them. Culture plays a large part in how emotions are socially constructed and demonstrated (Hare 1986, McLean 2003, Morris & Feldman 1996) and influenced by what are deemed to be acceptable behaviours and expectations (Kemper 1990, Morris & Feldman 1996). Overall, I would argue that professional identity, with shared understanding that social workers 'discuss anything' overrides gender. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that whilst discussion of emotion is not avoided in relation to reflective practice, it is referred to differently by male and female respondents.

6.3 **Conclusion**

This chapter addressed respondents' contributions connecting reflective practice, identity, emotions and feelings generated by social work practice and training. Reflective practice is viewed positively by almost all respondents as a written and verbal method and as a personal thinking process to manage the emotional content of the work. It was identified as helping to manage difficult feelings, especially for students as they adjust to the role and the emotional demands placed on social workers, both professionally and personally. I argue that the research demonstrates a link between reflective practice and theories on emotional labour. Respondent's perspectives in terms of personal and professional identity as social workers outline how reflective practice is used to enable some separation

between professional and personal experiences. However, it is acknowledged that strong values permeate all social worker's activities, including in their personal lives, and that identity as a social worker affects all experience and behaviour. Overall, men and women talk about emotions and feelings openly. Some gender differential is noted, but the ability to discuss issues sits alongside strong cultural expectations, ethics and a collective identity, endemic within the profession. The following chapter draws all the themes together and offers overall conclusions from the research.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 **Introduction**

This chapter sets out initial considerations and briefly explores my journey through the reflexive process. I subsequently draw conclusions, which are exploring whether gaps identified in the literature review were addressed and summaries of outcomes presented through thematic analysis. I then identify contributions the research offers to overall debates on reflective practice in social work. Finally, I suggest further research areas which could emerge from this study.

7.1.1 As a Reflexive Interviewer

Alvesson and Sköldberg's (2001) view on research was a strong influence, as I could personally and politically identify with the reflexive approach that they advocate. For reasons already examined, this felt to be appropriate for this study. However, initially, despite my commitment, I did not find the reflexive process easy. It was tempting to write specific questions to 'test out' respondents on particular issues. I was curious to hear views on subjects which had stimulated my interest. However, I felt uncomfortable with

this consideration alone. I believed that social workers' voices had not been listened to regarding reflective practice and I wanted to credit others' perspectives. However, asking respondents openly about reflective practice would have had no focus. It may have left people feeling unsure of what was expected. Like most research processes therefore, there were compromises. Through structuring the interview for initial questions, (Mason 2002), I endeavoured to establish some specific information, but then be led by issues raised from respondents. I found this to be a smooth process, carrying a structure of its own, as identified in the methodology chapter. It also led to some interesting and unanticipated material.

I began this research with some cynicism towards reflective practice as a concept and expected similar attitudes from some respondents. Despite teaching and assessing it for many years, I felt scepticism about whether students and practitioners were always offering honest accounts and was mindful of its personal nature. I believed assessing it provokes challenges, as in reality assessors look for a formula. I am still persuaded by this, but for more positive reasons such as consistency. However, listening to respondents changed my perspectives considerably. I began to realise that due to the nature of the work, reflective practice was essential for social workers. It is personal and relates to

values, but it also offers much more for students and practitioners, particularly emotional support.

Motivation for entrance into the profession varies from the political to the religious, to the personal! I realised reflective practice was totally entwined with respecting service users and necessary to cope with complex situations and maintain good practice. However, I began to see patterns emerging which related to people's view of themselves as social workers and belief systems in their personal as well as professional lives. Respondents described its use differently from some material presented within academic literature and I would argue that their emphasis was different. I contend that a reflexive approach enabled respondents to share issues which they would not have done with alternative methods. Honesty about feelings is synonymous with the reflexive interview, not as information gathering but as "performance texts" open to interpretation to create meaning (Denzin 2001: 24).

I learned quickly about my role in reflexive interviewing. One entry in my log reflects this:

> Because it is a reflexive approach and I can join in the conversation, there is a risk of recapping too much at once- stick to one issue and give time, including letting silences happen.

The research process felt to be like an amoeba which constantly changed shape. The initial continual examination of data to look for patterns created fears that nothing might ever become obvious, leading to insecurity and echoed by other reflexive researchers (see for example Howe 1998). The amount of information such methodology produces is enormous. "Going with the flow" never felt more appropriately termed! Ruch (2002: 209) describes how she observed her own "anxiety avoidant bids for certainty" despite prior awareness of qualitative research being unpredictable and emergent. Following 'scientific' approaches would at least have given some lead and I was mindful that I was taking risks, as the reflexive process is unique to each research situation. Although research is a lonely activity and I am used to independent learning, this felt particularly solitary as reflexive interviewing is individual, driven by itself. It was also challenging explaining it to people, as I was asked what my hypothesis was. There were occasions when self-doubt drew me back to exploring numerous textbooks on reflexivity in case I'd misunderstood! On the other hand, it felt free, flexible and honest. It was what it was and I felt comfortable with that. It was a pragmatic process and 'real'; I could acknowledge my role rather than attempt to create false objectivity or unwarranted authority.

I had to shed personal opinions about reflective practice, be distant from the theory and really listen to what respondents were saying. Fairly quickly I abandoned my original research ideas and prioritised respondents' views. What I heard then became fascinating, as I had not previously considered reflective practice is such a way, especially the links with identity and emotional labour. Having completed it within a reflexive framework, I feel that it was an appropriate process in keeping with the subject matter and ultimately enjoyable.

7.1.2   Were the Issues Addressed?

Overall, all the issues identified in the literature review were addressed. When respondents were asked what they thought reflective practice was, I received what I termed a "textbook response", however, this initial question was useful as it gave a starting point to the interview. Definitions emerged as people described how they used it. This was primarily exploring previous practice to examine future practice and included verbal and written, formal and informal processes. It was therefore impossible to define simply, but descriptions broadly encompassed the definitions examined.

Past learning was an area where I had personal interest, but this quickly became less of a focus. The majority of respondents were mature learners. With the exception of PQ, an area where many respondents had been required to use reflective practice, the process of formal learning was not seen as synonymous with it, despite most respondents being introduced to it through training. This may also reflect current focus on continuous professional development in the workplace. Reflective practice was described as starting with self and experience, as identified in the literature review (Loughran 1996). Respondents' perceptions on the use of theory were not prioritised and this was an area which differed from presented material (Fook 2002, Payne 2002). However, the data supported other perceptions, such as reflective practice arising from practice experience (Ruch 2000, Taylor & White 2000). Most theorists argued it was both and it was probable that theory was so internalised that respondents were not always aware of using it. References to learning are integrated within respondents' dialogue and data. Without exception, every respondent uses reflective practice. The application of it was therefore explored through thematic analysis. The other gaps identified are all addressed within the research analysis.

7.2 **Summary**

This conclusion identifies the main outcomes of the research. I identify points established with each sub-theme and the global theme. All research is open to interpretation and evidence of the research methodology was identified in chapter 3. This section summarises my interpretation of primary findings.

The first thematic analysis in chapter 4 commenced with a critique of values, establishing emphasis placed on this for social workers. Acknowledged throughout the thesis, values are integrated procedurally and theoretically (Dominelli 2004, GSCC 2002). Reflective practice was presented throughout the literature review as essence of how respondents consider their work from a values perspective (Närhi 2002), and reference by respondents to this was anticipated. However, my interpretation led to the conclusion that this issue needed to be widened to examine what I termed 'morality'. Respondents described a commitment to values permeating every part of their lives, emerging from an ethical core of wanting to improve service users' lives and be good practitioners, but also be 'good' people and do the 'right thing' at all times personally and professionally. Larrivee (2008: 342) in her study of teachers describes this as the "higher order" reflective practice, taking into account context and ethical perspectives. A social work value base was discussed within the literature review, however, these overriding moralities had not been previously

emphasised. I would therefore suggest that this research has uncovered new ways to consider reflective practice, recognising the significance of this for social workers.

The sub-theme on time and place set out to establish where and when reflective practice happened, as this denotes how it is used. The major outcome was that all respondents used reflective practice in a variety of situations formally and informally, verbally and in written form. It was used to explore previous practice in order to improve, to work through difficult issues and to discuss decisions. However, data identified that respondents found it most useful as a process for discussing issues they had concerns about informally, with colleagues or friends. There were no time boundaries to this, although lack off time was seen to be problem when people were busy and when it became a reactive process. Schön's (1991) notion of reflection-in-action drew varied responses although most stated that this was not feasible and that most reflective practice was retrospective. Others talked of using reflective practice continually. In addition, another major use which contradicted identified research was that respondents welcomed its use in supervision (Holt & Lawler 2005) and overall did not feel it was a process of surveillance or that their managers were employing power, as suggested within the literature review (Ecclestone 2002, Gilbert 2001). This could be a local phenomenon or specifically related to the research situation, nevertheless, supervision was highly regarded. It was seen by some as developing

confidence, which had been addressed by theorists (Cook, 2004, Crawford et al 2002). There were differences in terms of how reflective practice was engaged with. Logs were useful to respondents, particularly to women students, and its use in PQ was addressed. However, informal verbal use was seen as the most useful within the team situation, particularly at the point of need, which had not been widely identified previously.

Reflective practice can be used as a solitary activity, supporting the notion of internal questioning of practice (Yip 2006). Although there is some written reflection identified in case notes, primarily it is written within submitted work for assessment. Data established however, that reflective practice was primarily used verbally and maintains professional relationships. This enhances team cohesion, reinforcing a social work culture and supports theories on communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991). Respondents' stated that they were able to be honest with their colleagues about concerns and work difficulties through informal discussion which took place within the office. Whilst not using the term "messy", such as Schön 1991 and others, respondents did describe the challenging, unpredictable nature of the work where reflective practice was of benefit, thereby supporting academic literature on the rationale. This was sometimes in response to someone who needed to talk about a particular situation immediately. This sharing of practice was described as providing good support networks. In particular, it tapped into

tacit knowledge, rather then use of explicit theory. The nebulous nature of it (Eraut 1995, Bleakley 1999) argued by critics was not supported by any of the respondents. This may reflect the way it is "taught", but nevertheless, it was viewed it as tangible and useful.

Central to theories on reflective practice is the notion of employing it as a process for problem-solving and developing good practice. It is at the heart of assessable work for qualifying and post-qualifying courses. One of the major ways this is "taught" is through books and other materials. One of the issues I wished to raise was whether these processes presented reflective practice as formulaic. I felt these models were ironic, considering Schön's (1991) rationale for reflective practice presents as an alternative to scientific approaches. However, whilst academics generally agreed, responses were mixed; students, practitioners and practice teachers welcomed it, supporting some academic theorists (Banks 1995, Brown & Rutter 2006, Martyn 2000). Although there was acknowledgement that these were rather contrived, it was felt that because of its requirement in assessable work, handbooks helped people engage a reflective perspective, producing work for successful achievement. The "mandatory reflection" (Nelson & Purkis 2004) discussed in the literature review was not how respondents stated they perceived it. Although the requirement to do PQ was complained about, respondents saw the role of reflective practice as necessary when analysing cases in written form. It was examined as to whether

it was a conscious process and most felt that it had become unconscious but integral, so that it was automatic. It was used to explore and develop practice and conceptualise, supporting much of the theory and links to adult learning (Boyd & Fales 1983). Respondents felt that it did link to previous learning, this issue emerging as a minor discussion rather then major theme, however, two respondents who taught students felt that ability to do so came from innate intelligence. Therefore, it was felt that it was necessary to take on undergraduates who were capable of reflective practice. It also emerged that reflective practice was vital to develop practice. People stated that they do not use reflective practice to specifically discuss certain theories, but will discuss cases and work through issues, derived from knowledge and "practice wisdom" (Clegg 2000, Sheppard 1995).

Exploring monitoring of practice through reflection with respondents revealed that most felt they used it to develop self-awareness. Alongside supervision with the line manager being viewed as important, observation of practice and peer observation were advocated. Primarily, reflective practice was seen as a way for individuals to retrospectively consider their practice to rectify mistakes. Overall, if criteria are clear then this was seen to be a good process. Feelings were mixed as to whether reflective practice can be assessed. The literature review identified academic opinion that it could not or was difficult (Boud 1999,

Ixer 1999, Rai 2006), although others felt it could (Brown & Rutter 2006, Moon 2004). However, one respondent, who frequently observed teachers in the field, felt that it was an excellent way of monitoring and assessing practice and providing evidence. One issue which emerged as creating difficulties for assessment was the emotive and personal nature of reflective practice.

As a requirement in qualifying and post-qualifying courses, most respondents felt that whilst there were difficulties, it was imperative that reflective practice was assessed, but against consistent criteria. My view that competence and reflection are an antithesis was not shared by respondents. In fact, respondents felt that reflective practice went alongside the competence model, supporting Karban and Smith's (2006) view that it was inseparable. This would suggest that people are able to deal with complexities of mechanism and flexibility simultaneously and assimilate their contradictions. Taylor (2006b) argues that despite the difficulty of accepting the students' narrative as 'reality', it provides opportunity to give first-person accounts, rather then the removed nature of case notes. Respondents seemed to be comfortable with reflective practice in different modes, for personal use to "work things through" and for assessable work. There was an admission by respondents that people choose and enhance case studies submitted for PQ

carefully to demonstrate their best work. No-one admitted to fabrication, as would be expected.

All findings in the sub-themes connect to the global theme of identity and emotional labour, bringing together the main findings in the study. I would argue that this particularly contributes to understanding and awareness of how social workers utilise reflective practice. Respondents described how reflective practice connected to their emotions and feelings, not just in relation to work, although important, but also personally. Being a social worker permeated through all their activities. Nevertheless, students appeared to go through an emotional transition on becoming a social worker, incorporating personal perspectives. For practitioners and educators this was a way of life. Respondents spoke about their commitment and belief system, but also how they felt different from people who were not in the work.

Reflective practice was discussed by respondents as a way of controlling and managing emotions, which sometimes created emotional dissonance. There was an identified need to develop boundaries between professional and personal experiences. but it was not always successful. The skills identified as "emotional labour" (Hochschild 1983) were not just

used as a job, social workers recognised those skills themselves and were part of the motivation for joining the profession. This was a pre-requisite, linked to views about life and people, which became "social work values" and identity within the social work community (Lave & Wenger 1991). The value-base permeated through all activities and to maintain registration there is monitoring of behaviour. Respondents referred to dealing with their own emotional issues before dealing with others, in order to carry out the job effectively; reflective practice being seen primarily as a source of emotional support. The respondents stated that they tried to separate out their lives, but work did encroach as consequences of their decisions were a cause of concern, which could not easily be 'switched off' in personal time. I would suggest that there was a difference from the theories on emotional labour as respondents were not "acting"; it was integral to their belief-system. There was some gender differences, most of the men remaining more objective, nevertheless, strong cultural ties overrode diversity. Reflective practice though use of team discussion becomes a work "confessional" (Bleakley 2000, Saltiel 2006), developing a camaraderie which is exceptional, providing emotional support for each other to do challenging work.

7.2.1   Overall Observations

The research involved different respondents as students, practitioners or educators and there were differences in how these social workers utilised reflective practice. The academics and practice teachers described how they used it personally and with students, but it was focused on approaches to improve practice. The students and practitioners who were 'doing the job' all described it as a way of discussing issues verbally, with friends and colleagues.   However, they all had to submit work for assessment which had to incorporate reflective practice. This was accepted and respondents felt that assessment of the concept was essential to safeguard themselves and service users. Overall, it was spoken of as used for support, discussing service users, casework and decisions. This contributed to a cohesive social work culture. The research was conducted in two different geographical areas with different profiles. One was in a large town and the other rural, however, there was no discernible difference in the language used, value system referred to or cultural dimensions as social workers.

7.2.2   Contribution to Knowledge

All research findings in this study, in terms of a contribution to knowledge and wider debate, must be accepted with caution. I am mindful to emphasise that this reflexive study does not represent all social workers and 'speaks' for itself. It is also my interpretation of

the findings, which is centred on respondents' representation of their social world through narrative and therefore mutually socially constructed (Taylor 2006b). Nevertheless, I argue this small sample is of value as an authentic piece of research in terms of the messages it presents.

The academic literature identified that reflective practice is primarily advocated as a process for social workers to consider their role, tasks and values in order to learn, improve and maintain good practice. The study identified that respondents also perceived it as useful for that purpose, however, the essential issue which emerged from the study is that social workers, students and practitioners use it a lot more for emotional support and to share practice issues with others in work and personal time with colleagues or friends. It also emerged that whilst it was primarily used spontaneously, formal supervision is also welcomed for reflective discussion. This would suggest that reflective practice is most useful for people as a support system to talk through difficult issues, and this is how it is most valued. Interpretation of this through this research suggests that this provides new insights into how social workers consider practice issues, work through complexities and make decisions, interpreting the work that they are engaged in. It also demonstrates how social workers engage with each other through reflective practice and develop support networks.

One implication that emerges from this is that social workers need to have time to engage in such discourse, that the work is acknowledged as challenging and that team dialogue should be recognised as significant. There has also been criticism of practitioner ability to write reflectively with reference to written theory and analysis, however, tacit knowledge and practice wisdom is seen by practitioners to have value. It is not clear how much theory is incorporated in these discussions; however, there is shared language and culture which is significant and this process could be utilised for assessment. Values were seen as crucial and respondents presented as people with strong ethical views which permeated into their personal lives enabling them to deal with the most vulnerable in society and cope with the work.

An issue which I felt was significant was recognition of how much initial adjustment student social workers seemed to need to make towards the job. This is not to suggest that social work is the only profession where this takes place, however, respondents stated that they found that it took up much emotional space, which they found difficult. Some described needing to 'work through' their own emotional issues in order to be able to deal with it. This was also the case with values which, although students demonstrated an expectation of commitment, they did not anticipate the emotional turmoil that took place when initially exploring ethics. This was replicated with the dilemmas faced as

practitioners. Formal and informal reflective practice are both reported as playing a part and used constructively, including in training and supervision. It must also be emphasised how much practitioners and managers stated that they valued supervision where they feel reflective practice plays a significant role. There appeared to be a gender difference in how it was used, but that needs to be recognised and respected and incorporated in supervision and training, so that support systems are available for all social workers, regardless of gender.

The other major research finding was the connection between reflective practice, identity and emotional labour. These findings are obviously linked as I would suggest that social workers engage in their work, so that issues they deal with affect them personally as well as professionally. This was despite attempts to place boundaries between the two, which respondents found difficult. If reflective practice is acknowledged as a support system, then its role is particularly crucial. It was demonstrated that, not only is there a deep commitment to diversity issues, there is also a dedication to enhancing service users' lives and providing a good service. However, this takes its toll on social workers who demonstrate that they use reflective practice for support, to enhance their practice and as a safeguard. This is to ensure their practice is sound and decisions are rational, but also to protect them emotionally.

7.2.3   Further Research Areas

The findings identify how and where reflective practice is said to be used by respondents used and its significance for social workers. Further research could explore diversity issues to establish any differences and potential implications, following on from the brief exploration of gender. This research did not establish the content of the reflective discussion. It allowed the respondents to interpret what they saw as reflective practice and identify its use. It would be useful to research the way in which it offers support to social workers, with more detailed knowledge of the content of reflective practice as seen by respondents. Further exploration of its informal use would enable building knowledge of how it could be harnessed for written work. This could link with the original rationale for this study. Reflective practice is a requirement in written work for training, PQ in particular, but students struggle with it, often having to repeat work as it is not reflective enough (Brown & Keen 2004). Verbal reflective practice may not be directly compared, as the process of analysis may differ, however, reflection which takes place informally demonstrates that people do use it to explore issues. Understanding the differences and/or harnessing the discussion may enable a transfer of skills to increase people's confidence.

In a study of PQ (Doel et al 2008), reflective thinking was seen to be one of its advantages, but reflective writing was cited as needing the most support to develop

(Brown & Keen 2004) and needs to be encouraged outside of formal training (Brown et al 2005). This could be an area for further examination. One specific suggestion would be to take forward a notion of oral assessment for reflective practice, as social workers seem to be comfortable with talking about their work reflectively rather than writing about it. A final area which may link with the last is that the original idea for this research was to look at mature learners' self-awareness of previous experiences of learning in connection with reflective practice for learning transfer. If individuals can identify their own processes of learning whether formal or otherwise, this will also enable them to facilitate others effectively and monitor themselves as reflective practitioners.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

DRAFT 1

Explanation of process -statement of confidentiality, agreement of personal identity terms and job role. What will happen to the information.

(Overall statement) I am interested in your perceptions and opinions about 'reflective practice'.

1. Could you tell me what you believe the term 'reflective practice' to mean?

2. How do you consider it when you hear the term?

3. What images or practices come to mind when you hear reflective practice mentioned?

4. I am interested in what context you think it is referred to.

5. Where have you heard the term used?

6. How does the term make you feel?

7. Have you been involved in its use in any way?

8. Please can you add anything at all that you would like to contribute to being asked about reflective practice?

9. Is there anything else you think I have missed out or overlooked?

After whole interview thank them. Assure them of transcript process etc.

DRAFT 2

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS or Question areas

Explanation of process -statement of confidentiality, agreement of personal identity terms and job role TIME IT WILL TAKE. What will happen to information .
(Overall statement) I am interested in your perceptions and opinions about 'reflective practice'.

1. Could you tell me what you believe the term 'reflective practice' to mean?

2. How do you consider it when you hear the term?

3. What images or practices come to mind when you hear reflective practice mentioned?

4. I am interested in what context you think it is referred to?

5. Where have you heard the term used?

6. How does the term make you feel?

7. Have you been involved in its use in any way?

8. Please can you add anything at all that you would like to contribute to being asked about reflective practice?

9. Is there anything else you think I have missed out or overlooked?

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Further questions
Reflective practice as control, surveillance
RP as subjective- how does you share? How do you choose what to write?
Emotional Labour – controlling emotions. Are you 'selling' your emotions to an organisation?
RP and assessment
Self reflection- honesty. Are you able to say what you really feel? Especially if it is being assessed.

DRAFT 3

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

Time it will take, Explanation of process -statement of confidentiality, agreement of personal identity terms and job role. What will happen to information

(Overall statement) I am interested in your perceptions and opinions about 'reflective practice'.

1. Could you tell me what you believe the term 'reflective practice' to mean?

2. How do you consider it when you hear the term?

3. What images or practices come to mind when you hear reflective practice mentioned?

4. I am interested in what context you think it is referred to?

5. Where have you heard the term used?

6. How does the term make you feel?

7. Have you been involved in its use in any way?

8. Please can you add anything at all that you would like to contribute to being asked about reflective practice?

9. Is there anything else you think I have missed out or overlooked?

Further questions (added on as more interviewing took place)
Reflective practice as control, surveillance
RP as subjective- how does it enable you to share? How do you choose what to write?
Emotional Labour – controlling emotions. Are you selling your emotions to an organisation?
RP and assessment
Self reflection- honesty. Are you able to say what you really feel, especially if it is being assessed?

 (after 4 pilot interviews)Issues to pursue

Ethical framework – honesty, truthfulness.
Do you see reflection as a subjective process?
Is it a scientific approach- is it methodological or is it random. If there is a method , what is it?
How would you use it in teaching and learning/supervision/tutorials?
DRAFT 4

AREAS FOR DISCUSSION explanation of process -statement of confidentiality, agreement of personal identity terms and job role. Time it will take What will happen to information
(Overall statement) I am interested in your perceptions and opinions about 'reflective practice'.

Could you tell me what you believe the term 'reflective practice' to mean?
How do you consider it when you hear the term?

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What images or practices come to mind when you hear reflective practice mentioned?

I am interested in what context you think it is referred to?

Where have you heard the term used?

Have you been involved in its use in any way?

How does it link to previous learning experiences- both discussion and writing?

Is it different according to whether it is discussion or whether you have to write reflectively?

Do you see reflection as a subjective process?

How would you use it in teaching and learning/supervision/tutorials?

(Is it a scientific approach- is it methodological or is it random? If there is a method, what is it?) Not direct question- ask round it.

Self reflection- honesty. Are you able to say what you feel, especially if it is being assessed? Ask round it. Can you write what you want tot for example? Are you able to be honest about what happened?

However, don't ask questions falsely. Go with the flow of how respondent sees reflective practice. Questions became more as prompts and a focus for discussion. Often questions were not needed.

Further questions (added on as more interviewing took place)
Reflective practice as control, surveillance, accountability
RP as subjective- how does it enable you to share? How do you choose what to write?
Emotional Labour – controlling emotions. Are you selling your emotions to an organisation?
RP and assessment
Sharing with others. Team factors. Using it for personal reasons.
Supervision as a discrete discussion. Problem-solving, monitoring. Assessment.
Ethical framework – honesty, truthfulness.

Appendix 2

<u>Overall after pilot</u>

Initial discussion of process, timing confidentiality, profile of respondent, the outcome of the research findings etc.

Areas for discussion- added on as considered.
- Respondents definition and/ or interpretation of RP. What language do respondents use to describe RP?

- How does the respondent see it-formally, informally, used personally and/or for written work? Use of logs at all?

- How does the respondent contextualise it?

- How does the respondent use it? In what situation? Alone or with others? When where and how?

- What is it used for? e.g. problem-solving, in supervision, discuss cases etc.

- Where did the respondent first use? How did they learn about it? Past and current learning.

- How it is used informally and formally by the respondent? Evaluation of practice?

- Issues about honesty, accountability, surveillance, control, self-monitoring.

- Issues about emotions, feelings, identity, values and ethics. Issues about morals and ethics.

- Gender perspectives.

- Motivation and adjustment to social work.

- Academics seem to have camps – as narrative, confessional, problem-solving process etc. Do respondents? Is it seen as pathological?

- Formulaic approaches and books written about it. Instructions on how to use it. What do respondents think?

- Conscious or unconscious process

- Cynical aspects- a genre, language, buzzword, catch-phrase. Do any of the respondents describe it that way?

- Links to competence.

- Time. How do respondents see reflection-in-action?

- Does it communicate to respondents how they should behave, think, feel?

<u>Thanks – later - would they like to be sent a copy of the transcript?</u>

Appendix 3

EXTRACT FROM WHOLE FRAMEWORK

Small example of some of the framework for analysis

Leanne (w, f, student)	Dawn (w, f, student)	Patsy (w, f , student)	Tom (m, w, practitioner/academic)
Taking theories about working with service users. Applying theory to practice. Problem-solving process Prepares you to work with SUs. Recording for later use for analysis About feelings, Prefers to use it for discussion. Sharing ideas. Helps you to be more objective. Enabled professional maturity, by working through past experiences Moves away from simplicity e.g. stereotyping. Reflects nature of work as complex. Personal Prepares you for social work Bringing experiences to the discussion. Provides support though sharing with others. Links with the unpredictability of social work. Related to values and ethics in relation to work e.g. diversity Not assessable. Internalising learning Marriage of intellectualism and emotions. Part of a process (of? engagedness with the profession) Not conscious Can't be honest. Selective in written work if assessed A way of looking at yourself. A way of doing the job effectively. If used for accountability – a good thing.	Reflection is part of Adult Learning. Self –analysis. Keeping a log Writing things down to use to think back on what happened. Keeping a log. Seeing change. Problem-solving Writing an evaluation. Reminder of events. (log). Reflection is discussion – using people as 'sounding boards' to problem-solve. A diary of events.	Looking back at what you've done. Always done it. Being focused. Informal way of sorting things out in my head. Use if all the time. Analysing relationships and people. Not judging people. Using it all the time, in personal life as well as professionally. Keeping a diary. Bringing some of yourself into the work. Related to values. Way of trying to remain objective/ separate from the work. See yourself evolving. Collaborative only as a way of organising thoughts. RP viewed as personal. Written RP could be made up. Can be mechanical when used just as a formulaic process. Useless using it for accountability as could be made up. If used for scrutiny could encourage a recipe of 'good practice' rather than reality. Uncomfortable sharing it with someone else. Discourages good reflection to share it.	The work of Donald Schon. Thinking about experiences. Essential part of social work practice. Looking at how you've moved on in your practice. Looking at development, an evaluation process. Showing how you dealt with something that went wrong. A way of dealing with feelings. Removing the personal feelings from practice. Need to be human but not emotionally involved – helps with that. Need to be honest but not lay yourself open to liability, so might not record everything.
NOTES Essential when working with people. Also Dawn, Hondo Feelings , Diane, Jadwiga, Pauline Personal Jadwiga, Pauline, Safia. Related to values- Andy	Evaluation - Andy	Major issue with 1st/2nd degree students that they generally can't see it as assessable. See it as a learning tool rather than an outcome. Academics see issues, but see it as assessable.	Themes Analysis of relationships (Patsy)

Moral dimension
Linked to working with people – being a 'good ' practitioner.
Happens in informal situations
Linked to honesty or not?
The value base of the work.
Need to be more self-critical because of above; the working with vulnerable people - the moral responsibility.

Communication with others
Supervision, inter-professional working and multi-disciplinary teams. Feelings aspect. Team events for discussion.

Appendix 4

Analysis of transcripts - Topic areas
<u>Themes emerging (colour coded)</u>
- Related to an improvement in practice as a way of problem-solving
- Related to accountability
- Difficult to measure/assess (some say impossible)
- Personal and related to thinking and feelings- emotional labour, giving of yourself to be a professional
- Related to values and ethics
- Expectations by managers/academics that it will happen if you are to be a 'good' practitioner.
- Provides clarity about practice- a 'good' thing.
- A way of reviewing practice.
- Over-emphasised, jargon, buzzword.
- Form of pressure
- Surveillance – form of control by management – not so much in social work, but nursing - Linked to the work being invisible (Foucauldian perspective)
- Individual , but changing to seen as good within group process (nursing)
- Social work more accepting- cynicism in nursing. Teaching used but seems less controversial.
- Always done it , but didn't have name
- Helps to improve people's lives
- I'm that kind of person anyway- need to be to be in the work.
- Use to in everyday life to work out difficulties or think about relationships.
- Developing it as a student – scary at first.
- A genre of language and writing.
- Self-monitoring process.- linked to accountability
- Representative of good practice in written form. - improves practice through the process of writing (?)
- Form of self-indulgence.
- A conscious process –this came up a lot. Make the work conscious – uppermost in your mind and open to scrutiny.
- Linked to honesty and truthfulness
- (Opposite to above). - You pick what to write and therefore present 'reflection' as though it were honest- especially when for assessment.
- Over-confidence negates reflectivity.
- Looking back at yourself and practice
- Related specifically to practice.
- Everybody comes at it differently
- Desire for a formula, to do it 'right'.
- Highly subjective and individual.
- An industry for academics.
- Proper casework, as opposed to accountability social work.
- Safeguard against dangerous practice.
- Linked to elitism.
- Useful
- Equates to professionalism.
- Difficult to find time to do it when working as a practitioner.
- Easier to do it verbally than in writing.
- Analysis of practice.
- Demonstrated keenness to learn.
- Easier to express feelings in writing.
- Cyclical rather than linear.
- A methodical process
- Formulaic approach helpful to student. Formulaic anyway.
- Replacement for social work theory
- Related to theory.

Appendix 5

An example of cross-referencing grid

Reflective Practice as problem-solving						
Name of respondent	Comments	Context	Times referred to	Spontaneous	Cross-referencing	
Hondo	Had been taught RP during management training. Uses it as deliberate strategy Refers to Schön	Formal teaching Informal processes Uses formulaic approach Management training Learning from mistakes Alone or in groups Uses it to consider practice issues	5	Yes.	Tajir, , Martin, Christine, Diane, Stella, Leanne, Dawn, Stella, Jadwiga, Anne, Ellen, Jenny, Maggie.	Used in groups of people to explore ways of improving practice. Formula a good thing to be able to use it. Way of exposing the work, which is a good thing because we work with vulnerable people.
Stella	Uses it alone and with others to think though practice issues. Developed mainly during PQ training	Done in the car on the way home from a visit Tends to be retrospective Sounding out with other professionals. Reflects with peers.	8	Yes	Tajir, Hondo, Martin, Christine, Diane, Stella, Leanne, Dawn, Jadwiga, Anne, Ellen, Jenny, Maggie.	Thinking deeply about practice. See what went well and not so well. Dealing with something you are worried or concerned about. Thinking through a problem- Thinking through different issues in relation to SU's and carers. There's not set formula for problems , so RP can be a helpful process.

Appendix 6

<u>Themes and Metaphors</u>

Christine

    Learning ladder.
    Learning to drive a car and then driving it automatically. (3)*
    Like driving a car.

Martin

    Thinking on your feet in practice. (2).
    Post mortem.
    Borrowed ideas.
    Playing tennis.
    Brand name.
    A buzzword. (3)
    Being sold to us.
    Borrowed from nursing and teaching.
    Proxy for management.

Andy

    Part and parcel of what we do. (6)
    Not something concrete.
    Difficult to pin down.
    We can document our thoughts. (2)
    Mulling over things.
    Weighing things up and looking for alternatives.
    Making it more visible.
    Part of the human condition.
    The part that reflection plays.
    We bandy it about.
    Tied into good practice. (3).

* The number of times referred to by different respondents.

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Appendix 7

<u>Analysis of dialogue</u>
<u>1st question</u>
So what do you think of when you hear the term reflective practice (Amir)
Can you just tell me what you think about when you hear the term RP? (Tom)
Can you tell me what you think of when you think of RP? (Brigid)
Can you tell me what reflective practice means to you if you think about it first of all? (Renata).
First of all, what does the term reflective practice suggest to you? Barbara)
Can you tell me what you think of when you hear the term reflective practice? (Leanne)
<u>2nd question</u>
ok, so. How do you consider it when you hear the term? ....How do you feel about it when you hear the term? (Frascuelo)
Can I pursue that one....you say that is could or should be measured.........(Andy)
Do you think this is any practice? (Christine)
Had you heard about it before you came here (*univ)*? (Safia)

Ok. And how do you feel when you hear the term? (Sue)
Right , yes so, do you, right, so you referred to it as relevant here. Do you see it attached it to anyone in particular? You mentioned a process. What particular process? (Tajir)
<u>3rd question</u>
For whom? (Diane)
Can you expand on that? (Keith)

Do you see it as reflecting on problems. .. or.....? (Pauline)
Yeah, can I pick up on that last point? What forum would you do that, do you think? (Alison)

I want to pick up on your point about relating it to feelings. I find women tend to talk about feelings much more. (Anne)

Go on. (And have you actually read anything about it, in the books you've been reading? (Tracey)
<u>4th Question</u>
Me: Do you think some students find it easier than others do? (Jane)
You've looked at RP as a term. How is it (reading about it) different from what you would have done anyway? (Barbara)
23 years ago so that was..... (Jenny)
What about written reflective practice? (Hondo)
I was going to ask about that. Do you think you can do it formally, informally? (Maggie

But do you think it becomes innate? I mean is you are talking about working in an anti-oppressive way. is what you're saying it risks racism creeping in if you're not? (Maggie)

I mean is you are talking about working in an anti-oppressive way doing child protection work? (Diane)

Diane)

<u>5th Question</u>
Ok. So what are you saying about the actual..........(Patsy)

Both. I like the fact that you recall. I didn't know whether you'd remember that's good. So, you first became interested in it as a process of adult learning? (Amir)

Is it problem-focused for you or do you think about other things? In other words is it a problem that you think about or is it everything? (Brigid)

Well, like PQ? (Renata).
So you see reflection as a step outside of the machine, as you've called it? (Diane)
Are you saying that what it was rather than (learning about it) affecting your work? (Barbara)

Appendix 8

Excerpt from Transcript - **Jane**
(white, female academic)

J. McD: Can you tell me what you think of when you think of reflective practice?

Jane: Social work obviously, because I'm teaching reflective practice in social work. Does that mean I should be saying lots about it?

J McD: Mm y…..

Jane: It's the way…It's the way forward it's the way to develop your knowledge, skills and values even….mmmm. It's about looking in reflection, at the time and after a particular event, on your practice…how you communicated, how you came across, how that person responded, whether you were aware of what you wanted to get from that incident, that intervention in advance, whether you got some of that, what that process if for the future, how you'd improve, what you'd change.

J McD: How would that be monitored do you think?

Jane: Self-monitoring of course. Good supervision and it's in written work too, obviously.

J McD: Ok. So you think of it as just in social work?

Jane: No, course not. It's just that's the first thing I think of I suppose. No, it's the road to enlightenment isn't it really? That's what (laughing). I would like to think that as we experience things in life, not necessarily as we get older, cause sometimes we have a lot of experience when we're younger that we can learn from that and develop from that. Er.. that we can reflect on our experience and how… how we felt, how we responded mmm thoughts, feelings, actions, isn't it?

J McD: Do you think some students find it easier than others do?

Jane: Yeah, absolutely.

J McD: What do you think that's about?

Jane: (*sigh*) I think it's about a number of things really- mmm… previous training and being made aware of the value of reflection has a large part to play in it, I would say. Also, maybe experiences in their lives where they have had to consider their responses and other people's responses and if they've had some value from that, if they've grown from that, if they've learned positive things from that, then I think that will encourage them to learn again, - social learning theory. They learn from other people doing that as well.

J McD: So, so, what you're saying is that if they've learned to reflect before it's easier for them to do it.

Jane: Yeah. Or if they've had experiences in their lives where they've had to reflect really. Been forced into the position; the experiences they've had.
J McD: That's the thing isn't it? Is it something people do.. in a large variety of situations?

Jane: Yeah, course yeah, yeah. I think it is – exactly.

J McD: Ok, so that's …..the way you're describing it.. is very much a personal thing and it's really about consideration.

Jane: I think it is personal, but all the work is personal. You can't separate it out can you really because it about how you feel and your values. How does that affect your practice. I talk about that with the students …often actually.

J McD: What about ..written reflective practice?

Jane: mm. Maybe if you've erm always been used to journalling, writing a diary. Maybe it's a gendered thing .. it seems to be, well I think it is a gendered thing or can be a gendered thing because, I think writing a diary, sh…exploring your emotional self, being introspective, is something that is largely something that is encouraged by girls rather than boys… in childhood – the secret diary. The whole erm ….it's ok for girls to express emotions, it's not ok for boys to. The cons…social construct of masculinity, femininity begins at an early age. What was your question again?

J McD: No, just interested generally in our views. Well, you mentioned gender. One of the issues I'm exploring is all around the issue of emotional labour …there's a whole theory around the fact that some people have to simply kind of if you like, ….. adapt their emotions according to the job they're in. You can almost say it's play-acting, you know that you have to ….mm. the usual example is air stewards.

Jane: Yeah, mmm, yeah. There are similarities with social work. Yes I've heard of this theory mmmm Yes, Hochschild. Air stewardesses.

J McD: They have to smile all the time whatever and almost become a different person, or, maybe they're always like that, but..

Jane: Mmm. Yeah, yeah. I can see the link although, not sure about the smiling.

J McD: And I think in social work for me… Its much more about the fact that we don't just expect people to have the skills and knowledge and values, we expect them to be a certain person and that's ..reinforced by the registration and the fact that you can be struck off. You've got to be ,, er you know , if you look at the conduct list in the GSCC you actually see people who've been …. I don't know whether you've seen that?

Jane: No, I haven't to be honest. Reflective practice must be a safeguard though. Discussing things with others. It's necessary though isn't it? The women find it easier to adapt to that I think.

J McD: Well someone for example .. was struck off, been done for drunk driving. So, you've always got to be a social worker. And I just wondered what you thought of that?

Jane: And I do …and I teach that. It's interesting because I'm only just sort of ..thinking around these issues and I'm, I'm, teaching people that they were….talking about counselling skills, particularly talking about congruence and genuine…genuiness and the difficulty sometimes that we have in dealing with different and difficult situations and being genuine. What I'm saying to students I guess is 'Look, this is the value base. some of this has come from.. our definition of social work. It's come from the codes of practice. It's come from the BASW codes of ethics. This shouldn't just be lip service, this should be how you feel, so we do expect that you will change if you are…do not already feel that value, that value base, do not already feel a sense of social injustice at the inequalities in the world and want to do something about that.' Erm.. everybody's different of course. We're all unique; perception is reality but there is a common ground in terms of that value base and

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that should be felt, I think and acted from …as a person as well as a social worker. You need to feel it as a person first and foremost. That what we discuss a lot in class.

J McD: Cause I suppose, there is if you think of …….

Jane: Well, that's the point. I mean have we always got to be a social worker all the time. Yeah!

J McD: On holiday, Saturday nights? I mean you know. I know that has to be in terms of the law and things, but … It's an interesting... Go on.

Jane: I wouldn't have thought there would be that much …. I would like to think and I am…we have this debate between ourselves 'cause I've come from a more therapeutic line of social work. I would have thought that you would feel that way anyway. And that social work, yes when you step into the role on the Monday morning is about putting tighter boundaries round it, but in terms of how you feel about people and how you feel about society, then that wouldn't be that much changed. You have a job of work to do. You're constricted by the legislation, by the framework, but that value base, that being a social worker all the time. And yet I recognise that sometimes, sometimes I don't, I don't feel like listening actively to some people ..on a Saturday night as you're saying (laughing). From a humanist, person-centred perspective, that ..that's me!

J McD: Is it a matter of degree as well, you know?

Jane: Of course.

J McD: Obviously just occasionally you want to switch off, if a friend phones you on a Saturday night in distress, you might think...

Jane: Yeah, not again!

J McD: Oh not again Although you wouldn't go out hopefully driving when you're drunk and killing someone. What about assessment in reflective practice because that's a big issue, isn't it? . Ok, so people write things and we expect them to write assignments where…

Jane: Debatable I would say and that is because I'm coming from a .. the points I have chosen, or have they chosen me, was it chance .. to teach on this course particularly have been the ones that are high, that entail a high degree of self-awareness, self-development, self-reflection and looking at issues that affect you professionally. Erm so I would say if anything I want to shape it more towards reflection being one of the most important things in the first year particularly and in communication.

J McD: How do you measure it?

Jane: Eh?

J McD: How do you measure it?
Jane: Through them writing assignments. Ah you measure it through the journalling. The Communication assignment is a self…….. reflective assignment. That's what it's about. I'm not failing people if they haven't reached necessarily the academic standard, as I think this is one of the 3 pieces of assessment where you are looking at their level of self-reflection. If they can't reflect we're in trouble. We all are as we can't train them and they will hit a block. They need to write about their reflective thoughts in terms of their values particularly, about their feelings of justice and their work or their values, what they think what they feel about people in certain situations for example.

J McD: Ok. How do you know they're being honest?

Jane: Mmm consistency I suppose. How do you know, …Yeah, if it's written work, of course we've got a massive problem of plagiarism haven't we? It's true. I suppose we do go on face value. We have to, but I still think we can tell . It is also what they say in tutor sessions and so on and in class of course.

J McD: We've got a problem with plagiarism and also if you know something is being assessed what do you do?

Jane: You select what to put…..Yeah, if you're clever enough to know yeah, if you're clever enough to know what we want to hear then yeah, I don't know.

J McD: Especially if its about practice really and your feelings, particularly at PQ level again when you really get them to, to really look at a piece of practice.

Jane: Yeah, oh yeah. Yep, yep. It's true. I hope they are consistent if they are honest. I work on the assumption that we are all honest and true.

J McD: Well there are built in safeguards...

Jane: Such as direct observations? That's it, so there is a…so you'd like to think that the whole package.. would catch out the people who are just jumping through the hoops 'cause they need to or they're aware. You'd hope it would …On a single piece of assessment, people can pull it off. It's a perception. It's all perception anyway I suppose.

J McD: You're still selective though. You know we create our own narrative about ourselves. So that's the difficulty that you're assessing something isn't true, that isn't real because as you say, it's a perception.

Jane: Yeah, yeah. What is real? Yeah oh yeah. What would you say?

J McD: I mean, I'm not saying. I suppose …talking to people. I mean I suppose started off more cynical than I am now..

Jane: Right.

J McD: ..about it really because I do think people go through the motions

Jane: Yeah.

J McD: but talking to people I think .. it's the only way anyway whatever the difficulties.

Jane: yeah, yeah.

J McD: I still think there's an issue there (*talked about Ixer's paper)* He says we can oppress student because we create this extra criteria, no sorry this extra competence, but don't make it clear what the criteria is. So we've got this list of competences particularly in the DipSW. Where is the reflection in that but its something we ask them to do and it's the same in the degree to a certain extent, isn't it? We have key roles bit there's not reflection written in there.

Jane: Yeah and it's tricky about the ADP (*anti-discriminatory practice*) as well because we're not really clear about that and there's difficulties in definitions there. I mean again I suppose you can assess that they have…. If you're talking about …practice or application to a case study you can…to some extent assess

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whether they recognise the theoretical basis they should have worked from or the information they could have used or the skills they could have used. That's part of the reflection isn't it, that you can assess? Ok I did this. I wasn't sure what I was doing. It may or may not have turned out positive depending on which perspective you're on but I could have done a, b or c. And hopefully they'll get more skilled at doing them, but are they more skilled – I see what you're saying- are they more skilled at knowing how to play the game. Mmm I see that and its maybe a reality, but if they know which game to play? Isn't that a good thing? They know good practice and good values. Isn't that most of it?

J McD: And how to write reflectively. Erm I mean 'I use a task-centred approach'. how often do you read that? (*laughing*)

Jane: I know. I know. Gosh its either that or an eclectic one! I used an eclectic approach… We're all human aren't we? We've all done it. We've all thought afterwards. Well what kind of theory can I put in there? We've not really used a task-centred approach. We've gone in and started talking to the service user and things emerged, erm… and we all collude in that game. You know what we say is perhaps as teachers God well, at least I recognise there is a structure to this, even if it's retrospective.

J McD: Maybe eventually it becomes tacit. You know, this idea of tacit knowledge that Polyani initially talked about.

Jane: Competent incompetence. Unconscious competence and all that, (laughing) yeah, yeah. Mm. I suppose that's what, you know. But yeah, there's those difficulties.

J McD: Another difficulty perceived is coming in more. I've seen it…more in nursing particularly . I'd be interested in what you think because you know a lot about the medical side as it's seen as a bit of a threat by some people because of …. They see reflective practice as management accountability and surveillance. You've obviously heard that?

Jane: Absolutely, and I mean and I've worked with that. I've worked in an institution..mm where the concept of supervision, of reflection has been brought in before my eyes and I've seen the defensiveness and I've seen what, what a negative impact it can have if management have managed it poorly. No time – no time to have supervision, no time.

J McD: Can you tell me more about that? Give me an example?

Jane: Mmm. It was a case of nursing staff in the hospice that I worked in never having any sort of supervision ….as we know it, yeah . Never had any formal exploration of their practice. Some of that may have been done through workshops, day courses. There was plenty of training opportunities. And many people were going through that system and converting their er…qualifications, their higher or professional or academic ones. So that was kind of accepted that that should be the thing to do. But in terms of sitting down on a one to one with your line manager which maybe is sort of you know social services type of language or business type of language, with your manager er, that wasn't done. And it was just kind of brought in pretty swiftly and this is what the evidence- , and we now have someone who is in charge of clinical governance. Er, this is what the evidence-based practice is about…..

J McD: Clinical governance. What's that?

Jane: Clinical –well, good point. Well, it's a kind of somebody who audits that the service is doing what it says it should. It's a drive to get service users involved mmm and suddenly this was part of the whole hierarchy and that's good. Service users should feed back on the service they receive.. but, you know.

J McD: So this is where it came from, so you think it was it was linked to that. You saw it as linked to that?

Jane: Yes. So the bit that I saw more than anything, although I was aware that these new tiers were being formed in the hierarchy it was when nurses had to sit down with the in-patient services manager 'cause of all the jargon titles changes and say 'this is what .. the job I do. This is why I do it. This is the underpinning knowledge. This is what I've read and you know basically account for their practice. And people just went off sick (*laughing*).

J McD: Was that written stuff as well?

Jane: Well, there would be an account. But again, I think they, they've jumped in too quickly. And hadn't actually worked out what kind of proforma or what kind of form the written ….written work would take. So that was another threat. Nurses hadn't been involved, hadn't been consulted in the process really.

J McD: So you think the, the threat was perceived and it wasn't terribly accurate or do you think it was used as a form of surveillance?

Jane: Half and half. I think some of the people in this process were motivated by erm ticking the boxes, doing what had to be done in terms of what .. I don't know what policy there was around at the time; 'Agenda for Change' or …..and I think some of it was about - Hey, let's look at what we're doing here and see if we can improve it. See if people are motivated by the job, see if giving them more training or more support or enabling them to speak about their roles will motivate them more.

J McD: Yes, there's always been a culture of supervision in social services?

Jane: Absolutely, yeah. Erm which actually was largely welcome, erm I think from my ..limited experience obviously it was more to do with how people largely got on with their manager whether they found it useful or not. So if their manager was supportive and seen as positive people would look forward to their supervision. If I mean in …………my supervision in my last job it took the place of accountability management basically . I just, I just went though what I was doing, so he'd know what I was doing and I told …. Erm it was a cop out as well to do that. But it was, you know you'd think that's easy I can do that..tell him what I'm doing. Erm but unfortunately it wasn't someone you could really go to when there was a problem running round in your head. I'd use peers for that. And that's what a lot of managers are like that, but when they are good its great. I welcome talking about my work . I needed to have supervision as you deal with some things that were – you know flummoxed you really. And then there's is a lot of cynicism around that, but people do use it differently and there's a time issue, but I don't think writing things down is seen as a threat really, was it really in social work? I don't .. in my experience again , you know, I think when I talk to people in the office and I talk to colleagues out there, I think I'm generally a pretty optimistic, happy half full person and I also have had I think – whether I've interpreted the .. this way but I have had some very positive experiences within social services and outside of social services and supervision and the opportunity to reflect on my practice work through things has generally been good. The odd times I can think yeah, that was, as you say, about accountability. That was just about getting me in the office and ticking the boxes. But I've had some very positive stuff and peer supervision was encouraged in most of the teams I've been in. Again, cynically you could say that takes some off the burden off the manager or that might take some of the burden, but it worked.

J McD: It worked…?

Jane: We really did talk openly about things that were big challenges for us.

J McD: Well someone else, someone mentioned actually as when we talked about this was that the hierarchy of nursing also makes a difference. It's a lot, a lot more hierarchical and ….the medical model

Jane: Yeah. Its such an institution, the medical model, yeah the whole thing.

J McD: But you wonder if reflective practice if welcomed appropriately might create more of a social model.
Jane: You would think so, but then when you look at my position in the hospice, it was more,… the hospice foundation is built more on a social…. supposedly it was built more on a holistic, social model than a medical model by recognising that people have needs at this point to be in the institution. There was a lot of stuff that was going on that wasn't…. within the institution, but there was still a lot of resistance from.. the social workers from within the hospice.

J McD: From the social workers?

Jane: Yeah. From, sorry, from the medical staff, the nursing and medical staff.

J McD: About what?

Jane: Towards the social workers. About looking at a person's needs holistically. Largely the biggest threat was what was the biggest challenge in our job I think was to get people discharged because as soon as they came into the hospice and the fear was- and this is getting off the subject a bit –

J McD: No, go on.

Jane: The fear around, the fear around death and dying that exists in our society, in our culture, is huge, isn't it? People would do anything to avoid that. Hospice should be an environment which enables people to explore the changes that are happening in their lives and their family's lives. And yet it was just as oppressive I think in parts as the culture hospitals and that wasn't the intended aim of Dame Cecily Saunders and all the other ones who started the hospice movement, so when it came to ok we know this person. We know they're dying we know there's various medical issues, but it is their wish to go home and holistically, psychologically, emotionally, socially this is what I think should happen. There'd be resistance, it always took far longer than it should have done.
J McD: Really?

Jane: Yeah. They might die in the ambulance. How many times have I heard that? Yeah, they might..

J McD: For goodness sake. Oh I see. That's what they say.
Jane: Yeah. But they might I mean there were people who were I mean. Well there was people who were… not everybody…It's a misunderstanding about hospices as well what was our returns rates because you develop a sense of humour as well. I think our return rates were summat like 60%. So 60% of people who come into the hospice don't die there.

J McD: Go out again?

Jane: Yeah. Yeah, but yeah so what, as long as I have explored with that person that this is a possibility and can you cope with that and do your nearest and dearest know this? Then that's surely up to them to take the risk.

J McD: Totally.

Jane: Yeah, yeah. We will support that and minimise the risk as much as we can and we will and I think once, once in 5 years I worked in that service did someone die in reception and once someone died in an ambulance.

J McD: But does that matter? I mean I can't see the big significance of dying in an ambulance really.

Jane: I think if you chose, if you chose mmm you can have a view that home is fabulous erm that I need to get home, the concept of dying without the people around you in an ambulance its not ni …. You wouldn't choose that would you? But if it's a real risk, a significant risk and the doctor, the consultant can tell you generally. Maybe its surprise I say consultant I shouldn't say that really. It's usually… sometimes it was the nurses who were the least qualified who knew more than anyone else who knew when someone's time was coming.

J McD: I can believe that.

Jane: And often information we got was from auxiliaries who were bathing people as it usually is when you're most relaxed, rather than saying 'tell me how you feel'. Sole opposition, you know.

J McD: Absolutely.

Jane: But if you can't reflect at that time, you know...

J McD: Yes.

Jane: And I tried to introduce stuff like erm the Buddhist stuff 'The Tibetan book of Living and Dying'. It was like, you can't see this, but it was like oh, stand back. We can't cope with that spiritual stuff. We'll go straight into Christianity, of course. We're absolutely with that, but anyway…..

J McD: No, spirituality is becoming a big issue…

Jane: I don't want to get too involved with the conference.
J McD: What conference?

**Jane: At the hospice. The hospice is doing a national spirituality conference in the hospice movement. ………
I mean if you're ever going to be reflective I would imagine it's going to be at the end of your life 'cause you're going to evaluate your life aren't you if you have the strength to do that? A lot of people don't have the emotional strength to do that and will collude in all sorts of ways and deny what's going on. But that was the bit, that was the biggest part of my job apart from practical things**.

J McD: You sort of present it as a human factor really. And it's amazing how many students I've spoken to who said 'well I've always been that sort of person'. Reflective person. So I suspect you come into .. and that could be gender. I must admit it was the women who said it. er I do think there's huge gender differences in, in the comfort around reflection more than anything. I do think most people do reflect, but its admitting it.

Jane: Its about admitting you have feelings isn't it? : Mmmm, yeah, yeah, mm yeah. And whether it becomes a negative downward spiral or whether it's to be actually shared with other people.

J McD: Yeah that's the other thing I suppose depression can be a form of actual reflection can't it?

Jane: Hmmm. Absolutely .

J McD: Which is bringing us into a different dimension I hadn't thought of. Yes, so I'm trying to think if…do some find it easier to reflect than others?

Jane: I'm particularly interested in gender and learning. Going back to that do…..some students find it easier than others? I think so. We talked about people who have had particular experiences…. Makes people more reflective. I think that's… sometimes gives a philosophical kind of…spin to you way of looking at things, doesn't it? I suppose some do find it easier than others, the reflective stuff.

J McD: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely….our old adage…about age.. interesting. Do you think there's a difference around that? You talked about older people reflecting on their life. Not sure.

Jane: Dying people, rather than……no, the statistics seem to show that older people don't reminisce any more proportionality than younger people. That's some of the things that I've used, you know, when I've been faced with ageist stereotypes.

J McD: Well why would they reminisce more than... We all reminisce don't we?

Jane: And it's contextual, isn't it, you know? If you have more time on your hands you sit thinking more don't you? What I was going to say is the biggest experience that women have, that women largely have that men don't have is raising children. And if ever there was an opportunity for constant reflection, it might just be at a practical level it's in responding to children and raising children – constantly. Maybe it's just me, but I don't think so. Yeah, you're constantly questioning yourself. Cause if you have, if you have a solid enough value-base and philosophy and enough motivation to want to bring up children well – that is your priority, you turn yourself inside out thinking.

J McD: Is it, is it an intersubjective issue then? Is reflective practice about communication with others?

Jane: I think that's a big part of it, but it doesn't have to be of course. But it depends how skilled……for me , I think it depends how skilled I am this is variable according to many things internal and external, how skilled I am. Is the reflection having a positive result? That's reflection of course, reflective practice, if you're talking about professionally then should enable you to improve your practice - go on to, to..achieve better intervention.

J McD: This is interesting. One of the threads that I followed quite a lot at the beginning is how much is it problem-focused, whether it's pathological; … that we only reflect when there's a problem to be dealt with. What do you think about that?

Jane: That was absolutely the hospice feeling, yeah. Yeah em that was the nursing staff per se. I know it's on mass, but there's a feeling around that … and we did have critical incident investigations.. every now and then. Most people don't complain about hospice care. It doesn't matter what it is they won't because of fear and high emotion and all kinds of things, but occasionally there would be. But that one incident was based around a complaint, but there was a generalised opinion that reflection, reflective practice that a new supervision routine, any of this stuff was around the negative. My role, I think our role as a social work team, such as we were was to encourage that and spread the word a bit about the fact that the culture in social work was about just looking at how you'd done things, saying 'yeah I did that well, I could have done that better' and then how's and why's and when's and to work out some of the technicality and how, how sometimes how you could have done that better is by having more knowledge, being more skilled, getting more practise, getting to look at your value-base. But then you can get it when you talk about issues like depression and stuff, of course erm you can get into a negative downward spiral can't you?

J McD: Well, you're more likely to chew things over if you think ..you've bodged something up aren't you?. It goes though your mind – fancy doing that, whereas sometimes if you've had a good day or a good piece of practice you don't….might think 'oh that went well' and that's it.

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Jane: but that's got to.. that to me has a spiritual or philosophical basis as well, because ultimately my belief is the key to life is appreciation. Is appreciation of everything that we have on a daily basis. The point of power is now. Its not……..it's pop psychology stuff as well. It's informed by many things, but everything passes as well you know. Enjoy it, get it here and now or enjoy what's going on here and now. Appreciate what you've had in the day but look at the things you could do better.

J McD: it's interesting things because I think this philosophy we have about honesty even with the things we do well is a problem in a lot of areas.

Jane: British culture that is.

J McD: I think one of the reasons we may get on people's nerves is that we might say- we think we're doing well in this department or wherever ...and that's kind of seen as a bit frowned on and erm..well.

Jane: But don't you think that is a British cultural thing? It's embedded deeply I think in British culture. This concept of backing the underdog. Someone would rather stab you in the back. Yes. Catherine Tate – I must admit I don't watch much telly. I do pick up on things I can relate to – the granny in Catherine Tate. Have you seen it?

J McD: Yeah.

Jane: I mean that just epitomises British culture to me. …………..I'm not sure it is far fetched as some have said.
J McD: I think it's also because we're passionate about what we do.

Jane: We're totally steeped in it. and people think – they think they're special. We don't think we're special I'm sure if I was in construction or something I'd be equally passionate about that (laughing). But that's no the point is it? You can only be passionate about what you know and do the best for …I think you're right. It's stifling I think, British culture. I'll say this to students. We're talking about loss and I'll say – all social work is about loss. Discuss- what do you think about that. And then we'll talk about emotional intelligence and how we out British culture, or do we think of as British culture stifles negative or what's seen as negative emotions labels negative or positive emotions. Yeah, right you are not allowed to cry too much. But you are not allowed to laugh too much either (laughing). You're not allowed to clap. I have a drive and I've had it since I was a child- I clap at the end of films in the cinema. I can't help it and for a while when I was a bit, you know, sensitive round my 20s or whatever… I didn't do it. But now I do. If I'm so engrossed in something I want to immediately show my appreciation of it. What's wrong with that?

J McD: No, exactly.

Jane: As long as you're not, you know encroaching on other people's territory too much. Saying thanks to the train driver………………………………..
………….Where were we?

J McD: Can we go back to this link to learning again? It's all part of reflection. I think what's interesting about the students, is the amount who've done Access. Therefore when they came on the degree they actually found the style (*of teaching*) was something they could relate to group work, discussing with…………

Jane: Absolutely.

J McD: Whereas people who ..and this is all ages, but people often of my generation because I had a very formal …… I've obviously done lots of learning since but…..

Jane: Yeah.

J McD: It was terribly formal, so obviously if you have mature students who have only ever experienced very formal school I'm just wondering whether you think they do find it harder to adjust?

Jane: I think some people do – absolutely. Alright I'll try and stick with the age and style of education… well, the gender thing because I do find in class now it's, it's impossible to separate out. I'd be enlightened if I could have the real truth-what is truth anyway, but erm the men generally are not as receptive. No, I do a bit of poetry every now and then and I've got this one poem, piece of prose I never know the difference between poetry and prose really. Its something I picked up when I was travelling so its obviously embedded and got an emotional attachment to it for me and its basically saying that everything ……..stems from all of our behaviour, mainly our behaviour, but our thoughts as well stem from 2 emotional responses; love and fear.

J McD: Ok.

Jane: And it's simplistic, but I think as a tool for reflection it's really, really useful and the resistance I and I've started depending how I feel on the day ……..

J McD: Like Maslow (*laughing*).

Jane: Sometimes I, well yeah. I suppose it is, possibly……….

J McD: It's our basic safety needs though, isn't it? It's not just love and fear. Its actually about meeting basic needs.

Jane: Yeah but we need to meet our basic needs because we're fearful if we don't get them then we won't exist. You can relate it to all of that I'm sure. It's not about…

J McD: You need to see security as love as well

Jane: I'm sure. Absolutely. As our counsellors would say, everything taps into something doesn't it? You know when that horrible thing came out last week (redundancies) it taps into our basic insecurities of being rejected basically. I know its also things like how are we going to live if we haven't got a job. There's all those issues going on, aren't there? How then do we react to that? Do we react to that by colluding with all the negative, spiralling horrible back-stabbing stuff and try and get the most you can out of it, try and protect ourselves. O do we think 'ok this is a really difficult situation for everybody- how are we going to open up real, honest live communication? It might involve some sadness or some anger or summat whatever.

J McD: Exactly, I agree with you. I said this. if you don't let people express their feelings then people become subversive. They get angry and subversive.

Jane: It gets suppressed doesn't it?

J McD: Well it happens in corners. It does ……I go back to that jam sandwich thing I … it's like the jam in the middle of a sandwich , if you press the bread down it comes out the sides. You can't do that. You've got to open it up and as you say, get people to express….because they're thinking it and feeling it anyway. You can't control people's thoughts. What you can do is open it up and that seems to be…. that's the sort of thing I say which is not very popular (laughing).

Jane: Yeah. Well I….well actually I think reflective practice is very challenging 'cause if it enables you to think why am I… what is this line of thought, why am I doing this, what is my motivation in this and if you can simplify it to love or fear, which you can a lot of things to be honest mm .. and if we are agreed we'd

rather be in a I'm ok you're ok position.. Then you know it's pretty easy to get people to put their hands up to that. How do you feel in your head when you have negative feelings towards somebody? Blah, blah, blah. I get real resistance sometimes. I'd love to, you know what's going on for me. ………

J McD: What…. Just expand on that a bit when you get negative feelings about people…………?

Jane: Don't understand. I'm not interested. What are doing poetry for? Not.. quite as ….well I have had some blatant negativity by some of the men in the class, a resistance to feminist stuff as well. Absolutely. And the fear is loss of that privilege, even if people haven't fully recognised their privileges by being white or being able-bodied or being male or whatever. If their fully not aware of at there's a sense there is an emotional tension there some of that's toppled when our belief of that is challenged a bit, isn't it, so what do you do? Fight or flight. It's physiological stuff underpinning that as well isn't it?

J McD: So how do you get these students …going back to this?
Jane: How do I sort them out? (laughing)

J McD: How do you sort them out? How do you get them to be reflective? It is a hard jump for people isn't it?

**Jane: I think one of my key things and I'm getting more confident in it is being reflexive.
In class the other day….**

J McD: Reflexive?

Jane: In class the other day, after lunch and this is the class that I haven't seen since last year. I like to think that I have a special bond cause me ego obviously demands that I think that because I've done admissions and erm induction with all the students that are here now me mainly and it has been me. I'm not saying that I've done more work than anybody else; it's just been my role and I'd… I have need for approval like most of us do, like a laugh? I had a really good morning for such a dry subject area but not the most….PSSW2. Lots of theoretical stuff. After lunch, to cut a long story short … for some reason something came out about the other groups somebody said something. There were electives together in the group. We then spent about 45 minutes deconstructing what was said in that first 5 minutes, reflecting upon it because basically what it was, was they said they're crap, (another group) we're good, they gave us erm they are more experienced than we are so we can't say anything. It was really out…

J McD: About the other group.

Jane: Yeah, about the other group, because they mix together in the electives.

J McD: Right. Ok.

Jane: We just gave over the first half of the afternoon to completely exploring this and it was … I think it was so useful because we looked at all the cultural stuff , the cultural clash as we have a part-time culture. We have a BA 2006 whatever it is ……...erm we looked at the negative language that was used – THEY- we applied that to social work, you know they think this – who exactly was it and we really pulled it apart…and I, and I…said we had to deconstruct what was going on here...

J McD: You, you facilitated it? You actually said look this is what you said. I want us to deconstruct….

Jane: Yes, yes, yes. And that's confidence, I... That's probably the most, one of the most ..daring things I've ever done.

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J McD: And that really does explore values from the very basics doesn't it? When we talk about THEY, them up there, those down there.

Jane: Absolutely. Yes, yes, yes. And we pulled it apart and I even said to people, what do you think? What I haven't got, which I don't know I'll ever get is everybody's names and its so difficult to... I mean I can do it by eye contact, but that feels so rude.

J McD: And it's awful isn't it because that feels the very thing that is offensive to people, isn't it?

Jane: Grrrrrr, I know. And that for me felt for me ..more useful than lots of other stuff I'd done. For me, it was grounding them again. I know I witter on about ground rules. First year I've laminated them and I mean it. And next year I'm going to get even tougher because I think it's really important.

J McD: That really was kind of an exploration of tolerance isn't it and acceptance of people? That's really what that's about. That's actuall.....

Jane: It's also about self-awareness....

J McD: Yeah. That's also quite freeing. ...but there is something emancipatory about .. actually not being angry with people and not feeling that isn't it?

Jane: Mmmm. Mmmmm.

J McD: It's a sort of freeing up. if they're angry with you, its their problem.

Jane: Reflective practice is part of enlightenment for me. It's so important for the students to learn this to enable them to work effectively and is consistent with values and all that. Well we'd be enlightened wouldn't we and that's another way of encouraging people to share practice. I think by saying that we would have self-actualised in Maslow's terms and Buddhist terms would be Enlightened, transcended, you know what.., whatever.

J McD: you'd be dead anyway (laughing)

Jane: Well, all of that. We're not there, we all on the road we're all on the path. We're all learning. Let's make this an, an open atmosphere and make them autonomous, independent.

J McD: Is this Buddhism? Is this what it's taught you? Were you always like this? Did you have this philosophy to start with?

Jane: Who knows? I mean I'm very.... I can't, I can't connect. I can't commit to Buddhism wholesale. I'm too lazy and selfish and enjoy life as it comes.................(discussion on Buddhism).

J McD: Is there anything else. I mean we've explored in a different way lots of issues. I think its quite freeing as well not having different boundaries about the themes I'm exploring. Is there anything else you want to say about reflective practice?

Jane: I just hope that people continue to, to grow and learn. I think we all are on this course particularly and I always say to students this is the entrance, this is just he starting block. You may not feel like that now when you've got thousands of words in front of you and you're being challenged and you're being..... One of the most and its petty really. One of the most recent things that someone said to me which made me think that I

had encouraged them to reflect is that, 'this course is really messing with me head'. 'You're really messing with me head'. But the way in which she said it was a really positive… and I thought 'yeah'. 'Good'.

J McD: It does mess with your head doesn't it?

Jane: But it should do. Social work training, counselling training. That's about the integral, the integrated nature of the value base. it should do. It should change you……………………………..

Appendix 9

Transcript **Maggie**
(practitioner, white , female).

J McD: I would just like you to tell me what you think of when you think of reflective practice?

Maggie: ERM, I think reflective practice for me is about challenge in the deliberation of your practice, Mm.. Perhaps I might think that when I do something I might think well, the very fact that you think that I could have done that differently. Because your views and ideas change when you leave a situation. I think so. I don't get time. I'm quite newly qualified and erm when you do your training you talk about reflection and you talk about the importance of reflection and reactions. Erm, I have this view that I need to sit and ponder about what I'd do. I'd have creative ideas about what would work and alternatives for families through reflection, but that is definitely not the case you just do not have time to reflect in that way and I think as you're practising you become quite skilled at reflecting when you are in the car and reflecting actually while you're doing an action. You might think about something and reflect on what you've just talked about in the car. You do that quite differently. You can get quite scared at that, but the important thing is knowing that you're doing it. Sometimes you are doing it but you don't realise that you're doing it.

J McD: Does it matter?

Maggie: Erm, well in a way yes I do think it does matter in a way, yes, because you're looking for new ways and ideas and the whole point of reflection is that you're doing things to the best of your ability and you're working with families in anti-oppressive manner and that you are challenging yourself. Rightly or wrongly we all have our own inset beliefs. And you know we….as a department we say its wrong to be racist, its wrong to be this, its wrong to be that, its wrong to be the other but be all have our beliefs and we can't change those, it's very, very difficult to change those. You know what's right and what you should be thinking, but it all comes across in your work and so that's why we should be all be reflecting all the time to make sure that you're challenging yourself.

J McD: What you're talking about is unconscious competence.

Maggie: Yeah. That's right.

J McD: But do you think it becomes innate? I mean is you are talking about working in an anti-oppressive way. is what you're saying it risks racism creeping in if you're not.

Maggie: No. I think, I think what I'm saying is that you need to be aware, because aware of what we do because you need to be mindful of everything and you become lapse about everything. As soon as you stop reflecting and stop challenging yourself you then at that point you might be totally incorrect, but think that you're not, but if you keep reflecting and thinking of different ways of working then you can reflect upon and have a case discussion with somebody and listen to their point of view. It doesn't have to b a formal thing.

J McD: I was going to ask about that. Do you think you can do it formally, informally?

Maggie: Yes. I think, I think as a social worker in fieldwork you think of other strategies and you come up with those yourself. And it's like informal supervision between your colleagues in a way, but drawing on their ideas and their experiences is really, really useful. And It does help you to reflect and think and you think perhaps there was I was a bit wrong about that and perhaps you go back and think of another way of

working with that family. And you know there is another way, there is another idea of looking these things. There is another way that in the end you may think of what to do.

J McD: Do you use it in supervision?

Maggie: I do. I use reflection often in supervision mmm… and I reflect about things and S… my manager will say to me 'You're reflecting and that's really, really nice piece of work' and don't know I'm doing it sometimes, so…...

J McD: So you're reflecting with your manager as well.

Maggie: She's very good. She is very good and I think that's really important.

J McD: Some people say they don't have that. It just accountability or some managers will say I don't get a chance as it's all crisis intervention. You're actually doing your PQ so you do written reflection? Do you think…. you've told me what you think reflection is. Do you think it's a personal thing?

Maggie: yes. I think it can be private and it can be personal and sometimes you might challenge yourself about something and you think that was really wrong I shouldn't have said… used that terminology. I shouldn't have said that word. I shouldn't have … and you can pout that right yourself. You don't have to work past it. You can put things right yourself through reflection. Its all learning, I think in social work, we continually learn, things continually change. We do talk about things in the team all the time and it's always easier. It makes us quite close really. Your reflection, the art of reflection continually changes. Different people are continually telling you, you are reflecting this failure your reflecting that bad….you know ….(Laughing).

J McD: What about your written reflection though? You are presenting for assessment aren't you?

Maggie: Yes.

J McD: And is this an issue if it's personal?

Maggie: MM. No not really because I think human nature will only let you mm…… give out what you want to give out anyway.

J McD: So you think you are selective?

Maggie: yeah, it would be definitely because you're not going to write something. If you've done something and you think. You feel quite strongly in yourself and you realise erm when you reflect on something 'I shouldn't have done it like that, in that way I should have done it a different way'. But you feel strongly about that. Your own personal selection perhaps won't let you …write completely you know….. write that situation down completely you know.

J McD: So how does that affect PQ then?

Maggie: I think PQ is erm a brilliant tool. I think erm… it is for letting you recognise your er…personal development and I think it is honest to a certain degree, but it works extremely effectively in bringing you back and letting you realise that that holds the basic issue. Personally I think you gain a lot from PQ.

J McD: So, so it doesn't matter it isn't honest in that sense? That's the problem with it, yeah?

Maggie: Yeah, I think you've got to be. ……I think your own professional boundaries and development and your own professional values and make you, make you…erm shine will make it come through, but ..but these are positive means…. For me the self-critical analysis has been absolutely learning. I mean I'm only doing PQ1, erm…….but thinking about, for me when you sit down and think about the strides that you've made in your personal development and how your confidence is raised and how your ability to talk about social work is raised and how your ability……., how you feel, you know. Just recognise it's a huge stride in a short time.

J McD: You've obviously gaining a lot from it and er you er..reflect already.

Maggie: Yeah, oh yeah. Yes definitely.

Me: Some people struggle with those issues. For you it's all about thinking through your work. Reflective practice is about positive values. I suppose that's the themes with PQ that some people do struggle. When I started I wondered if people would be cynical and see it as a trendy term, but that's not my experience. It's also an emotional term. What do you think about that?

Maggie: I think….I think erm professional boundaries are really, really important. I think reflection on the involvement with families and examining professional boundaries is really important because the nature of our work is emotional and it's an emotional job. You see and hear horrific things. You see and hear things that you think to yourself (Gasp) Ahhh, that child shouldn't be there, it needs be …taken out you know and …. Your gut instinct is , you know pick the child up… or remove the child from that situation. But there are always ways of working with people which ….. they can change, they can change. And I think though sometimes its fair on yourself that you think children should be removed because our instinct is to really take control. It's not about that though, it's about asking ourselves if the children really want to be with their parents. Sometimes what's good enough for me might not be good enough for somebody else, so sometimes……… So you've got tough decisions to make and it's all about your reflections being your deliberations as well really. Erm a case I'm working on at the moment which I'm actually just writing a conference report about erm my gut instinct is saying to me that the children there shouldn't be there er, but I know that the parents have begged for more facilities and have responsibilities. They love their children dearly and have learning difficulties. The house is in complete chaos. There's no boundaries in the place. There are lots of things now in place and things haven't changed, but they're loved dearly and they love their parents, but they are not like normal parents in certain sense. So the latest thing we going to try is er, er direct payment facility and arranging a package so that the children can stay at home with their parents, but with paid responsibility and it's on a full time basis really. Erm and if that doesn't work then I know that I've tried everything. But I feel strongly that these children are at risk, but the oldest is 12 years old and 7 years old and Mum and Dad aren't …. They can't transfer stuff, they don't grow with the kids. It's a really, really contentious and difficult case. And of course adult services come from an adult perspective and I find myself struggling greatly with this case.

J McD: There's disability rights issues.
Maggie: That's right. And normally what I do what I do I reflect in my writing, in my recording and I use that as a tool for my reflection.

J McD: Do you have to worry about data protection? Mmm Is that something of an issue when you write things down?

Maggie: Do you mean …How do you mean, data protection?

J McD: The public have a right to access to their records, so I'm wondering if that affects what you record and if you worry about that.

Maggie: No, I don't act… What I do is er, when I say I'm reflecting when I'm recording, I record what I've done, what my actions have been. I then.. that allows me to explore different things that I could do. I don't bother writing down my feelings. I don't record my feelings, my personal feelings. I don't recall those in my recording at all. I don't feel that would be right.

J McD: We used to years ago

Maggie: Yes (laughing)

J McD: We used to write all sorts of things.

Maggie: It used to be a life story didn't it?

J McD: We used to write judgmental things like 'dysfunctional' family. That used to be encouraged. It was terrible.

Maggie: Yes, I know I know. No I am very careful about that. I think this is the only case that I usually go to sleep at night thinking about and that's how I came to refer to the direct payments. I thought that was another way to support that we could the children staying at home. They want to be with their family and they shouldn't be denied that and really it's our failure if we can't help them to do that. I don't want to take them out and put them in a foster family and you know …but they really are in a mess at the moment.

J McD: So you are linking it to emotion? Linking it to emotion, which is a positive link. Because one of the things I'm exploring, there is gender stuff, …

Maggie: Yeah, yeah, yes, I can see that….

J McD: People also link it to analysis, which is interesting. Some people see it as the same and some see it as something different. I don't know what you think about that?

Maggie: Erm….I think if you are not in touch with yourself you are not able to ….. not able to understand these things very well. I am very fortunate, you know , I had a very stable upbringing and I had a I had a good basis to compare things to and stuff like that ... because I think that does influence, but I also my health background. I used to work in a hospital. (*didn't answer question, but wanted to tell me her history which is linked to the morality question. I came into social work as I had VIEWS about things*)

J McD: Yes other people have talked about the fact that reflective practice is a big issue in nursing.

Maggie: It is.

J McD: But.. I don't know whether you've ever read any nursing stuff around it?

Maggie: No.

J McD: One of the things and it's a big issue this is a wariness because if its perceived link with managerial surveillance. In other words managers use to check what people are doing, an accountability tool.

Maggie: Yeah. I didn't feel that that ………it was used as an accountability tool when I was there, but I was fortunate I had lovely managers throughout my involvement in health care. One thing that I reflect upon in the years leading me to the social services and I realise thinking about models the reason why I came into social services was when I was working in the maternity unit and my care was dictated by social models.

J McD: Yes, reflective practice can sometimes equated perhaps with a social model perhaps? Social workers don't work in the same hierarchy, so I dropped the question

Maggie: Yes, exactly, yeah.

J McD: One of the things presented to me was the hierarchical difference. There isn't the same sort of supervision. I think social work has different support . Do you think?

Maggie: I do and what I'm ….what I did …. The reason I moved over erm to social care because I tended to challenge the hierarchy within the hospital and in doing that ..erm on one occasion I challenged a consultant because I found him very rude. The ladies were very frightened of him when I was on the maternity ward. The ladies were very frightened of him and they dreaded him coming and that wasn't what he was about or should have been about. The nurses were terrified of him and one day I asked him to come into the office and I told him I found him truly obnoxious indeed and I didn't know how he expected people to work with him, mmmm and he apologised and said that he didn't realise he was doing that. but that was probably his upbringing and he had been made to feel the all-important person. Everybody scattered when he arrived – the matron… everybody. It was quite unbelievable in the real world. And in the real world that didn't happen and then there was an incident involving someone's human rights on the ward and I challenged that. And it meant that I was actually in work at 6 o'clock in the morning and I stayed until 2 o'clock the following morning to make sure … I wanted to make sure that this lady was fairly treated. She actually had a termination and her baby was born alive and erm her termination was through disability and a baby… babies were born alive, but they, but they would die very quickly because they were only 20 weeks, the termination was 20 weeks, 21 weeks. This baby was a little bit older than anticipated and it was living for quite some time. It was making attempts at life. it was erm responding to touch and it was very much alive. I said that this lady had a right to know that her child was alive and had a right to say 'I'd like it christened, I'd like it……….you know these things happen. I didn't know what her beliefs were and I was told to be quiet basically, that it was not her decision . She had not asked to see the baby and it would be very disturbing for her and I completely changed that when I said. 'Look if you don't let this woman know that this child is alive then I will do it and then there will be some serious trouble'. Erm…And she was let known and she had the baby christened, which was a good thing. So you know it was nice for her, it was closure for her, so you know, but….. In years to come if she'd have gone back, if she had reflected on her situation in that hospital and she had have gone back and said 'Look I'd like to see my files' and the time of that baby's time of death was noted 3 or 4 hours later. How would she have felt and known that it was alone in a sluice, nobody round it and she could have cuddled it.

J McD: As a manager I would think of a litigation case I should think.

Maggie: I know, yes, but from my point of view her human rights had been violated. Her rights as a human being were totally ignored and I, I just don't totally …. don't accept that at all. So my manager said to me you know you are a very strong person, there's a few ideas, you know…. There's a few domestic violence issues on the ward that I'd like you to help with and get involved with and we talked about the social perspectives and the medical perspective and the different terms and we talked about the conflict and erm between the two roles and erm she said to me that she could se me as a social worker , C…… Have you thought about doing that? I said 'hell, no' because I didn't know what social workers did and I didn't really realise I was working to the social model. I didn't even really realise I was working to the social work model and then when I read about the social work model I realised that's just me that's what I'm doing. Then I became a family support worker and I loved it and then progressed to doing my DipSW.

J McD: One of the other things I get talking about with reflective practice is you know I don't know whether I'm that sort of person, is that why I came into the work and so forth. I mean I sort of favour both really, I think you have to be a certain sort of person to do it really. Or people are working though stuff there/s that as well. And the

other issues is that when you are there and doing training and so forth you become more reflective. Some people say that they analyse too much, and how do you define too much?

Maggie: Well, that is one of my problems. When I was doing my DipSW. It was because couldn't ever write anything simply. It had to be the undercurrents of….and so things that were meant to be short were usually quite long and I have that problem with my case notes now because I think it is so important that all the information is there. Say with the parents and the children to get a completely rounded view from everybody. You see if something is missing you could get a completely difference to somebody saying 'Oh those children need registration from an earlier date'. And whilst people tire of us with a lengthy report , you know you've got to read it and you've got to …. You know digest that. I think that information is extremely important.

J McD: For you.. you like to put everything in and Reflective Practice helps with that process.

Maggie: Yes.

J McD: Oh well, you've been very helpful . Thank you .

Appendix 10

Leanne
(white, female student with some practice experience)

J McD: Can you tell me what you think of when you hear the term Reflective Practice?

Leanne: From what I can gather er…reflective practice is taking the, you know ..theories from working with service users and trying to apply them in a practice situation. You know looking at the past somehow and er I suppose thinking what you need to do to get better and that.

J McD: Did you hear the term before you came to college?

Leanne: Er, no, not really, but ok, once you know about it… It helps you work with them. You can see how well you've worked with .. er service users. It prepares you to work with them or in social work situation(s). You can write down what you've done and th.... er think about what you've done. Record it for later so you can see what went well and what didn't. You know you think about the theories you've learned and whether you have used them in your practice. So you put the....your theories in to a practical situation.

J McD: Apply theory to practice?

Leanne: Yes, exactly – apply the theories to practice.

J McD: So you've not heard the term before? *(just checking).*

Leanne: I have not heard of it before here. I've read a book about reflecting on your practice, making written notes and thinking and, er reflecting back on what you've done. When we have discussions and er ,.. discuss things in practice, like case studies we reflect back on experiences on days in college. I have felt I have made so much progress on the course and really enjoyed those... the discussion about work with other .. my other, the people on the course, the students. We all bring our experience to the discussion. It gives a chance to talk about your feelings. These could affect your practice, so it's good to get it down. I have changed .. changed so much since I've started this course.

J McD: Do you think reflection is about feelings then?

Leanne: Oh yes, definitely, but I also think that when you write it all down it er .. Helps to be able to control your emotions, your feelings. It's helped me to come to terms with things, things from the past. Not that anything really bad happened, nothing like abuse happened or anything, but I still needed to er… you know, think things through and writing down what I've thought, what I've er… you know felt about things has really helped. I've really been enjoying it.

J McD: Now you've talked about it from 2 aspects, you know er writing things down and discussion. What do you think it the most helpful in terms of reflective practice?

Leanne: Mmm… I don't know really. Well actually, I think discussion is much better. You can discuss what's bothering you and get er… ideas for other, you know. I prefer it to writing stuff- as you think about things and ………. Although you can reflect on what you've done with written notes, but then you can reflect back with discussion, link it to the past. It triggers things.

J McD: So you prefer to reflect with other people do you. Er do you think?

Leanne: I prefer to talk about it .. things with the others. – sharing ideas and stuff. You can deal with your feelings and feel supported. You can get down your feelings when you write and that, but discussion gives support, yeah. There are certain situations I suppose that you should write down. I'd not heard of it before. Things and feelings about your past. I have really enjoyed this course. I have changed so much, I suppose matured I suppose and reflecting on the past has …. You know it helps with that. I've found it useful as a social worker talking about problems. I do still er…. feel a bit uncomfortable you know talking about er thing..... and discussing things does erm trigger…. but then I write it down. It helps though to talk as it means you can be more objective. This work is about talking to other people. It's not black and white though is it? People are complex things. There are lots of elements in it. So you can er—write down theories and that but it's not like that. You don't just go out and use task-centred theory because you can't expect…you don't know what to expect or how people will react.

J McD: So you find reflective practice useful in that process?

Leanne: Oh yeah, yeah, It depends on where you are as a person. You couldn't get into this career if you couldn't take….. if you couldn't deal with it.

J McD: So reflection……?

Leanne: So ..reflection is perhaps working through stuff before you work with service users. Personal issues on something can be a blockage. If you don't reflect as a person, personal experiences can get in the way. It helps you to step outside. I think it's really important to get those out the way so that you can be a better social worker, otherwise you might er..er…. er involved, involved with service users er problems if they are similar to your own. You sometimes .. you have to be good…better…you can't have those feelings...

J McD: In what way?

Leanne: Well – we have to be.. er…unblemished. It can be a pressure too.

J McD: Does it tap into any previous learning before you came here?

Leanne: What do you mean? Only A levels and things? What do you mean?

J McD: Have you used reflective practice before in your learning?

Leanne: No oh no. I just did A levels. This is really different from anything I've ever done before er..... I've learned so much. A levels and that – I mean I did sociology and I just like learning about class as black and white. Working class people do this and middle class people do that. You know working class people go here and speak like this and such….and I was brought up middle class I know I was, but it's… it's not really so, that simple…..My accent is Manchester, and I was brought up you know middle class but I can posh it up, you know……. I was sort of on the level. My peer group on the course I'm a stronger person now. One thing that concerns me when I hear people talk and I wonder why they are in the profession you know in class sometimes. The things people say worry me really.

J MCD: Stereotyping ? Yes we still have the extremes at both ends but mostly there's more mobility in between now….

Leanne: Stereotyping, yes. Definitely. It's more complex than that. So er--. Things were more factual in my A levels . I just learned facts really. This has expanded me … my mind and that. It's been important to look at all the issues from that er… others perpec…perspectives, you know.

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J McD: Ok. So you will have to write more about reflective practice though. You know about PQ? You'll have to do PQ when you are qualified? *(nodding).* The work has to be reflective but also assessed. Have you any thoughts about that at all?

Leanne: Thoughts about……..?

J McD: About reflective practice being assessed … at all?

Leanne: Oh, I don't think it's assessable. I can't see how you can 'cause it's personal isn't it?

J McD: Ok. So you see it as personal then?

Leanne: **Yes, It's your thoughts about things. Yes it's useful as a tool, as a process.**
(I feel that this is difficult, as the respondent has no real experience of producing reflective work at that level, which is assessable, so won't pursue. Its interesting as I am now getting a view pre-formulaic RP if you like. So on the other hand, the view is not 'tarnished' with expectations and a different mind set about the term.)

J McD: So could you see yourself being able to produce work that was reflective for assessment. If so would a formula to do it be useful?

Leanne: Yes, I would imagine if you have to do it and get the work in to be,.. be assessed, marked and stuff then it would make sense that there was something to follow to do it right. I think it would have to be. I suppose it depends on what work you need to do, though. I might still do it as a log kind of thing. I don't want to go into Children and Families. I've decided that. I'd be upset working with children who'd been abused. It would make me really upset and affect me. I don't want to go into it then, I think…. I've made up my mind about that.

J McD: What area do you want to go into?

Leanne: I… I'd really like I don't know for sure, but possibly adults….mental health or maybe young offenders. I have a placement in …. that.. sort of that area. I'm really interested in young offenders. I can see myself going into that area, yes something in that area. I find it really interesting. You could use it a s a tool, as a process if you have to do it, although I suppose you could anyway, you know. I've grown up a lot on this course and much happier in myself. I used to e, you know emotional. I would cry at anything. I was always crying. *(I think this refers to a specific incident which Leanne is trying to explain in a round about way)* **I seem stronger now, now that I've worked through stuff. Reflective practice teaches you to see things from another perspective. I think of myself and reflection as.. internalising the learning. I now realise that you need justification for peoples' feelings and opinions and, before this you know I always had moral, you know er…ethical views, but I would let things go. I always knew what was right and that, but I wouldn't challenge or owt. Now when people say something you know racist or whatever I become really irritated. It really gets my goat. I believe it's tapped into my inner beliefs.**

J McD: And where does reflective practice fit into that process, do you think?

Leanne: Oh I think it really does because it's well, it's a process of learning. The values are in there aren't they?

J McD: You mentioned you might keep a log…..

Leanne: Oh yes it all goes in there trust me!

J Midis been seen by other professions as a form of accountability. You know so that the work you do can be visible,…. a sort of … well, managerial surveillance.

Leanne: Oh I think there's a need for accountability. There are so many issues in professional fields, you know, When people are working with vulnerable people, you need accountability.

J McD: You're not the first person to say this. This is interesting, as this view does not come from social work, particularly. But nearly every person I have spoken to so far has said this, especially if they are in practice. So…. How can you write reflectively in an honest way if you.....the work you are writing is being used for accountability reasons?

Leanne: Well I think, then … you have to have aims and objectives with service users, clarity. It shouldn't be, you know. hidden. You need to have the work monitored and account for times and things. Accountable....you need...yes, to be accountable . I think reflective practice is sort of accountability. When I did my sociology A level everything was over simple. When I hear other people in class sometimes I think that they are not professional sometimes.

J McD: In what context in that sense do you think reflective practice can be used?

Leanne: Reflective Practice? Context? Social work is people work so it's always relevant when considering the work.

J McD: Do you therefore see it as personal or collaborative?

Leanne: It is very personal to me, but it could also be collaborative. Yeah, mm yeah. You've got to reflect on how you work with other agencies and service users. It's abut making sure the service users have better lives isn't it? That's what we're here for.

J McD: There are books written on reflective practice. You say you've read one yourself? You said at the beginning…

Leanne: Oh yes, yes, I have read books which refer to it, not read a book just about it, but in social work books on theory and stuff, you know. They've referred to it, to being reflective. As a good thing to do when working with service users.

J McD: Yes, right. Exactly. One of the other I suppose criticisms……..it seems like a criticism… is that it has been described as formulaic- like another theory. What do you think about that?
Leanne: What do you mean. It's a formula?

J McD: When people write about it they suggest maybe a formula to write reflectively.

Leanne: I, I suppose….. er well, true reflection isn't it? I suppose if you have to do it. It could be useful. Using a formula is not the……. Not when it's involved with the work with service users. It's a good way….. I suppose if you have to write down something for people. I think true reflection though is not … you can't use a formula. Some people are resistant. You need to use it to see what would be better next time if you were working in a certain way. I don't think I would write it down though. Its like tickboxes really isn't it? I don't think I can work like that. It's a form of evaluation, isn't it? I think it evaluates your work.
J McD: Do you think it can be mechanical?

Leanne: No, not really, but I'm a very emotional person. I'm a lot better about emotions than I was. It's central. People don't want you to be over personal. And I wouldn't want to be if …especially if people are going to read it. You'd think, what do they want me to put down? That wouldn't be that helpful really would it? *(laughs)*

J McD: Do you think it is a conscious process?

Leanne: Erm……No, I don't think it is conscious. I don't think you can be really honest actually. Some emotions can't be put into words because some of the feelings you have … well, they can't, can't be labelled. When I've done something…. like at work… I can't stop talking about what happened. I ring friends to talk about it and think about it, you know. You're not sure about why you …. Why your feelings are like that- it's just such complex work, isn't it? It's so important and I worry about it, if people are ...you know don't agree with my decisions. Yeah, I'm really into it, really enjoying it and part of that is talking about the stuff you think about - definitely. I mean I know you are getting paid for what you do. You're not God. You know…you can't just, just go in and solve people's problems for them. Your own thoughts can get in the way if you haven't worked them through and people, service users, you know, don't want that. It's a job and ah you have to be able to be right for it, you know. You can't be martyr to people or anything. You can only work with you know, aims and er objectives and er…offer solutions to enable them to change. You have to think to yourself 'What am I doing here'? It's not just my job, there's a lot of people involved. You need clarity, ..a clear role.

J McD: Do you see reflective practice as part of that process?

Leanne: Yeah, it's important as you are working with vulnerable people. A lot of people. You need to put a lot of yourself into the work I'm a lot more chilled out now than was … because I've had a chance to think about…. the past and that. I can handle emotions a lot better and I'm happy. I find it interesting.

J McD: You've raised another issue that I wanted to ask, talk to you.. about.

Leanne: Oh, have I? (*laughs***). Yeah, I've probably got a lot to say….**

J McD: That's good. That what I want. No, what I wanted to bring in was the issue of emotional labour. This is a term used for the amount of self you put into a paid job as opposed to more objective skills. You know we've said that we have to have right values and attitudes. Er well, you know when you were interviewed for the course, it was a lot about what you were like as a person, whether you are..were, you know suitable…due to the nature of what we do as social workers

Leanne: Oh yes., but that's so important. I mean not everyone can work in this. It is really important, as people are so vulnerable. I think that's what I'm saying about handling emotions. I think the theories and kind of ways of working …. Things you learn about can only come into ….. well, take place when you've got yourself together. It's all part of the maturity bit I suppose. I think it's the intellectual thing and the emotional thing. It's a way of being able to do it effectively. It has to be intellectually stimulating, but you need the two. In reflection I have got myself to the point when I can take in the theories and that.

J McD: Gosh, that's interesting. Are you saying that reflective practice is the emotional process you go through to get to the intellectual understanding?

Leanne: Yes. You've hit the. ..Yes exactly that. I do mean that. I have had to go on a journey really I suppose and mature and that. I needed to do that before I could er you know take in the rest, like the modules we are doing now where we are looking at practice issues …in detail and stuff. You know we are looking at the

theories and what we'll need to know. It needs to be a thought through process. You need the feeling and then the thought through process.

J McD: Well, can I pursue this, as it's really interesting? Do you think that first year when you have …. You are in college, and with no placement, which comes later. Do you think it helps that?

Leanne: Definitely. I needed that. I couldn't imagine going out to work with people so, so, some although I do in my work, but not in the same way. I definitely needed to mature and grow up and become less emotional and chat about stuff with my friends and the others on the course.

J McD: And reflective practice helped with that?

Leanne: Oh yes.

J McD: But is that reflective practice as such or just thinking though the past?

Leanne: Ah I see what you mean. Its not about social work as such, but I think it is because that .. It is all connected. One process leads to another and without that feelings stuff it… I couldn't feel confident to go out and work on placement. I go out next week and I am really which … I wouldn't have been otherwise.

J McD: That's really helpful. Is there anything else you want to say about reflective practice that I haven't raised… asked you about?

Leanne: No, not really. I don't think so.

J McD: Well that's been really interesting. Thank you very much.

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