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**TITLE OF THESIS**

**Learning from Lives: An exploration of the impact of service users' stories within pre-registration social work education**

**by**

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**Canterbury Christ Church University**

**Thesis submitted**

**for the Degree of Doctor of Education**

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## **Abstract**

This study reports the findings of an instrumental qualitative case study exploring the impact of service users' stories in professional social work education. A number of mandates -legal, practice and not least from the service user movement itself – have led to a closer involvement of service users in the pre-qualifying curriculum. Current research is beginning to consider how service user perspectives may be integrated within the social work curriculum although there has been less focus on the impact of such involvement. Located within a social constructionist paradigm, this study explores one aspect of involvement- stories of personal experience as told by service users themselves-and illuminates the understanding of 'impact' from the perspectives of students and service users as well as the lesser heard voice of the social work academic. Key questions in relation to an emancipatory approach to social work education are raised. Drawing on in depth individual and group interviews, document analysis and participant-as-observer data, key pedagogical implications emerged. Presented as thematic networks, findings identified the creative potential of using stories to promote criticality, personal reflection and reflexivity within the classroom. Emotionality and its management were also identified as significant themes as were the construction of roles and the identities of professional lecturers, students and service users. The findings revealed how aspects such as childhood sexual abuse, trauma and working with those with mental health needs may be taught via narratives. In this light, it identifies the key features of transformative learning and proposes a 'constructive' pedagogic model to promote personal and professional development. The opportunities and challenges relating to the use of stories are also scrutinized. Discussion includes the need to revisit how theory is taught including the potential of service users' told experience to enhance knowledge for practice and to practise via the creation of 'live theory' in the classroom.

The study concludes by identifying key messages for the social work curriculum and evaluates this case study methodology including its potential to generate theory amid wider calls for social work education research to be more firmly embedded in evidence-based and evidence-informed approaches.

# 1 Introduction

Contextual description is a defining feature of case study methodology (Merriam, 2009; Hyett et al 2014). As context is central to understanding the setting in which any case comes to be revealed, it is therefore the natural starting place for discussion. It will also serve to position the subject of this qualitative study -service users' stories as told by service users themselves- as a discrete activity within professional social work education. The study's focal point, the impact of such narratives, also remains an under-researched area within wider discourses related to pedagogy and service user involvement (Robinson & Webber, 2013). I will show how this qualitative case study research had a level of flexibility which was used to illuminate the various ways in which impact came to be understood and enacted within one university's social work curriculum. As I approached the study inductively, hypotheses were developed and refined in the course of the data collection and analysis. This provided the means to explore and generate theory through the stories themselves and participants' narratives of their experience. Both aspects may well not have come to light had an alternative methodology been used.

Service users' involvement (SUI) in social work education (SWE) forms part of the wider landscape of professional education to which service users (SUs) continue to make a significant contribution. Together with social work, this involvement has been most visible within the fields of nursing and medicine (Hilton, 2011). However, this development has occurred over a relatively short time scale and continues to present both a range of challenges and opportunities for those involved in the design and delivery of professional curricula. Not least, this sea change has been accompanied by a new language and terminology including 'people who use services' and 'experts by experience' (Tovey, 2007, p.15).

The term 'service user' (SU) can be 'used to mean different things in different research and professional contexts and internationally' (Morrow et al 2012, p.19). The general consensus in the literature is that it refers to people who are using –or who have used- a service. For example: carers or parents of service users, lay people, the public or non-professionals (Chambers & Hickey, 2012). It is their knowledge, gained through direct and personal experience, which has come to be seen as valuable to impart. Definitionally, however, 'service user' has and remains contested territory. Other definitions have been offered on the grounds



of inclusion. For example, Swift (2002) in an administrative vein, includes those who are eligible to access social work services. He also refers to those who define themselves as potential users of social work services, either because they anticipate a future need or because they choose not to use the services that are currently available to them. This muddies what are already unclear waters by introducing the notion of the 'hypothetical' SU. SU organisations give their own definitions. Many reject any use of the term 'service user' to imply that any individual's defining characteristic is that of a 'passive' recipient of services. Instead, a SU should always be self-identifying and seen as a person first and foremost rather than being seen as simply fitting into the various service divisions or 'client' groups (Shaping Our Lives National User Network, 2003). Recent research (Chambers & Hickey, 2012) exploring the current involvement of SUs in the design and delivery of pre-registration education and training programmes approved by the then Health Professions Council (HPC) concluded that, in this context, any definition of SUI would have to exclude students and academic staff as they are 'users' of the education service not health and social care. Such a demarcation runs counter to Beresford et al's (1994) earlier claims that educators and students themselves may also be service users whose experience should be validated and supported. The outcomes of Chambers and Hickey's (2012) study suggests that confusion still exists, especially amongst academic staff, as to who are the service users. A similar tension relates to timeframe restrictions on being considered a SU; whether someone's experience of a service has to be current or in the past. Interestingly -though perhaps not surprisingly- in relation to that same question, the 'consensus' workshop run as part of the above HCP commissioned research concluded that 'no agreement was reached' (Chambers & Hickey, 2012, p.85).

These observations form an important backdrop. It is clearly beyond the scope of this study to attempt to resolve some of these more enduring issues and debates. However, as I read more I could see that previous work undertaken in relation to SUI revealed a number of aspects of significance and relevance as well points of tension and ambiguity that would merit further exploration. At the very least the study would provide the opportunity for all participants to speak for themselves and define their own roles and experiences.

To avoid ambiguity in this study, I have adopted the definition of 'service user' that most closely corresponds with the way in which it is interpreted in the literature; as the 'user and public' group which includes patients, clients and carers (Chambers & Hickey, 2012). To clarify further, the stories referred to in this study -including those of the four SUs who agreed

to participate directly in the research- have all been told by people who currently use and/or have recently received social work and/or health services.

## 1.1 Orientation to the study

My initial orientation to the subject and final decision to concentrate on the impact of stories involved a scrutiny of existing evidence. Much recent work indicates widespread support for the principle of involving SUs in the design and delivery of professional education and training. Overall, the majority of these studies centre on SUs involved in classroom-based teaching (Cooper & Spencer-Dawe, 2006). However, I decided early on that my preparatory reading would involve reviewing research from fields **other** than social work. I thought it was important to look outside my known professional domain to see what other insights and perspectives had been reported and if they contained messages to inform my own SWE research.

Many benefits were reported in the data related to SU led teaching in the classroom. For example, gaining insight into the SU experience -while clearly beneficial for the education of students, as Chambers and Hickey (2012, p.15) commented- also has potential benefit to SUs as it potentially makes for a more empathic professional in the future. More immediately and concretely, students on clinically oriented programmes indicated feeling safer and more relaxed being taught by SUs in the familiarity of the class environment compared to clinical practice settings (Rees et al, 2007). It is not one-sided. According to Rush's (2008) insights into mental health teaching, here the balance of power also moves from the student to the SU; SUs become 'experts' based on their personal knowledge and experience of interventions within the mental health field. SUs cited the benefits of increased confidence and self-esteem and the development of new skills (Masters et al, 2002; Simpson et al 2008). This form of teaching enabled students to combine concrete experience with reflective observation. Interaction with SUs outside the clinical environment enabled psychosocial aspects of the individual to come to the fore (Rush, 2008). A range of robust evidence articulated SUI as making the classroom experience 'real' for many students (Ottewill et al, 2006).

Across the board it seemed that SUI challenged assumptions and highlighted the need to treat SUs with dignity and respect. The latter had a strong resonance with my professional value base and is a central feature of SWE. Moreover, it is also extremely pertinent in the current socio-political climate with increasing concerns regarding the safeguarding, care and

treatment of individuals and the pursuit of rights-centred and anti-oppressive practice(s) (Koubel, 2016).

Much less reported in this 'non-social work' literature were specific tensions and conflicts within the learning environment. There were some references to students feeling inhibited by SUs in the classroom and observations of interpersonal tensions between students and service users (Costello & Horne, 2011). These suggest that academic staff have at least a facilitation role to play and/or perhaps where the situation demands, the role of mediator.

In terms of role, the notion of 'expertise' has been highlighted. Chambers and Hickey's (2012) own primary research discovered, in line with other work they reviewed (see Masters et al, 2002), a view held by some educators, practitioners and students that it would be 'difficult' to involve SUs in certain aspects of a course. They concluded that overall this remains a somewhat confused picture; it remained unclear whether this relates to SUs' lack of expertise in the 'topic' being taught or their lack of expertise in 'being involved' and competent in their particular teaching role. Linked to this, Dogra et al (2008) make the distinction between the 'expert professional' and 'expert service user'. The former is the lecturer who has the skills and knowledge to deliver a curriculum while the 'expert service user' has expertise by virtue of his/her experience.

This initial review proved to be a very fruitful exercise in the context of the overall study. Through different lenses, it revealed other ongoing debates and aspects of SUI directly related to their teaching input which I could draw on to inform my own study. As one example, I was keen to learn the extent to which Dogra et al's (2008) above observations about the 'expert professional'/'expert service user' held true this time within SWE education as a different professional learning context. Would similar findings emerge connected to the sharing of one's personal narrative?

## **1.2 Background to the study**

In the light of these observations about professional education, it seemed to me that this was a wider context to which my proposed study might also be of value. With a more explicit focus on SWE, the study also takes place as the future configuration of social work services remains uncertain and the function of social work education much contested (Social Work Reform, House of Commons 3<sup>rd</sup> Report to Education Select Committee, 13/7/16; Munro, 2011). SUs

are making their voices heard within this debate, not least highlighting that their contributions are being overlooked in the reform of the profession including their input to students' theoretical learning (Social Work Reform, 2016, 3<sup>rd</sup> Report of Session 2016-2017, HC 201, written evidence SWR0010). This suggests that for these SUs at least, they viewed their specific contributions as particularly important.

In this study I was, therefore, keen to explore the impact of such contributions from the different standpoints of those involved. I have been involved in social work education and training (SWET) as a lecturer for more than two decades and have been strongly connected to different aspects of SUI. I was aware from previous biographical research I had undertaken as an individual case study (Cecil, 2010) that there is a paucity in the literature examining the notion of impact from the social work academic's perspective. I wanted to explore this further and broaden the scope of inquiry. I became aware that this is a relatively under-researched subject, characterised by newly emerging discourses and practices but with the impact of narratives themselves are rarely the main topic of inquiry (Eriksson, 2013). More broadly, I was interested in the nature and influence of 'expertise' in the classroom; the relationship between knowledge and experience and how this was played out in the learning environment. Are SUs engaged to provide their 'knowledge' of a particular subject or, as highlighted by Masters et al (2002), rather as a presence to provide 'an example' of how a particular initiative, theory or service impacted upon them. Or is it a combination of these? The current study would enable me to interrogate and test these questions. In terms of timeliness, the study reflects the continued importance of SUI at the local level and also (inter)nationally the UK's Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC's) concern to develop research capacity in a number of smaller disciplines, including social work (Shaw & Norton, 2008).

Nearly 20 years ago commentators highlighted how the development of naturalistic research and increasingly sophisticated interpretive theory have fuelled democratic evaluation and placed it squarely on the agenda for educational researchers (Broadfoot, 1988, p.9). Some claimed that those who might have been termed 'subjects' in the past have been elevated to more or less equal partners in the research enterprise. The extent to which this is actually the case remains questionable yet was prophetic given past and current emphasis on SUI participation and knowledge within social work education and other social research communities over the past 20 years (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2003; Evans, 1999; Beresford et al, 1997). The study can therefore be seen in this light. Philips and Shaw (2011) have called for social work research and SWE research to be more 'meaningful'. It should

produce more realistic depictions of SUs' experiences, have a real relevance to contemporary practice contexts and create forms of knowledge that advance social work practice and its education in both creative and transformative ways (Philips & Shaw, 2011, p.609). More 'faithful representations' (Philips & Shaw, 2011, p.609) of lived experiences and SUs' needs, with greater attention to the detail of their situations across the life course and the social work response, have also been highlighted (Clough et al, 2007; Hearn et al, 2004). Central to such perspectives is the tradition of social work's historical commitment to attending to the voice of the 'client' (Mayer & Timms, 1970) in line with participatory and empowering approaches to evaluation in social work (Lishman, 2007) and shifts in social work professional practice and theory from passive to active models of working with vulnerable citizens (Levin, 2004). This study sits quite comfortably within these principles. Although it stops short of a full participatory approach in terms of the participants taking shared control of the research process (in part due to time and availability of other resources) they contributed to its design in various ways and the very nature of their respective involvement, the stories told, shaped the final outcome. The study also seeks to add to the above aspirations by developing understanding of all participants', not solely SUs', experience and listening to their voices. I recognise that emancipatory research has been part of SUs' active response to equalising and changing relationships between 'the researched' and 'researchers'. I wanted to conduct the study in such a manner that all participants felt able to speak and act for themselves. I was also keen to avoid any type of invasive research of the sort carried out nearly 30 years ago 'on' those living with mental health needs, whereby the research process had been labelled 'psychiatric pornography' (Lawson, 1988). This study also had the potential to contribute to other emerging discourses surrounding social work practice and SWE which I will now outline.

### **1.2.1 The changing face of social work education: service user presence and a changing discourse**

The advent of the new social work degree qualification introduced in 2003 and the DoH (2002) requirement to involve SUs was heralded as both 'innovative and exciting' (Beresford & Boxall, 2012, p.161). In a specific mandate to Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) SUs were the only named and identified group from the wider stakeholder pool which HEIs were required to involve 'in all parts of programme design and delivery' (Levin, 2004, p.8).

However, Beresford and Boxall (2012) crucially highlight, although SUI was required in the design of the degree and in teaching and learning provision, specific requirements were neither identified in relation to allied research which supported the profession's knowledge base in this area nor to the theoretical base underpinning this largely uncharted aspect of SWE. Despite this, the way that SUI in teaching is conceptualised has undergone significant transformation since it was first acknowledged by the former Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW). As an example, CCETSW guidance predominantly located mental distress as well as mental health SUs themselves within medical model discourses: 'Involving users and carers in teaching can also be very productive by providing experiences at first hand of mental illness, treatment and care for mental illnesses and their impact on...individuals, carers and the wider community' (CCETSW, 1994, p.11). However, evidence of such 'impact' and the defining features of this 'productive' approach were yet to be identified. Moreover, some critics were swift to point out the particular ways in which SUs were constructed: 'as in the ritual of the ward round, as exhibits of particular medical symptomatologies, not as coherent subjects who might be seeking the discursive positions whereby to speak of their distress and their experience in their own terms' (Tew, 1999, p.435).

SUI was not a neutral activity then, nor is now and has increasingly become the subject of political discourse and welfare practice (Braye, 2000). Power remains pivotal to these emerging discourses (Ager & McPhail, 2008). Emancipation and the transformation of power relations between SUs and practitioners are seen to effect improvements in service provision and help avoid discriminatory and stigmatising practices (Lipsky, 2010). Theoretically, this study is grounded in such discourses and aims to make a further contribution. Transformation does not happen overnight but SUI as a crucial first step offers the opportunity for SUs' views to be broadcast.

In this light, Weinstein (2010) applies such emancipatory philosophies within the mental health field showing how to safeguard against tokenistic responses to SUI in education and training and how it may be reconciled with policy and professional pressures to provide 'safe' services (Weinstein, 2010, p.9). Resonating with this study, the emphasis is on the voices and experiences of people in their own Recovery process to develop alternative discourses. In an epistemological-political vein, she explains that underpinning her particular use of language is a move to demarcate and reclaim territory. The word 'Recovery' with an upper case 'R' denotes that its meaning in the context of mental health discourses is generally different from the dictionary definition of the word 'recovery' (a return to a normal healthy state following

illness or accident). The latter, she maintains, may not be an option for those living with enduring mental health needs whilst she fully acknowledges at the same time that there is no reason why they should not be able to live fulfilling lives: '...Recovery is about taking back control of one's life and being back in the driving seat' (Weinstein, 2010, pp.10-11).

However, there is a need for continued vigilance as the gains made may well currently stand on shaky ground. The College of Social Work (TCSW) had signalled a whole systems approach and commitment to SUI making the notion of 'co-production' explicit within its principles and in its promotion of a narrative for social work

([www.tcsw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/TheCollege/Media\\_centre/SUandCarerFeedbackPCF20.pdf](http://www.tcsw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/TheCollege/Media_centre/SUandCarerFeedbackPCF20.pdf) Guidance & information). Despite its long awaited advent, it was recently and very swiftly disbanded.

SUI remains as one of the cornerstones of social work degree programmes and continues to be identified as such by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). What is noticeable, however, is the omission of 'user-led perspectives' in relation to the theoretical knowledge base of social work which had featured in the previous QAA's statement (QAA, revised 2008, p.10, section 5.14). Instead, it appears in the Service Users and Carers domain under the less forceful guise of: 'underpinning perspectives...of the characteristics and circumstances of people who need care and support...drawing on...the experience and expertise of people who use services' (QAA, 2016, Draft consultation on academic benchmarks for social work p.6, section 5.4 ii). This lessened emphasis does not fit with Munro's (2011) earlier calls for the profession to embrace professional curiosity and creativity within practice, both of which SUI had proven well able to stimulate in students on social work programmes. So too the need to improve relational aspects of practice (Munro, 2011) had been identified and who better than SUs to take the lead on such aspects in the curriculum, particularly given their proven effectiveness in doing so? (Branfield, 2009; Agnew & Duffy, 2010).

However, the statement does signal the contribution that 'service user educators' (QAA, 2016, p.21, section 6.4) can make to teaching, learning and assessment practices. Of note, the term 'SU 'group referred to here...includes some that are involuntary or unwilling recipients of social work services....It is recognised that students and staff may also be, or have been service users and/or carers...' (QAA, 2016, p.8, section 2.7). These developments have also been accompanied by a raft of guidance documenting ways in which concepts such as 'collaboration' may be operationalised as well as the principles and practicalities of building

and sustaining such partnerships (Levin, SCIE, 2004). However, two observations are to be made. First, whilst such guidance is helpful and clearly needed, it can veer towards the mechanistic by offering 'prescriptions' for educational practice and involvement and often fails to explore other core dimensions of the SUI process(es) in any depth. Second, the QAA proposed statement continues to fall short of identifying either the potential challenges posed by the inclusion of 'involuntary' or 'unwilling' recipients of services or the implications of students and staff as SUs. It is hoped that the study would be able to offer relevant insight in relation to these aspects.

Taking a longer term view of professional education, Lam (2005) highlights how the past 50 years have witnessed an increasing and consistent shift from the teacher to the learner in terms of both theoretical exploration and how pedagogical principles and practices are conceptualised. Social work is increasingly performed in fragmented and diverse contexts and over the years a range of key theorists have joined forces in a groundswell to challenge the separation of theory and practice (Mezirow, 1981; Schon, 1987; Fook, 2002, 2003). There is now a wealth of literature showing the importance of building (critical) reflection into social work, education and health curricula (Tate & Sills, 2004). This has also been accompanied by other approaches to teaching and learning. Speaking in her role as Associate Director (HE) of the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme, David (2008) welcomes the growth of a new body of methodologies grounded in personalised learning and narrative approaches including the use of life histories and auto/biography within the fields of education, HE and lifelong learning. Such methodologies, she maintains, offer the potential for rich insights within the current climate of encouraging learning across the life span and the turn to more inclusive HE practices. This requires a more searching and comprehensive response reflected at policy level, going beyond paying lip service to such principles: 'British Government's policies...concern us deeply...whilst they are committed to a notion of social justice, they draw upon evidence-based approaches which sometimes ignore the more subtle and complex methodological approaches of social scientists and other educational researchers' (David, 2008, p.5).

### **1.3 Study overview: Strategy, focus and rationale**



My motivation to adopt an instrumental case study methodology (Stake, 1995) was to develop a deeper understanding of the subtleties of experience. By examining individual narratives and piecing these together with other contextual evidence, I wanted to see what lessons -if any- could be learned in terms of constructing approaches to learning that corresponded to the needs of the social work curriculum, as well as those involved in its delivery.

I took a realistic approach to exploring the phenomenon of impact (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). I needed to ensure a strong link between the research processes and the research methods to enable me to access the eight data sources and to answer the research questions effectively (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Significant -albeit much lesser reported- tensions are also appearing in the SUI literature including wider contextual factors, the politics surrounding SUI and the ways in which 'involvement' is understood. So too, at the personal or micro level -which I conceptualised as 'narratives of involvement'- there is evidence that all does not necessarily run smoothly at a relational level and that the process as well as the content of that involvement would both benefit from closer scrutiny. Students' voices were fairly comprehensively captured within the literature and were quite closely followed by SUs, though the views of social work academics were lacking.

To this end, I chose a firmly qualitative approach, partly due to the relatively limited research in this area but also due to the complexity of the social work programme and the nature of work/learning context. In line with the storied focus of the study; a qualitative approach offered the opportunity to listen to the views of SUs, colleagues and students and -as far as was possible- listen to the views within their context. This would allow me to explore their meaning and gain insight into the examples reported verbally, in their written form or those which I could directly observe. Theoretically, social constructionism therefore proved attractive and as such underpins the study and informed the construction of the thematic networks. The majority of current studies are only able to provide evidence of impact at the reaction level (Bailey, 2002) of Kirkpatrick's original (1967) model and are focused on testing processes and knowledge rather than on how learning is constructed. This study, therefore, aims for depth understanding to complement the more practical or process orientated elements of SWE.

I am mindful that as a single-case design, the findings are unable to provide any generalising conclusion(s) (Zainal, 2007). I did, however, ensure that I incorporated triangulated evidence

and that a further layer of rigour was built into the process which I detail later in relation to Toulmin's (1958) contribution.

### **1.3.1 Research questions**

To explore the impact of service users' stories within pre-registration social work education, this study addresses the following research questions:

- What is the impact of the use of service user narratives of their lived experiences on social work education?
- What is the nature and extent of learning as a result of service users sharing of their narratives?
- What are the challenges for service users, students and educators when service users share their real life experiences?

## **1.4 Dissertation overview**

The discussion in this thesis is structured as follows:

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter introduces the context of the research and identifies its significance, purpose and aims. It outlines the study's methodological and theoretical grounding and the study's research questions.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter reviews and critiques relevant literature in relation to SUI and SWE .It specifically reviews literature addressing the use of SU narratives within SWE, highlighting how 'impact' has been reported and its relevance to the study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter describes epistemological issues and the methodological framework underpinning this qualitative instrumental case study. It outlines the research strategy, design

and methods including data collection and analysis. It provides site and participant information. Ethical considerations and limitations of the research are also presented.

#### **Chapter 4: Presentation of findings**

This chapter presents the study's findings in the form of four thematic Global Networks and provides illustrative data extracts.

#### **Chapter 5: Discussion of findings**

This chapter provides a critical discussion of the findings including their analysis and interpretation with reference to the study's original research questions and findings from the literature review.

#### **Chapter 6: Recommendations, Future Research & Conclusion**

This chapter presents recommendations based on the study's findings, suggestions for future research and overall conclusions.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

**'A different voice may be particularly effective in disturbing the existing participants into re-examining matters they had come to take for granted'**

**Stefan Collini (2012) in 'What Are Universities For?'**

## Introduction

As Hart observes; the originality of a research topic is often dependent on a critical reading of a wide-ranging literature (Hart, 1998). My first aim in this chapter is therefore to interrogate relevant literature to highlight key developments in relation to the use of narratives and their role within teaching and learning contexts.

In terms of articles, the literature search identified a combination of research projects, literature reviews, descriptions of particular initiatives as well as opinion pieces in relation to SUI in curricula. I took a relatively loose definition of research as this also enabled me to include SWET consultation exercises (Branfield et al, 2007; Branfield, 2009) and opinion pieces. Much of the current literature focuses on nursing, medicine and social work contexts although some relevant studies related to SUI in the education of other health professionals. I reviewed international studies from comparable countries in terms of their approach to SWET and SUI and/or where SUs narratives had been used within the social work curriculum. The parameters of the search were that the articles be in English and, in terms of currency, published between 2000 and the present day. The majority of the research typically took the form of small scale qualitative, studies focussing on specific initiatives within a particular education institutions which again were clearly relevant. It tended to be mainly descriptive, highlighting participants' experiences, perceptions and views of various SUI. As will be seen, the review also references older sources, for example, early critiques of disability research and seminal works from the fields of education and social work. These were selected due to their theoretical salience and/or their continued influence within contemporary SWET.

This will also serve to contextualize the second aim of the chapter; the relevance of 'narrative' and the particular place it occupies within social work practice and social work education. Together these aspects will tell the story of service users' involvement in the social work

curriculum before a more focused examination of the evidence base as it relates to the use of service user stories. Here I will pay particular attention on the notion of 'impact' and how it has been reported.

Throughout this study, I have been cognisant of Hart's claim that 'it is the ideas and work of others that will provide the researcher with the framework for their own work's Hart (1998, p.27). I was particularly interested to see whose voice and perspective(s) were broadcast within the literature, how these were conveyed and whether it was possible to identify any explicit-and implicit- messages. By tracing this wider narrative of how SU stories in their different forms have contributed to social work education, it has enabled me to identify core themes of relevance to the current study and also served as an important background resource for the study.

## **2.1 Setting the scene: the turn to the narrative**

Earlier contributors to the field of social sciences explored the concept of biography. For example, Mills' discussion of the 'sociological imagination' began to locate personal experience within the contexts of both social history and the social world: 'By the fact of his living, he contributes - however minutely - to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove' (Mills, 1970, p.12). In a more contemporary light, social scientists such as Burr (1995) show the continued relevance of debates about the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge and how, under the spotlight of social constructionism, any notion of 'truth' becomes problematic. As will be seen such views are indeed finding a foot hold in the teaching and knowledge base of social work practice (Milner & O'Byrne, 1995).

The increasing focus on narrative in the form of biography has been documented by several observers who highlight its particularly interactive flavour and opportunities for cross-disciplinary approaches (Squire, 2005; Chamberlayne et al, 2003). Indeed, the move has been heralded as a paradigm shift within the whole range of social science disciplines (Wrigley, 2002, p.1) characterized by an array of approaches whose main field of study is 'lives'" (Rodriguez, 2003, p.1). Squire (2005), for example, maintains that by drawing on literary and cultural theory and story-research traditions within sociology, anthropology and psychology - as well as medicine, therapy and new media - it offers a high degree of salience for fields

outside as well as inside academia. She observes that this 'turn' also brings structures of language into focus with 'a plethora of attendant possibilities for linguistic, visual and even behavioural analysis' (Squire 2005, p.2) and draws on Seale's (2000) description of sequences of everyday actions as 'life-maintaining narratives' to support such claims. This narrative 'permeation' has similarly been observed by Coffey (2001) within sociological enquiry as a strategy for enhanced exploration of personal histories as well as the relationships between structure and agency in contemporary society (Coffey, 2001, p.54). Similarly, Sarantakos (1994) identifies two key elements which may be contained within narrative accounts. Firstly; the question of how subjects define themselves and interpret the world and secondly; the relations about their opinions and their social environment. Such accounts have informed understanding of other related areas such as how students construct their identity as they progress through university education (Rodriguez, 2003, p.2).

There is evidence of biographical methods being employed in a range of learning contexts. Sword (2007), for example, considers how the use of auto/biographical narratives in academic development and story-telling within higher education has been seen to improve learning performances (McDrury & Alterio, 2002; Roberts, 1998). With a more explicit focus on teaching; Ironside (2006) observes the growth of a range of interpretive pedagogies with their roots in feminism, criticality, post-modernism and phenomenology which, though having epistemological and practical differences: 'All offer an approach to schooling, teaching, and learning in which interpreting particular encounters becomes the context for learning' (Ironside, 2006, p.479). There is also evidence that educators around the world are referring to narrative methods to inform and reform their work (Swenson & Sims, 2003), including teaching informed by narrative research to enhance learning about the lives of individuals in marginalized communities who have experienced severe economic and cultural 'dislocations' (West & Carlson, 2007). Literature on critical pedagogy and narrative also articulates three core components as central to the process and rationale underpinning the integration of narratives: i) a socialisation towards critical thinking and conceptually driven analysis, ii) the importance of dialogic learning and reflective dialogue and iii) the notion of social action as education (Saleebey & Scanlon, 2006). For example; the challenges and opportunities of developing a pedagogical model with service users as co-teachers in relation to disability studies are also explored by Gutman et al (2012). Central to the latter was the 'deconstruction of hierarchies' and 'encouraging students (and ourselves) to question formal knowledge

through the lens of both the medical model and the social model and explore how they both may impact upon work with disabled people' (Gutman et al, 2012, p.212).

The 'illness narrative' literature also shows how stories provide insight into 'life from the inside' for individuals living with a terminal illness or those with enduring mental health needs (Reissman, 2005, p.428) In relation to social work, Cree and Davis (2007) explored the perspectives of those 'on the inside', i.e. service users, carers and practitioners. Given (2007) is concerned with the development of a narrative approach to the training and development of health and social care professionals as well as the narrative construction of service user and professional identities.

This greater emphasis on the collection of life stories in generating qualitative data within social science has led to narrative accounts increasingly being seen as significant points of research and debate rather than simply adjuncts or components of other 'serious' methods (Roberts, 2002; Rodriguez, 2003; Riessman & Quinney, 2005). West, for example, addresses questions of validity facing the biographical researcher and those features of constructivist research which, qualitatively, distinguish the latter from its positivist counterpart: 'The good story...gains its credence from engaging fully with the particulars of experience, and from a process of transforming understanding in the generation of new insight and meaning.' (West, 2001, p.211). Reid's (2008) work takes us to the point of considering reciprocal conversations and "auto/biographical immersion in the text" (Reid, 2008, p.25). This revisits Stanley's (1992) earlier discussion of her preference for the use of the hybrid term 'auto/biography' in relation to feminism; to cover the individual experiences of others as well as our own reflections on life in order to understand social issues. The notion of stories as co-constructions between narrator and listener/questioner are similarly encompassed in West's emphasis 'inter-view' (West, 2007). The function of stories as a form of politics or to 'broadcast' voices (Squire, 2005) that are otherwise neglected within dominant political structures and processes such as the voice of the working class or the experience of women has also been discussed within the relevant literature (Fine, 2001; Andrews et al, 2000; Andrews, 2002).

One example of how this was played in relation to survivors' personal narratives of domestic violence and social worker interventions was the subject of Keeling and van Wormer's study

(2012). Theoretically grounded in one school of feminism -i.e. standpoint feminism- with its emphasis on listening to women's voices (Bui, 2007), the study followed feminist principles of conducting narrative interviews (Dominelli, 2002). This included a vigilance to support the regaining of autonomy as each participant chose the juncture at which her own story began and used personal discretion to terminate her own interview. Central to the findings were the women's experiences of power, control and threats which - usually associated with perpetrators- were similarly revealed to be the women's experience of responses on the part of social workers. The authors stress the importance of listening to survivors' views and professionals sharing their power to ensure that all voices are heard in policy-making processes. Of note here is the observation that the literature shows the use of stories within both political and personal spheres. At one end of the spectrum, for example, Biggs' (2001) macro-level discussion shows the place of critical narrative and stories of ageing as told in contemporary social policy; in highlighting the complex and often contradictory nature of stories that we are encouraged to live by in later life. At the micro-level, individualised, personal accounts have also become increasingly common within social work. For example, in relation to fostering and adoption a range of stories are readily accessible covering issues such as adopting a disabled child, same sex adopters and reparation of childhood loss and trauma (see [coramadoption.org.uk](http://coramadoption.org.uk); [barnardos.org.uk/fosteringandadoption/adoption/adoption-stories](http://barnardos.org.uk/fosteringandadoption/adoption/adoption-stories)).

## **2.2 Construction of understanding in practice: social work education, service user knowledge and 'principled practice'**

Key social work commentators have continued to make the case for a constructive approach to social work and their observations are important in charting the development of this narrative turn. Central to this approach has been a questioning of the extent to which integrity has been demonstrated in relation to service user involvement more generally and a scrutiny of values-based dimensions. I have conceptualised this as the notion of 'principled practice'.

As a backdrop, Parton and O'Byrne make the case strongly for a 'constructive' approach to social work (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000) in which they explored the relevance of those social theories associated with post-modernism, social constructionism and narrative approaches to



social work .Elsewhere Parton (1994) had observed that: 'Increasingly it feels as if social work does not have a core theoretical knowledge base, and that there is a hole at the centre of the enterprise' (Parton, 1994, p.30). A further factor compounding the situation is that since the early 1970's, social work in Britain has been highly contested and subject to a variety of public, political and professional debates. In part, Parton argues, this is because the space occupied by social work has always been complex as it is related to and to a great extent dependent upon many other and more established discourses; particularly law, health, education and psychiatry (Parton 1996, p.6). These themes are subsequently revisited by Parton and O' Byrne in 'Constructive Social Work' (2000) and voiced more unambiguously: 'There has been a failure to articulate and develop concepts and theories for practice in recent years which has done a considerable disservice not only to practitioners but, more crucially, the people with whom they work.' (Parton & O' Byrne, 2000, p.7). As part of making both their position and argument explicit; at the outset, the authors give their rationale for selecting the term 'constructive social work.' Constructive is defined as 'having a purpose; helpful' (The Oxford Dictionary). These are ideas which we want to articulate and capture. The term constructive as we use it here is thus theoretical and metaphorical; both are important. '(Parton & O'Byrne, 2000, p.10). Their message is clear: 'For us here the key focus is work with the service user and it is the failure, over recent years, to address how we can make sense of the face-to-face encounters of the work that has been missing and which we see as in urgent need of attention' (Parton & O' Byrne, 2000, p.10). The study of narrated experience and the work of social workers as narratives has received previous attention. Goldstein (1990) more broadly put the case for narrative theory as a possible practice theory for social work by offering a real opportunity to operationalise the precept 'start where the client is' (Goldstein, 1990, p.39). Core to this is the search for understanding and knowledge in people's actions (Nygren & Blom, 2001, p.371).

Beresford (2003) also articulates such a position by exploring different ways of thinking about knowledge and carrying out such research that values people's first-hand experience and experiential knowledge. His theoretical position here is clear: 'The greater the distance between direct experience and its interpretation, then the more likely resulting knowledge is to be inaccurate, unreliable and distorted' (Beresford, 2003, p.4). In this work; he covers much ground including: ownership of knowledge, validity and reliability of experience and the transformative potential of face-to-face contact with people with direct experience in developing others' understanding. He maintains that the way forward is not to deny the

inherent difference between those with and without direct experience but rather 'to place value on that which may help bring the two closer together' (Beresford, 2003, p.54). The case is made for a more empowering approach grounded in emancipatory discourses which at its heart lie messages of inclusion. 'So, there is a value in knowledge constructed by people without direct experience. They have a contribution to make. However, it should never deny them the chance to develop and offer their own knowledge' (Beresford, 2003, p.54).

In this vein, Scheyett and Diehl (2004) place values firmly on the agenda in their exploration of a facilitated dialogue process between users of mental health services and social work students. Central to their analysis, the authors highlight the importance of the values of self-determination, empowerment and partnership as defining features of social work practice with service users. Amongst their reflections, the following; "We teach students that social work's role is not to do for, but rather with...resulting in an empowerment process whereby people: 'gain mastery and control over their lives and become active participants in efforts to influence their environments' (Bartle et al, 2002, p.33), cited in Scheyett and Diehl (2007, p.436). Scheyett and Diehl therefore challenge social work academics to adopt a professional integrity in line with the profession's underpinning principles: 'Social work educators, if we are to act in congruence with our values, must examine the extent to which we practise partnership, self-determination and empowerment in our curriculum development and in the educational process itself' (Scheyett & Diehl, 2007, p.436). It is to this area that I now turn.

In line with the above, it has been observed that current developments in social work theory and practice have a greater emphasis on actively working with rather than for service users (Marsh & Fisher, 1992; Beresford and Croft, 1993). Waterson and Morris (2005) also support this by highlighting similar developments such as The British Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics launched in 2002; which places a strong emphasis on service user involvement in the development of practice and policy. Baldwin and Estey-Burt's (2012) discussion of narrative ethics couches the notion of: 'listening to one's story' itself as an ethical activity which involves two primary facets of all narratives; the story as it is told and the way in which it is told or the saying and the said (Newton, 1995). Baldwin and Estey-Burt's assert that service user and social worker compose their narratives in relationship and dialogue with the other. Both finally emerge with a co-constructed narrative that shows a clear responsibility to the 'Other' and whereby this narrative, ethical relationship then becomes the guide for all future action (Baldwin and Estey-Burt's, 2012, p.4).

From their vantage point as social work educators, Waterson and Morris observe that: 'Such an emphasis occurs whether models of social work have been developed primarily from a user empowerment perspective' (Beresford & Trevillion, 1995), or: 'From theoretical perspectives which may emphasise user involvement such as the exchange model' (Smale & Tuson, 1993); the 'interactive approach' (Payne, 1991) or, more recently, Parton and O'Byrne's (2000) model of 'constructive social work practice' (Waterson & Morris, 2005, p.656). Whilst this may be the view of some academics within the academy, has this always been and is it currently the case?

## **2.3 Emancipatory perspectives: tensions and opportunities**

Although great strides have been made both in terms of Service User Involvement and a fairer representation of service users and their situations, this journey has been far from smooth and continues to be beset with challenges. For example, Hunt's (1981) early critique of disability research questioned the ethical base of key research taught. Pointing to seminal work in the field by Miller and Gwynne (1972), it was noted that this had in fact 'exploited the lives and experiences of service users, whilst at the same time furthering the researchers' own careers' (Beresford and Boxall, 2012, p.155). It was not so long ago that Jones found 'startling continuities, such as social work's construction of clients as generally unworthy and manipulative individuals' (Jones 1996, p.197).

In a similar theoretical vein; Beresford and Croft (2001) show that service users' own 'knowledge' grounded in their experience may well be at variance with those held by professionals. Further, it has been suggested that the narrative turn has been slow to arrive due to the reluctance of some educators and practitioners to adopt methods or models of practice that appear to be at odds with notions of science or 'professionalism' (Margolin, 1997; Reissman, 1993) including perceived professional resistance (Evans et al, 2002).

Of continuing concern is Warren and Boxall's (2009) more recent observation that service users' patterns of social exclusion outside the academy may be replicated if not, indeed, even amplified within it. More optimistically, however, they also show how these may be challenged within the academy; drawing on an innovative project which confronted their

observation and tackled this contradiction head on. It included service users as students together with other full-time undergraduates in a social policy class where learning focused on the historical exclusion of service users from discussions about social inclusion. Multiple dimensions of social exclusion were considered' informed by sociological perspectives and where the whole group engaged in an exploration of the notion of 'difference' and the 'othering' of those who are the subjects of social policy. In this way, the educational initiative responded to an earlier call: 'It is difficult to see how questions can be asked and answers offered about social exclusion unless all those concerned -including those included in the category themselves- have equal opportunities to contribute their perspectives, meanings and knowledge' (Beresford & Wilson,1998, pp.89-90).

Language too has fallen under scrutiny; Welshman's (2008) concern about historical social exclusion discourses centring on 'the social problem group' (Lidbetter, 1933) and Murray's (1990) conceptualisation of 'the underclass'. It is therefore of little surprise that several current authors locate themselves within emancipatory discourses in an attempt to address these questions and to advance the emancipatory goals of feminist, disablist and other critical theoretical perspectives.

Overall critical social theory as a school of thought stresses both reflective assessment and critique of society and culture through the application of knowledge gained from the social sciences and humanities. Grounded first in sociology and then examined in the field of literary criticism, it is arguably best defined as a theory founded upon critique. Wright's (2009) more contemporary position in relation to an emancipatory social science involves full attention both to its means and anti-oppressive purpose with an explicit commitment to moral purpose in the production of knowledge: ' The academic and theoretical challenge to such oppressive constructions in social work education is beginning to be articulated through emancipatory research paradigms and critiques of the so-called neutrality and objectivity of traditional social research.' (Beresford and Boxall,2012,p.160)

As Ring's (2014) recent discussion of the highlighted, critical social theory illuminates and interrogates a range of everyday human activities by examining their underpinning intellectual, social and structural foundations. Central to his discussion is Habermas' (1971) emphasis on knowledge; which argued that knowledge is constructed by the interests of its

users; thus, distinguishing the 'cognitive interests' of control, understanding and emancipation. As Ring maintains; this reveals not only the multiple ends to which professional knowledge provides the means but also the academy's distinctive role in developing, critiquing, interpreting and transmitting the knowledge base for professionals. Social work practitioners often construct their roles in more complex terms than those found in any narrower social policy definition/perspectives where they may be cast as public servants and their professional activity described as essentially instrumental. Practitioners often include an interpretive emphasis on understanding the subjective and social nature of people where an emancipatory acknowledgement of power is seen as central to creating and compounding social problems (Ring, 2014; Howe, 2008). Ring concludes that the social work curriculum then truly needs to represent the social work functions of understanding and emancipation, not just instrumental functions such as problem-solving.

The literature includes examples of collective involvement to challenge traditional understandings of service users and to facilitate their standpoints and knowledge being heard within the academy (Brown & Young, 2007; Baldwin & Sadd, 2006). Specific groups such as Advocacy in Action and Citizens as Trainers are committed to 'support one another and to empower themselves individually and collectively (Advocacy in Action et al, 2006, p.335). This commitment is underpinned by a belief in shared learning. This is part of a wider ground swell and greater professional preoccupation with aspects such as rights centred practice(s): 'Caring relationships are generating discourses of rights and care through which people can talk about the individual and shared troubles and aspirations, 'care ethics' arguably being one such language' (Warren & Boxall, 2009, p.285). Similarly, field literature also contains examples of service users' collaboration in broadcasting situations of survival and abuse within the social work curriculum. Beginning to hint at the notion of impact as a result of their participation, Glynn and Ansell (2006) reflect on how, at a micro-interpersonal level, service users learned not only how to support and advocate for each other but how such relationships could provide a mutual learning which, in turn, could be harnessed and used to improve the education and training of social workers and other professionals.

With a focus on individual service user involvement, we see Narey consulting with and citing the 'immensely impressive' Jenny Molloy who co-authored 'Hackney Child ' (Daniels & Livingstone, 2014) in his report's discussion of the politics of social work teaching (Narey report, 2014, p.12). Molloy writes from the perspective of having been a child in care and is

now a successful author and a visiting lecturer at a number of universities. She lists amongst her achievements: her contribution to producing the Care Leavers Charter (endorsed and implemented through the Care Leavers Foundation), her work with many thought leaders in Scotland (including the Scottish Government) and the devising of a training programme-based on her personal recovery from a damaging childhood and addiction- which has been implemented in several Local Authorities. As she observes: 'It has received a response which I didn't expect, one of enthusiasm, passion to carry the learning through to direct work and an understanding of what it is really like to live through an abusive childhood, a life in care, and then life as a care leaver.' (20/12/13 interview with Deona Hooper [www.socialworkhelper.com](http://www.socialworkhelper.com)). Her experiences, as well as those of other service users, have been shared globally and facilitated via the American based socialworkhelper website founded in 2011 which, amongst other aims, strives to assist providers of services with becoming more knowledgeable about the challenges and barriers that consumers of services face.

In many ways, Molloy's words echo Beresford's (2003) earlier contribution above. Beresford has been highly influential within the service user field and continues to write from his dual vantage point of being a long-term user of statutory mental health services and Professor of Social Policy at Brunel University. He is also the Chair of Shaping Our Lives, the national user controlled organisation committed to increasing the involvement and empowerment of health and social care service users. In 'It's Our Lives' (2003) his theory of knowledge, distance and experience which -on closer reading- revisits Russell's (1910, 1912) earlier concept of: 'knowledge by acquaintance' emphasises immediate, unmediated knowledge and direct awareness obtained through a direct causal (experience-based) interaction between person and object; free from inference and in contrast to: 'knowledge by description'. Beresford's work is significant as it locates service user experience firmly within emancipatory discourses and the theory he presents is organic in that: 'It has grown from seeing how things are for people' (Beresford, 2003, p.5). It importantly theorises the relationship between knowledge (and generation of knowledge) and experience: 'Only when we experience something for ourselves does our knowledge about it connect directly with first-hand experience. Then alone can it be based on our own interpretations and understandings. In all other cases when our knowledge is not based on direct experience, for good or bad, it is based on someone else's interpretation(s)' (Beresford, 2003, p.25). Such observations also lead to a closer examination of the place occupied by both 'the researched' and 'the researcher'. In her discussion of the researcher's placing or positioning of self in the

research activity, Reid (2008, p.21) raises key questions in relation to the boundaries between the two. In exploring the critical approach with its lean towards emancipatory interests; she argues that if the aim is to produce social change and not merely description, then ideological and power issues become central. This may indeed put the neutrality of the researcher under scrutiny but is an approach that demands both a transparency and honesty. As Reid claims: 'We are already in the research' and this can afford the opportunity to "engage with our pre-existing understandings and assumptions rather than attempt to deny them" (Reid, 2008, p.25).

Such ideas have continued to promote service user experience as a credible and reliable source of knowledge to complement other academic learning and professional training (SCIE, 2003). We are beginning to witness the greater engagement with service users being accompanied by a more considered and confident articulation of its theoretical basis and rationale. The unique characteristic of service user knowledge was earlier identified by Borkman (1976) as that 'learned from personal experience with a phenomenon rather than truth acquired by discursive reasoning, observation or reflection on information provided by others' (Borkman, 1976, p.446). Later Cotterrell and Morris (2012, p.58) develop the definition of experiential, or direct knowledge; arguing that such knowledge arises from personal participation in the phenomenon, incorporating a reflective stance on this lived experience. Additionally, they claim that the individual holds belief and trust in this knowledge based on their experience of this phenomenon. Such contributions evidence an active engagement in knowledge production within the social work field. As has been observed (Staddon, MHSUs in Research-critical sociological perspectives: Policy Press); service user knowledge is beginning to claim its own space in epistemological debates. In contrast to practitioner, policy or academic knowledge; it is not based solely on analytical, intellectual, occupational or political concern.

Despite these encouraging signs that both service user involvement and service user knowledge as fields of study are gathering momentum, there still remains a labyrinth of professional, institutional and educational contradictions to be negotiated. It is important here to consider those wider contextual factors which may work against this momentum. Significant barriers exist in relation to the recognition of 'expert knowledge' of service users and their need for support in developing skills to become involved (Barnes, 1997) as well as: 'The failure of many professionals including lecturers and social workers to believe that we

are capable of full and equal participation' (CitizensasTrainersGroup et al, 200, p.304). Such experiences are similarly reflected in other organisational observations (Cecil, 2010) highlighting themes such as accessibility of key personnel and overly rigid, bureaucratic payment structures which do not always support service users' involvement as co-educators. This theme has also been discussed by Basset et al (2006) in relation to service user involvement in mental health training and education and the inherent contradictions within a higher education environment. Although associated with academic freedom and independent thinking, speaking, research and scholarly activity; the reality is often one of a hierarchical, frequently insensitive institutional structure at odds with the liberal, co-operative and enabling structure that those coming from outside the academy would expect. The situation is further compounded, as Humphreys (2005) maintains in her discussion of the sources of knowledge for social work and the battles between them. She observes that the claims to knowledge within any profession are often deeply contested. With an emphasis on power and also drawing on Foucault's (1980) assertion that a claim to knowledge is a claim to power, Humphreys states that 'who is allowed to speak, for whom and with what authority and influence point to the issues which are central to the development of professional discourse and the role of knowledge/power in producing formulations of 'the truth' which structure the way in which we come to 'see', know and name ideas and concepts' (Humphreys, 2005, pp.797-798). Echoing Parton and O'Byrne's earlier claims she maintains that: 'The derivative nature of the knowledge base for social work has meant that 'what counts' as knowledge for social workers has always been contested and has often left the profession with an insecurity about the nature of its foundational knowledge' (Humphreys, 2005, p.798). Such insights support others' observations (Barnes, 2006) that there is no room for complacency in terms of inclusion in relation to the wider service user landscape.

## **2.4 Researching the impact of social work education**

Within the user community itself, the past two decades have witnessed a growth of user-led and emancipatory research accompanied by emerging standards (see for example Barnes et al 1999; Fisher, 2002). In promoting the cause and case for such activity, commentators have highlighted the wisdom of users underpinned by the incitement that 'it's time to listen to people who know' (Pawson et al, 2003, p.62). As these authors observe; standards related to user and carer knowledge continue to be: 'essentially aspirational' and 'revolve around the twin pillar principles of "participation" and "accountability"' (Pawson et al, 2003, p.61).



However, clear standards for user knowledge drawing on first principles are beginning to emerge and are informed by disability and emancipatory research perspectives (Barnes, 2003). At the same time, there is a parallel call for social work research to be: 'seamlessly integrated' into social work education in order to address more adequately trends in evidence-based practice (Phillips et al, 2012). More broadly and more recently a number of reviews have identified a lack of evaluative research and what little exists has tended to focus on post-qualifying education (Mitchell, 2001; Carpenter, 2005). Of 60 papers identified in a knowledge review of assessment training in social work (Crisp et al, 2003), only 11 reported any information about their impact. As has been noted, evidence related to impact is essential if education is to be evaluated effectively and programmes' resources targeted appropriately (Skinner & Whyte, 2004). There is also a particular paucity of evidence regarding the impact on service users and carers (Ogilvie-Whyte, 2006). In their evaluation of a Birmingham University Inter-professional Training Programme in Community Health (1998-2002) Carpenter et al (2003) assessed outcomes for service users using a wide range of standard outcome measurements. However, social workers have questioned whether these traditional quantitative methods are able to engage effectively with factors such as complexity, individuality and meaning (Felton, 2005). The literature shows a continued debate (for example, see Carpenter, 2005) over the most effective ways of assessing the educational impact of social work programmes. Pawson and Tilley (1997) had earlier pursued this aspect in making a case for a predominantly qualitative approach citing the limited research in this area and the complexity of the taught programme/work-based learning relationship. Such an approach offered the opportunity to listen to the views of key participants within their context, explore their meaning and gain insight into any working examples given. They concluded that in-depth exploration would not have been possible using methods aiming for statistical significance (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

Carpenter's (2005) study continues to stimulate discussion by attempting to identify what is actually meant by the 'outcomes' of social work education. In this he refers to Kraiger et al's (1993) review of theories of learning outcome which provides a synthesis of research and illuminates those relationships thought to influence outcomes. In this paper Carpenter also scrutinises Kirkpatrick's (1967) widely used four level classification of educational outcomes (Reaction, Learning, Behaviour and Results) and presents a generalised version incorporating Barr et al's (2000) subsequent elaboration to include modification of learning outcomes and the division of 'results' into change in organisational practice and benefits to service users.

Other recent examples of refinement to Kirkpatrick's framework are concerned with exploring the notion of impact; including taking into account the impact of training on users and carers (Barr et al, 2000) and post-qualifying education in mental health (Bailey et al, 2003). Where earlier studies were carried out, they commonly tended to focus on the format and delivery elements of programmes or learners' reaction' levels (Bailey, 2002) and to provide basic information about delivery rather than evidence of impact at any of the higher levels. The challenge then, Carpenter maintains, is for education and training to be evaluated beyond Kirkpatrick's first reactionary level.

I refer to Carpenter's and others' work here for three reasons. First, Carpenter's study is clearly relevant to the current study and forms part of its wider research context. Second, he also reminds us that although narrative accounts of social work education and its diverse methods abound; it is much rarer to come across research with carefully designed outcomes. Third, he maintains a strong focus on the service user throughout the research process and addresses the place of narrative accounts as part of educational practice. Carpenter concludes that 'engagement' is key to any research concerned with 'outcomes'; with staff, with students and with service users. My study clearly does not attempt to 'measure' outcomes in the way(s) that Carpenter goes on to outline but as a contextual case study, it does attempt to understand and join up the experience(s) of these three parties within the teaching and learning context.

## **2.5 The relevance of 'narrative' to social work education and social work practice**

The task of this section and the following is to examine the relevance of narratives first to social work and then, more specifically, to social work education. I will discuss how narrative concepts and methods have been incorporated in to their practice and report key messages. Literature addressing the use of auto/biographical, life story and other interpretive methods in relation to the higher education academy, the construction of personal and professional identity, social work teaching and learning and other forms of professional education were particularly selected.

In Riessman and Quinney's (2005) introduction to their critical review of the concept of narrative in social work and social work research over the past 15 years in Europe and the

United States of America; they propose that the 'narrative turn' indicates a wider turn to language in the social sciences. Baldwin (2013) revisits this development maintaining that 'narrative' is pervasive: 'Seemingly we find narrative under every nook and cranny: narrative ethics, philosophy, theology, biology, history, anthropology, gender studies, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, medicine, rhetoric, management, leadership, and even the 'hard' sciences' of mathematics, chemistry and physics (Baldwin, 2013, p.3). Other observers have similarly noted the turn to the narrative within humanities discourses (Czarniawska, 2004; Squire et al, 2008) and that this 'linguistic turn' is rooted in social constructionism and other relativist approaches (Gergen, in Kazdim, 2000).

From Baldwin's and others' perspective, a narrative is a story-based account of events but contained within it are other forms of communication which convey the social and cultural location of the teller (Roscoe et al, 2011, p.50). The narrative then, is much more than just a story as it highlights a particular context or situation; concepts contained in Garfinkel's (1967) observations that narratives are both reflexive and indexical accounts of what happened, to whom and where it happened. As Roscoe et al (2011) elaborate; reflexivity here refers to the context that the narrative articulates and situates itself within thus making claims about both context and reality: 'While some have seen them as rather individualistic accounts, reflexivity and indexicality show us that all narratives situate themselves in social and political contexts ' (Roscoe et al, 2011, p.50). Such views also resonate with others' preoccupations with refining and redefining 'reflexivity' (see White & Stancombe, 2003; Taylor and White, 2000; Parton & O'Byrne, 2000; Sheppard, Newstead, Caccavo & Ryan, 2000). As D'Cruz et al's (2007) extensive review of literature in this area also highlights; the concept is at the heart of social work: 'Reflexivity is defined as a social worker's self-critical approach that questions how knowledge about clients is generated and, further, how relations of power operate in this process' (D'Cruz, 2007).

Some commentators claim that this narrative turn is now a fait accompli given the well documented evidence and the benefits of seeing social lives as enacted narratives which in themselves provide rich sources of insight (Denzin, 2001). Stories have been defined as a means of communication and as forms of knowledge (Robbins, 2012, p.1; Czarniawska, 2004). With a focus on the use of narrative within teaching; Phillips et al's analysis of recent literature in nursing, medicine, social work and social care suggests that the creative arts can be a vehicle to encourage students' thinking and questioning skills as well as serving to forge

a link to relevant social science research models engendering a more research-minded environment. These authors pose critical questions of relevance to this study: 'Have we engaged our students in such ways that they can become adept at having the curiosity and narrative skills to conduct social science research and practice with competence and comfort? Have we given them the models and means by which to adequately research and tell the stories that will inform practice and create best-practice models based on evidence from real life?' (Phillips et al, 2012, p.786). Echoing Broadfoot's (1988) earlier claim that education research inhabits an 'uneasy' conceptual and methodological middle ground located between naturalistic science and interpretive disciplines such as a history and literature (Broadfoot 1988, p.4), Phillips et al's study revisits this assertion by charting the trans-disciplinary use of narrative. For example, evidence gathered over the past ten years shows medical humanities courses explicating the use of narratives and arts in medical education (Freeman and Bays, 2007; McClean, 2011) as well as within nursing education (Frei et al, 2010) and offering rich learning opportunities at the intersection of art and science (Frei et al, 2010, p.676). With direct reference to social work education, Rundell's (2007) study documents a 're-story-ing' process with fourth year students who engaged in a narrative-based intervention process to develop interventions in a poorly funded and problematic community programme. Core to Rundell's findings was the importance of the 'reflective practitioner' with its natural lead in to forms of action research which: 'require documentation and reflection of real world experiences that create a meaning and purpose for all participants' (Rundell, 2007, p.54). In a similar vein, and under the broader heading of sustainability, increasing attention is being paid to the use of technology in terms of safeguarding SU (personal/emotional) resources and capacity building in terms of extending the educator's range of teaching tools and learning strategies. For example, the use of digital storytelling-the practice of everyday people who use digital tools to tell their story- is gaining a firmer educational foot hold. Often these take the form of emotionally engaging formats and digital narratives (web-based stories, hypertexts, narrative computer games and film-making in general) can be interactive ( Lambert, 2009) .

Children and young people's narratives have been captured in an Economic and Social Research Council funded Urgency Scheme reporting on issues of vulnerability and resilience in relation to recent flooding in the UK; a unique collaboration between researchers at Lancaster University and the charity Save the Children (Mortimer et al, 2017) (<http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/cyp-floodrecovery/>). Children and young people's stories articulated their experiences including the impact on their family and social networks as well as their ideas to

enhance resilience within local communities ( available to view at [www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/news/news-items/flooding-and-resilience-the-role-of-children-and-young-people](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/news/news-items/flooding-and-resilience-the-role-of-children-and-young-people) accessed 4/7/17 ) . The role of digital storytelling in empowering marginalized youth in refugee camps was also the subject of Meadows' paper (Meadows, 2003) .In terms of class-based social work education, Johnson's (2012) study highlighted some of the pedagogical opportunities and benefits regarding the use of SU movies within substance use teaching but stressing the need for vigilance in relation to the group's interpersonal dimensions to facilitate an effective learning environment. This theme is also explored by Hull and Katz (2006) whose comparative case study discussion of the 'narrated self' in digital storytelling and other arts-based media explores their creative potential in fostering agency and as a motivation to forming and giving voice to 'agentive selves' (Hull and Katz,2006:43).

The practice of social work demands that practitioners are able to listen to, process and respond to service users' views of their lives (Balen et al, 2009; Turner, 2014) and stories are central to professional worlds where: 'Human service workers attend to the narratives of others' (Opie, 2000, p.185). Jordan and Parton's long standing contributions to this aspect continued to stress the defining features of social work within their writing (Jordan,1979,1984,1987,1990; Jordan & Parton,1983) .For example: 'Social workers are differentiated from workers in other services mainly by their willingness to forsake the formality of their roles, and to work with ordinary people in their 'natural 'settings, using the informality of their methods as a means of negotiating solutions to problems rather than imposing them (Parton and O'Byrne, 2000). Such an alliance between a narrative approach and social work is also highlighted elsewhere: 'A central area of narrative study is human interaction in relationships; the daily stuff of social work' (Riessman & Quinney, 2005, p.392).

More recently this theme was revisited by Baldwin (2013) whose searching analysis of narrative is firmly grounded in social work. Baldwin, together with (Hall, 1997) and Urek (2005), uses narrative as a means of understanding social work per se 'rather than as an adjunct to its primary practices' (Baldwin, 2013, p.3). In forwarding such assertions he has drawn on his exploration of the process of constructing cases through narrative which complements other research in this area (Hall,1997) In so doing he embeds such activity theoretically within a qualitative social work approach. He is critical of other authors citing

Wells (2010) and Poindexter (2002) who use narrative in a more limited way 'simply' (my italics) to analyse the accounts of service users as a means of understanding those service users' (Baldwin, 2013, p.3).

While Roscoe (2009) and Roscoe et al (2011) have articulated narrative as a therapeutic intervention and Gorman (1993) combines both approaches, for Baldwin, these authors have failed to grasp the fundamental narrative nature of social work: '...I believe that social work in its working up of cases, assessments, care plans, reviews and their presentations to supervisors, panel and courts, is essentially a narrative activity' (Baldwin, 2013, p.3). Its uniqueness is stressed 'in its concentration on the structures that shape stories and storytelling practices as well as being able to explore the work performed by stories within and between discourses' (Baldwin, 2013, p.3). If, as Robbins maintains, social work education is seen as: 'A fusion of the three spheres of knowledge, skills and values' (Robbins, 2012, p.1), Baldwin's claims in relation to narrative have a crucial part to play in developing understanding. He advocates a strong position on narrative in social work for three reasons. Firstly, social work is concerned with understanding and promoting understanding of individuals within their social, political and cultural contexts. Narrative operates at all three levels and a narrative approach therefore helps us understand the theory and practice of social work. Secondly, narrative serves a twofold function as a means to understanding self and others: 'As social workers we are part not only of our personal stories and personal narrative environment but also part of professional narratives and the social work narrative environment' (Baldwin, 2013, p.8). Thirdly, narrative paves the way to examining the work that has gone into creating narratives: 'stories for all their apparent naturalness, are constructions-stories have an author (or authors) who are seeking to appeal to readers. Stories do not just happen, they are made. Events are selected for inclusion, arranged in a particular order according to the purpose of the text, given meaning or causal relationships, organised into patterns or made to stand independently and recounted in particular language' (Baldwin, 2013, pp.8-9). The power dimension is also explicit within Baldwin's work, again resonating with earlier discussion of the emancipatory tradition and paradigms: 'The denial of a narrative voice, whether coercively through force, or through more subtle operations of power such as the setting of an agenda can be seen as a violation of human rights...and the development of narrative capital-a stock of stories and the authority to tell them-is fundamental to the pursuit of social justice' (Baldwin, 2013, p.10).

It would indeed then appear that narrative knowledge: 'has become an attractive candidate for bridging the gap between theory and practice' (Czarniawska, 1999, p.16). So too it has the appeal of flexibility: 'A narrative is able to produce generalisations and deep insights without claiming universal status' (Czarniawska, 1999, p.16). As Rodriguez (2003) notes; such an approach also offers the opportunity for a deeper analysis of educators' experience in and of educational systems. Over 20 years ago, Reissman similarly observed that: 'It would appear that the telling of a story about a life has become an important aspect of practice and research in professional teaching and other settings' (Riessman, 1993, p.5). More recently, a seminal literature review of narrative and social work concluded that the greatest part of the literature was concerned with narrative as a method followed by narrative in social work education and finally autobiographical accounts (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). Relevant to their observations; Tsang (2007) makes a strong case for a greater integration of experientially based and orally mediated knowledge within social work teaching and learning to counter the superiority and privilege of theories and knowledge learned through the literate mode. Certainly, an increasing number of scholars are arguing for greater recognition of the contextual and experiential knowledge gained by deliberation and reflection on practice (Gould & Baldwin, 2004; Narhi, 2002; Noble, 2001).

Baldwin (2013, pp.13-22) outlines seven features of narrative whose elements are connected and which together provide a framework for enhanced understanding and interrogation of the relevant literature:

- Plot: this encompasses dynamic and sequential elements (Scholes & Kellogg (2006) and how the story is conveyed (Abbott, 2003)
- Characterisation: how subjects are being characterised and positioned with respect to one another
- Genre: the categorisation of narratives by style, form or content which point to ways of seeing and interpreting the world or: 'strategies for conceptualising reality' (Pyrrhonen, 2007, p.121)
- Point of view: refers to the perspective or position of the narrator from which the story is told. This in turn raises questions about the reliability/ trustworthiness of the speaker
- Rhetoric: the art of suasion, either persuasion to a particular view or action or dissuasion, away from the same

- Authorship: the narrator as producer of the story and his/her motivation to tell the story in a certain way a particular audience
- Readership: the consumers of the narrative who judge it in accordance with their own expectations and 'read' it for very different patterns of meaning.

Of further relevance is Baldwin's discussion of three approaches to narrative. Formalism refers to a type of literary analysis where the focus is on the structure or form of any given text rather than the author's background or socio-historical influences per se (Leitch, 2001). It is concerned with what narrative strategies come into play in relation to the plot that helps produce the overall story as well as understanding how internal mechanisms combine to create noticeable features of those texts. Plot and character functions permeate these types of texts potentially shaping how the audience comes to view a person. Such processes were, for example, explored in Urek's (2005) social work case study analysis of 'Ana', a woman constructed and presented as: 'an unsuitable mother' with strong resistance shown to alternative interpretations of her situation.

The sociology of stories is a second approach; which emphasises the external processes influencing what stories may be told and even how they may be told (Baldwin, 2013, p.24). In this vein, Plummer's (1994) examination of sexual story in relation to rape, sexuality and child sexual abuse highlights five elements identifying overarching external socio-cultural processes and frameworks of power in which story telling may be located. These are: i) The nature of stories and concerned with how certain voices may be privileged while others are controlled or dominated; ii) the making of stories which examines those strategies and power structures which both obstruct and facilitate the telling; iii) the consuming of stories which addresses how members of the audience engage with a particular story and the influence of their own social situation; iv) strategies of story: telling characterised by the diverse ways in which people and groups tell their stories and v) stories in the wider world where the emphasis is on stories and the social worlds in which they are produced. This is in line with transformational learning perspectives and reflective discourse (Mezirow, 2000) where key to the learning process is the ability and opportunity for learners to reformulate their structures for making meaning, usually through reconstructing dominant narratives or stories (Mezirow, 2000, p.22). Aligned to this, how and why recipients engage with specific stories or key aspects of the same also raises further questions about how affective knowledge and



emotionality are generated and manifest. For example: Barlow and Hall (2007) observe that social work practitioners repeatedly negotiate oppressive societal structures and are exposed to the, often brutal, conditions of service users' lives (Barlow & Hall, 2007, p.399).

Emotionality is an area also receiving increasing attention within the wider social work literature (Davitz, 1969; Deonna, 2006; Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1996) where the importance of supporting emotional intelligence and maturity as part of a transformational learning agenda which prizes empathetic listening and informed constructive discourse is being more clearly emphasised (Goleman, 1996).

Baldwin's third approach is framing and canonicity, which are interrelated concepts and consider how people organise current knowledge into categories and use cognitive procedures to help them make sense of the world. It is concerned with how people make sense of, make meaning from and evaluate new narratives. Frames, often referred to as schemas, are ways in which one's previous knowledge of stories acts to shape contact with new stories. It is how individuals either incorporate new stories into their existing reservoir of stories or reject them as incompatible with, or disruptive of, that pool of stories (Baldwin, 2013, p.25). In this way, schemas or frames provide interpretive models that guide our interaction with the different stories that we are exposed to and provide a cognitive means of organising and classifying knowledge (Moore, 1989; Bruner, 1990). As Baldwin highlights; people search the new narrative for associations with prior stored knowledge and then allow new meanings to be constructed based on any parallels that emerge. Importantly, Baldwin observes this process is limited to one's experiential knowledge with ramifications following exposure to stories that do not fit the mould of our existing frames and schemas; the essence of canonicity. Not least, the more a particular narrative can be made to appear to conform to an already accepted stock of stories, the more likely it is to be accepted into that stock. The pull then appears strong, articulated by Spence's notion of: 'narrative smoothing' when there is an: 'attempt to bring the clinical assessment into conformity with some kind of public standard or stereotype' (Spence, 1986, p.212). Anything deviating or being exceptional to this idea will be exposed to a new meaning-making process seeking to recover links to canonicity.

Despite what seems a strong case for narrative and the keen interest in the same shown by some; questions remain as to whether this turn is in fact a fait accompli: 'In social work,

however -a profession that is, I think, so obviously narrative in nature- the literature on narrative is surprisingly limited' (Baldwin, 2013, p.3). Similarly, Reissman and Quinney (2005) express a disappointment by the limited use of narrative concepts and methods. I will now consider the evidence base in relation to the use of stories and storytelling within social work education, with a particular emphasis on impact and how this has been reported.

## **2.6 Service user narratives and social work education: the search for evidence of impact**

As a starting point; the verb 'impact' has been defined as: 'To have a strong effect on someone or something (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014) with its second meaning 'to come into forcible contact with another object'. As will be shown, both meanings proved -albeit metaphorically in the case of the latter- central to this study's findings.

Within the wider social care field, the notion of impact and assessment of the same has become increasingly important. For example: Skills for Care (SfC) has recently issued its impact and evaluation framework which articulates the rationale for such activity within a logic model couched within the NCVO Code of Good Impact Practice (SfC, 2014, p.1). The Economic and Social Research Council, whilst acknowledging that it may be difficult to predict the impact of any research from the outset, expects researchers to consider who could benefit from such activity as well as considering how to maximise the chances of potential beneficiaries benefiting from research. The ESRC casts its net widely, highlighting economic and societal impact as well as its second category: academic impact. The aim is for research to make a demonstrable contribution to across and within disciplines; including significant advances in understanding, method, theory and application. This includes influence at instrumental, conceptual and capacity building levels ([www.esrc.ac.uk/research/tool-kit](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/research/tool-kit) accessed 26/9/16).

So, what is the evidence of impact in relation to service user stories and story- telling within social work education? In terms of this study, reviewing the literature in relation to 'impact' posed a key challenge. The process revealed a difficulty in separating service user narratives from wider discussion about service user involvement more generally within professional social work education.

Service users' involvement most commonly occurs through teaching or programme delivery activities (Bolan et al, 2000; Elliott et al, 2005). In terms of skills development, for example, Moss et al (2007) report on the effective involvement of service users and carers in conducting interviews with students as part of assessed preparation for practice with the aim of developing students' language and interpersonal skills. Increasingly there are examples of innovative and non-tokenistic developments in student's degree studies including modules designed, delivered and assessed by service user trainers (Byers et al, 2008). Involvement often includes 'facilitated dialogue' (Scheyett & Diehl, 2004) and, increasingly, engaging students in conversations about personal histories (Elliott et al, 2005). In relation to the latter; the literature reveals evidence of service users' positive contribution to students' early-stage learning including enhanced understanding of how service users' situations come to the attention of social services and exposure to a breadth of 'lived experience' from a service user perspective (Moss et al, 2007; Tew et al, 2004; Skoura-Kirk et al, 2008). There is some evidence of negative impact on service users themselves resulting from their direct involvement in terms of emotional and practical cost (Brown et al 2007) but also significant benefits for service users in terms of having a valued role and developing skills and confidence (Felton & Stickley, 2004).

Earlier literature tended to describe models of involvement but increasingly more sophisticated analyses (Tsang, 2007) are being forwarded detailing the specific forms that narratives can take within the education of social work students. For example, see Smith's (2007) discussion of the use of narrative journaling to promote affective or emotional learning within social work education.

As a further example -in line with the above, more critical observations- Johnson's study (2012) highlights some of the pedagogical challenges and opportunities of incorporating the knowledge and experience of service users. Focussing on the use of user movies within substance use teaching, his observations are extremely relevant to the current study. The importance of extensive communication between lecturers and students was particularly highlighted. So, the benefits of developing insights into others' worlds was also highly prized: 'The ability of students to absorb new knowledge as well as to take other perspectives and experience into consideration' (Johnson, 2012, p.4) Next he deals with the thorny relationship

between theory and practice; observing how an instrumental approach is often adopted by students engaged in professional education. However, he claims there is both an inherent tension and confusion. The students tend to value most highly knowledge they deem to be of practical use in their professional life but all too often: 'The problem is that the students have a limited ability to make such assessments' (Johnson, 2012, p.4). He concludes that theoretical knowledge is subordinated or ignored, leaving many students struggling to follow more abstract lines of reasoning: 'There is therefore a need to find or build bridges between the abstract and the concrete in professional education' (Johnson, 2012, p.4). Of note, he further considers the challenge of integrating user perspectives within teaching. With a specific focus on teaching about methadone maintenance treatment, he argues that user perspectives are crucial if emergent practitioners are to appreciate more fully the range of ethical considerations and dilemmas surrounding substance misuse. Such perspectives introduce an important balance in ensuring that a breadth of discourses are represented and not only those dominated by medicalised control systems, as this puts service users at 'risk of being locked into an addict identity which runs counter to the objectives of the treatment' (Johnson, 2012, p.4). This evaluation concludes favourably in terms of enhancing learners' understanding through the integration of user knowledge and experience; user stories helped them: 'think in new ways', were described as: 'stimulating' learning tools and 'useful' in highlighting the user/patient experience which echoes the benefits of experience-based learning (Fook, 2002) and germane to Schon's (1983, 1987) various contributions in relation to reflection 'in' and 'on' action. As Johnson highlights; such learning is not about acquiring 'decontextualized' knowledge but starts with learners existing knowledge and experience and from that foundation, new, context-and-situation dependent knowledge may be built but supported by opportunities for reflection within the curriculum (Johnson, 2012, p.8).

Certainly, reflective practice as a learning tool has become well established and documented in social work (Gould & Taylor, 1996; Fook et al, 2000; Fook, 2002; Boudini et al, 2009) and health fields (Tate and Sills, 2004), although it's uncritical use in the social work curriculum is not without criticism (Iser, 1999, 2003). Fook's (2004) definition of the reflective social worker as a challenge to the: 'narrow stream' positivist conception of evidence-based practice draws heavily on practitioner experience itself as a source of evidence to complement their use of empirically grounded theory in understanding and responding more effectively to complex human situations. Her views are supported by Noble's (2001) positive evaluation of the use of narratives supported by reflection in practice teaching as a potentially very effective tool to integrate theory and practice.

A more searching analysis of narrative social work is provided by Roscoe et al (2011) who pursue Johnson's above observations about the need for professional educators to build bridges between the abstract and the concrete. Here they define narrative social work as a form of conversation between theory and practice. It is a means of helping the practitioner negotiate the complexities of a theoretically informed practice which at the same time keeps the views of the service user in focus. Returning to Johnson, however, not all student evaluations were positive. For example, some participants criticised the content as 'one sided' leading to a recommendation of a cautious approach to any content presented: 'I think the movies have pointed to problems that may exist' (Johnson, 2012, p.13). Johnson openly acknowledges that he has not made any attempt to conduct a systematic investigation of impact, relying more to date on anecdotal evidence from former students.

Findings similar to Johnson's have been documented in relation to educating social work students about palliative care (Agnew and Duffy, 2010). All students-both undergraduate and post-qualifying- indicated that the use of DVD excerpts were 'very useful'. However, the same study concluded that facilitated service user interviews had a more powerful and memorable effect as captured in the study's qualitative data. Typical of this was: 'Excellent learning experience-much better to hear experiences from an actual person' (Agnew & Duffy, 2010, p.753). Key learning points were identified including the value of hearing the service user's perspective, particularly in relation to how the illness had impacted on all domains of the individual's life and the importance of communication as well as demonstrating respect particularly for an individual's faith. Although, importantly, differences were identified between undergraduate and post-qualified students; which may well be the result of the former having limited exposure to service users in comparison to those qualified practitioners working in community or hospital based settings. Overall both groups felt more confident in relation to their skills and knowledge as a result of real stories: 'bringing theory to life', which was seen as: 'more powerful than reading books in isolation' (Agnew & Duffy, 2010, p.756). Again, the limitations of the study are discussed; that to improve rigour, reliability and validity, any similar replication of the study would need to consider the use of a control and intervention group to measure the effect and influence of the specific learning materials.

This theme is further explored by Reynolds and Read (2007) whose focus is on user involvement in the production of learning materials on mental health and distress and the potential benefits of personal written accounts written by users of mental health services. They explore the impact of such 'speaking out in print' (Reynolds & Read, 2007, p.425) with the collection of testimonies produced receiving high acclaim: 'Listening to the stories told will do something to offset the deadening effect of coping with the anxiety and unfulfillable demands that so often accompany a professional career in mental health' (The Sainsbury centre for Mental Health, 1997 cited in Read and Reynold, 2007, p.426). Importantly, the fact that personal accounts have a personal impact on students is also carefully discussed with the conclusion that they were able to cope with painful material and moreover, appreciate the opportunity to learn from it. Discussion of the process or indeed whether any form of support was provided is scant. However, it is partially addressed in their focus on the educator. The authors show the model's potential to help students negotiate the powerful impact of personal experience which can leave them feeling threatened in their professional role: 'We have found it helpful if academics can model openly the impact upon themselves. This can enable better listening and more honest discussion. Engagement by academics with material at the level of personal feeling can in itself be supportive to students' (Read & Reynolds, 2007, p.430). Not least they conclude this is because so many of the messages from survivors emphasise the importance of a human response from practitioners.

In a similar vein, Scott et al (2013) evaluated patient narratives contained in an on-line narrative archive showing their contribution to the education of future health professionals and social workers. This study explored the experiences of stakeholders including: educators, storytellers, narrative interviewers and students who contributed to, developed and used the on-line narrative archive; which was developed in collaboration with five universities and healthcare providers in the North East of England (CETL4HealthNE). Underpinned by realistic evaluation principles involving interviews, observations and a focus group; qualitative data were elicited and thematically analysed and identified dimensions of impact. Participants reported that listening to patient narratives was 'challenging' but that the process of contributing the story was also a positive and cathartic experience for patients. The powerful storyteller voice often evoked empathy. Students commented on the ability of the on-line audio-visual narratives to enable them to see the individual holistically and educators reported that narratives provided a means to introduce sensitive topics in the learning environment. The authors concluded that while narratives provided the opportunity to make a

positive influence on the training of professionals, care needed to be taken when exposing individuals to potentially sensitive narratives.

The use of narrative to inform the delivery and practice of social work education is also the subject of Coriale et al's work, 2012). With a threefold position as service user, researcher and student; the authors demonstrate how the engagement of a disabled social work student in a narrative approach was used to explore the student's experience within three contexts; the school of social work, the university and within the community. Such research, the privileging of her narrative -particularly with her as co-producer of the research- represents an important shift on a number of levels. It indicates a move to self-scrutiny within the academy and willingness to examine pedagogical practices. As a single case study, although generalisability is limited, it does articulate the social construction and deconstruction of 'disability' and locate such discourses within a critical disability theoretical perspective (Oliver, Pothier & Devlin, 2006). It also highlights the need to apply the concept of empowerment to the relationship between students and social work educators; 'for the concept to become real in the workplace, it must become real in the academy' (Coriale et al, 2011). This is an important shift and balance to the attention given to the social worker-service user dynamic which is prominently debated in the social work education literature (Fook & Morley, 2005).

The power of the story is also stressed by proponents of the strengths perspective in social work practice: 'Individuals impart, receive, or affirm meanings largely through telling and re-telling stories and recounting narratives, the plots often laid out by culture. Certainly, one of the characteristics of being oppressed is having one's stories buried under forces of ignorance and stereotype' (Saleeby, 1996, p.301).

Dupre also supports this in her analysis of disability and cultural competency in social work, again located within a critical theory perspective (Dupre, 2012). She is a strong advocate for an ecological practice approach with its focus on the 'person-in-environment'. An appreciation of service users' lived experiences, rich with values and meanings, is essential given the practitioner's role in assessing multiple interrelated and complex issues and to be proactive in changing maladaptive relations between service users and their environments (Dupre, 2012, p.170).

The benefits of sharing stories have also been reported in the literature exploring personalisation and direct payments with a focus on knowledge dissemination and as a means for service users to acquire new coping strategies: 'I have discovered how ingenious people can be. In the course of talking to other people about how they have coped, I've come across a multitude of ways of spreading the load between support agencies created by social services departments, family members and carers themselves' (Heng, 2004, p.35).

The potential to enhance students' learning through narrative has also been explored in relation to interdisciplinary learning (Balén et al, 2009). These authors highlight the importance of educators reaching a consensus in relation to both the academic and practice goals to be achieved. In this case, their rationale was specifically grounded in Shepherd et al's work aimed at enhancing students' understanding of recovery: 'Recovery represents a movement away from pathology, illness and symptoms to health, strengths and wellness (Shepherd et al, 2008, cited in Balén et al, 2009, p.418). Three narrative workshops were attended by students with the approach underpinned by Murray's identification of the differing nature of stories: romantic stories, in which an initial challenge is overcome; comedic stories, which tell of ongoing challenge and counter-challenge and tragic stories in which there is an ongoing struggle against adversity that ultimately fails (Murray, 2008). Their study considered narrative through: film (Tragedy), narrative through drama (Comedy) and Personal Narrative (Romance). Critical dialogue, use of prompts and focused questions were central to all three workshops and overall participant evaluations were extremely positive with students articulating the many ways that their awareness and thinking about mental illness, mental health and recovery had been informed and had then developed. The power of the narrative to evoke reflection on personal experience and, crucially, the learning about the relationship between subjective personal experience and that of others featured strongly. As the authors stress, this is important learning given the entry requirements of relevant life or work experience for professional courses. As educators, we need to do something with this experience. In this vein, it is claimed, a narrative approach can illuminate praxis discourses by facilitating a greater understanding of the nature and realities of practice: 'The narrative mode leads not to certainties but to varying perspectives (White & Epston, 1990) which students, educators and service users alike need to harness. Certainly, there seems a sense of urgency to address this given the continued concern expressed by academic staff and social and health care employers in relation to the lack of critical thinking skills amongst undergraduates and graduates (Balén & White, 2007). Ring's (2014) discussion of teaching on social work with



older people shares such preoccupations. He similarly reported the benefits of giving service users a voice in relation to dementia, effective communication and end of life care. Here he stresses the importance of an appreciation of the older person's inner world in shaping the means and the ends of social work practice. For any person-centred approach to be true to its aims, valid explanation and legitimate control must be based on a deep appreciation of personal concerns and lived experience. Although his focus is on a critical gerontology, his rationale is applicable to other practice areas where the aim is to advance ethical and professional social work practice. In terms of implications for educators, he is unambiguous that inculcating such critical perspectives is first and foremost an educational rather than a training role.

Tew et al's study (2011) focuses on the process of involvement and reports findings on more interactive ways of engaging with students' learning. Tensions arose along the way. Complex issues included those related to students and lecturers having experience of using services or caring for others and those identified as service users also caring for others. The authors highlight how this links to wider debates that problematise the use of terms such as 'service user' and also McLaughlin's (2009) observation that terms such 'expert by experience' may be similarly troublesome as they fail to make explicit what this experience may be.

Immediacy has also been highlighted; students taught by service users may be better equipped to work effectively or in a qualitatively different way than those being taught about relating them (Tew et al, 2004). 'Knowledge' has also been seen as problematic. Beresford and Croft (2001) criticise service users being used to 'flesh out' existing professional or academic knowledge rather than offering an opportunity to develop and articulate their personal experientially-grounded perspectives which may actually challenge such orthodoxies. Learners have raised concerns about bias within service users' narratives as well as the potential to undermine 'professional knowledge' (Babu et al, 2008). However, facilitated dialogue and other interactive teaching methods based on narratives rather than the more conventional 'teaching-from-the-front' with service users as co-educators have also been seen as constructive in promoting inter-professional practice and understanding within the classroom (Tew et al, 2011) Evidence of frustration that service user perspectives prevent the learning of other specialist, professional knowledge in an overstretched curriculum also featured (Tew et al, 2011).

Affective aspects have also been identified in the literature in relation to the emotional content of stories and their impact on learners. In a related vein, service users report having their assumptions that qualified professionals and those in-the-making could deal with stories of pain and distress confronted (Tew et al, 2004).

Of relevance to the study; the literature also addresses aspects of the wider context: institutional, professional, academic and ethical dimensions. Focusing on the underpinning knowledge base and content of social work programmes; Beresford and Boxall (2012) highlight the need for a continued critical and vigilant approach to the social work curriculum. The underpinning knowledge taught in universities is a key aspect of social work education, although its ability to oppress service users has been largely ignored. They argue that whilst a great emphasis has been placed on anti-oppressive practice in social work education, too scant an attention has been paid to anti-oppressive literature or theory (Wilson and Beresford, 2000). In their paper the authors explore the implications of service user direct contributions to social work education in the light of historical critiques of disability research. For example, as discussed, Hunt's (1981) early critique of disability research questioned the ethical base of key research with more contemporary commentators, highlighting the career advancement benefits for researchers at the expense and exploitation of the lives and experiences of service users (Beresford & Boxall, 2012, p.155). However, the need for participatory models of research and educational practice with service users drawing on their expertise has been highlighted to develop a more searching and realistic social work knowledge base (Gupta & Blewett, 2008; Roswcoe et al, 2011). More forcefully, Cairney et al (2006) describe the emergence of the service user movement as a 'necessary corrective to social work practice and education' (Cairney et al, 2006, p.316). Further individual and organisational (Biskin et al, 2012) potential barriers include cultural attitudes and assumptions, poor communication with service users and structural and systemic restrictive practices (Cecil, 2009). These factors can result in a negative individual experience in turn becoming inhibitors to involvement (Biskin et al, 2012).

As the knowledge base in relation to direct service user involvement within the academy has grown, the literature also reflects the importance of attending to contextual details surrounding that involvement and addresses issues related to preparation. Despite the many

advantages of direct involvement; research indicates that all too often service users experience tokenism and top down approaches, inequity in the allocation of funds and problems related to the use of inaccessible or: 'difficult' English and lack of feedback (Ager et al, 2005). As has been highlighted this can lead to: 'consultation fatigue' (Ager et al, 2005, p.469). The aim of Kjellberg and French's EU funded study (2011) was for students to learn about sustainable integration and social change through encounters with service users on equal terms in the classroom. They highlight how the factors hindering and promoting marginalised groups in society were brought into the classroom during the process of integration in the learning environment. Focussing on a module of social change, they detail how over time, they have introduced a gradual change in the classroom climate, including the innovative development of service users being enrolled as students alongside the social work students in the social change course. This has been accompanied by adherence to a clear and principled commitment informed by the conceptualisation of 'partnership ' made by Taylor et al (2006) whereby service users are the bearers of the testimony of their own experience: 'The emphasis here is on reducing stereotypes and recognising users' and carers' strengths and identities' (SCIE, 2006, p.99).

Taylor et al's (2006) work is of relevance as they show how partnership work can be embedded throughout programme curricula, structures and processes. Structural difficulties and obstacles to service user involvement within the academic environment have begun to be documented with stories peppered with the difficulties involved in bringing service users in to a university setting (Warren & Boxall, 2009), transitions to the academy and educators' contrasting experience of working within social care provider and higher education settings. Consider the following:

*'I mean...to start with the university's a very difficult environment to bring people in. It's much more difficult than a service, because a service is used to working with service users. OK, it's knowledgeable about people's issues and of people's circumstances and all that but the university is a very inflexible big huge machine so payment issues are a huge nightmare, practical issues for people, communication you know, all this...' (Cecil, 2008).*

Taylor et al (2006) conclude that any partnership with users in social work education needs: 'Strong institutional support, motivation and establishment of strong grass roots, networks,

careful attention to practicalities and principles (SCIE, 2006, p.98). As will be shown later, preparation for involvement on the part of lecturers, service users and students was shown to be of key significance.

This chapter has critically reviewed literature from a diverse range of sources and as such told the story of SUI with specific attention to the use of narratives within SWET. These different perspectives have shown how individuals and organisations have -and continue- to build their own knowledge. Contained within this are specific theories, models and pedagogic philosophies which have influenced not only developments in SWET but also the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Together with practical considerations, they have highlighted the socially constructed nature of social work and social work education. Social constructionism then has been established as the critical foundation to take this study forward. Theoretically, it is the lens through which participants' experience will be viewed and applied to make sense of 'impact' as it relates to SUs stories and the wider story telling process.

Continuing in this vein, the following chapter will present the study's methodology, choice of methods and underlying rationale.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

The study took place over 18 months and was based in a constructionist paradigm and positioned within broader emancipatory discourses. This chapter describes the study's research strategy and design but first gives the rationale underpinning the study's methodology and its theoretical location.

### **3.1 Research strategy: the study's methodological and theoretical location**

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study for several compelling reasons. Qualitative research methods are especially useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It provided the means to reveal participants' own understandings of how they engaged with the stories and the storytelling process. Such approaches are warranted when the nature of research questions requires exploration (Stake, 1995) and are more suited to the task of eliciting feelings or thought processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Further, they may be understood as striving to understand social processes in context while exploring the meanings of these for those involved in them (Esterberg, 2002).

The methods underpinning qualitative endeavours are both suited to and tend to work with smaller samples to extract depth and meaning (Becker & Bryman, 2004). The planned aim of this inductive strategy was therefore a mainly descriptive outcome (Merriam, 2002). The theoretical location of the study was social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As such, this demanded an acknowledgement of myself as researcher and the participants as conscious actors who attached subjective meaning to their actions and situation.

I needed to take account of the potential for bias and researcher influence and consider the degree to which it needs to be 'controlled' (Ortlipp, 2008, p.695); captured as 'the interpretive crisis' of the researcher (Denzin, 1994, p.501). A reflective record was used in order to record new and developing insights/interpretations, to monitor my on-going activity including relational dimensions and to provide a critical commentary related to personal and professional learning.

## 3.2 Orientation to the Study

In conducting the study I drew on my practice experience as a social worker, addictions counsellor and lecturer. This experience included a number of transferable skills including interviewing, assessment and group work skills which proved useful in the data collection. I was also very familiar with concepts of reflexivity and reflective practice and used these as self-monitoring tools throughout the process. My role as Faculty lead for SUI and external examiner for other social work programmes meant that I had solid and frequent contacts externally and internally with colleagues. This had led to a useful degree of familiarity with current SU debates and other discourses in relation to the HE academic environment and SUI. My work place was hospitable to the study and I was confident in the university support systems for students, staff and service users as I had a good working knowledge of them gained via my current role.

## 3.3 The Study's Aims

Qualitative research questions often begin with '*how?*' or '*what?*', so that the researcher can gain an in depth understanding of what is going on relative to the topic (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). This was the essence of the study: to understand as fully as possible '*what happens?*' when service users' narratives are shared. Following a refinement of my initial questions, I decided that this could be most usefully addressed by focusing on the following three key questions:

- What is the impact of the use of service user narratives of their lived experiences on social work education?
- What is the nature and extent of learning as a result of service users sharing of their narratives?
- What are the challenges for service users, students and educators when service users share their real life experiences?

To address these questions a qualitative case study methodology was selected. This provided the opportunity to explore and describe the phenomenon of impact in context using a variety of data sources. A key strength is its potential to develop understanding of individuals or

organisations through a range of situations ranging from simple to complex by exploring interventions, relationships, communities or programmes (Yin, 2003). As this case study was anchored in real-life situations, it would provide a range of insights which I could then construe as tentative hypotheses. This would also leave me well positioned to take forward any future research. Of further relevance, the case study is a particularly appealing design for applied fields of study such as education and social work because their processes, problems and programmes can be scrutinised; bringing about understanding that in turn can influence and improve practice (Merriam, 2008, p.68). The current study may be categorised as 'applied research'; such research often undertaken by practitioner-researchers such as myself who have regard to its practical application.

### **3.4 Instrumental Case Study Methodology**

In terms of the current study, a number of prominent case study researchers proved influential and I drew specifically on the contributions of the following: Merriam (1988), Stake (1995) and Yin (1994, 2003, 2006, 2009).

Exploration was central to this case study. Stake (1995) identifies three types of study but his definition of the instrumental case study best suited the study's purpose. Here a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue, to seek or refine theory. The case is of secondary interest and plays a supportive role to facilitate the understanding of something else. The case is often looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinised and its ordinary activities detailed because it helps the researcher pursue the external interest. The case may or may not be seen as typical of other cases. Yin's (2003) case study typology is broadly similar and this study also has much in common with his 'exploratory case study' where the primary interest is to explore those situations in which the intervention being scrutinised has no clear/single set of outcomes. Case study empirical enquiry invariably shows that there will be more variables of interest than data points with one result: that it therefore relies on multiple sources of evidence with data converging in a triangulating fashion (Johansson, 2003; Yin, 1994). As such, together these factors influenced the decision to adopt an instrumental case study methodology.

Although Stake and Yin at points part company methodologically and place differing emphases on aspects such as the degree of researcher control over case definition and the

limits as to what may constitute a 'case' (Bergen, 2000; Hancock and Algozzine, 2006), philosophically both base their respective approaches on a constructionist paradigm claiming the relativity of truth and its dependence on one's perspective. In this study the phenomenon or 'case' to be explored was impact of service user stories. However, this could not be considered without acknowledgment of the wider context (broader developments in social work education and service user involvement, the social work programme itself with its teaching, learning and assessment mechanisms and further practical specifics such as the classroom setting). I was aware that the study would need to have clear parameters to avoid the risk of attempting to address a question that was beyond the scope of what was essentially a relatively small scale study. Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) both highlight the importance of placing such boundaries; the concept of 'binding the case' (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In effect the boundaries I created would serve as inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study. In principle, the degree to which it could be pre-structured or 'emergent' needed to be appropriate for the purposes of the case study (Robson, 1993). In this study tight pre-structuring was not appropriate and in line with others' experience, in practice it fell between these two extremes (Robson, 1993).

### **3.5 The Study's Design**

I selected research methods that were viable and practical to elicit implicit and explicit data from the subjects which, as such, would be appropriate to the question(s) framing the study. In terms of purpose, I wanted to develop a depth understanding of 'impact' that could encompass both process and content dimensions. As detailed below: the experiences of the students, educators and service users came to form the units of analysis and entailed a systematic recording of a chain of qualitative evidence; particularly as interviews and direct observation were key sources of data (Tellis, 1997).

The design of the current study was also informed by previous case study research I undertook into one lecturer's experience of leading service user involvement; salient themes are included in the following chapter. This previous study served as a pilot for aspects of the current study in terms of its focus and use of the depth interview as a research method. There are many benefits of piloting any empirical research. What Yin refers to as the 'pre-test' (and for Robson what is closer to the usual meaning of a pilot study) is more of a formal dress



rehearsal in which the intended data collection plan is used as faithfully as possible. Pilot studies can be seen as case studies in their own right (Robson, 1993) and as here, served as an essentially exploratory function providing valuable insights into conducting research; certainly developing my understanding of methodological and ethical issues involved in this form of research.

### **3.6 Research site: recruitment and access to participants**

The study took place in a teaching-led university in the south of England that has provided pre and post registration social work education and training for nearly 30 years. The social work team is located within a larger Faculty of Health and Wellbeing; a faculty with a long standing commitment to inter-professional teaching and learning.

In terms of accessing service users, a large group of service users work across the Faculty. Within this exists a small pool whose specific contribution to social work education includes sharing their stories? I used existing links with service users within this pool with whom I and/or other social work teaching colleagues had co-facilitated teaching sessions featuring their stories. This process also resulted in accessing a qualified social worker who, following a teaching request made to her by one module leader, had recruited one of the younger service users to contribute her own story as part of the teaching session. The nature of case study methodology meant that I could accommodate this unplanned involvement and both subsequently agreed to participate in the study. I invited three social work lecturers to participate in the study who were selected because they incorporated service users' stories directly within their teaching.

The study was undertaken in three stages over an 18-month period. The first phase had involved the previous qualitative single case study as above. The second phase was the compilation of field notes based on participant-as-observer methods of four three-hour long teaching sessions where I had co-facilitated service users telling their story. The third stage involved data collection from one focus group and depth individual interviews followed by analysis of students' written assignments which were completed after their module teaching had finished.

## 3.7 Sampling

Fortunately, the selection of participants for this bounded case was relatively uncomplicated. In selecting participants for this study I used purposive sampling. It was important to select relevant people -or 'key informants' (Patton, 2002) - who had first-hand knowledge of the subject and whose insights would help me understand events as they had experienced them (Rubin & Babbie, 2011, p.448). The strategy of 'purposeful selection' also influenced the identification of the study's other data sources whereby particular lectures and associated teaching/learning activities related to stories were selected deliberately 'to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices' (Maxwell, 2005, p.8). To this end, I sought to involve as wide a range of participants as was possible given the parameters of the study. For example, the four service users all came from very different service backgrounds. Each had also chosen to tell their stories in different ways and within this group there were differing degrees of experience in terms of contributing their story. The lecturer participants were all educators with varying degrees of teaching experience but all actively incorporated stories within lectures. As such they were well positioned to give insights relevant to the study's aims. This also offered the potential to compare individual experiences with one another in a comparable position; a rationale applicable to all participants.

The study draws heavily on interviewing and participant-as-observer methods as data collection tools. However, overall it incorporates eight data sources; thereby ensuring different data points which I thereby judged sufficient to achieve an adequately thick and rich description of the case.

## 3.8 Ethical considerations and ethical approval

As Hugman and Smith (1995) state ethical issues are the heart of social work and these need to be explicit and open to question. In terms of social work research, Dominelli (2005) argues that there is a distinctive approach that can be defined as social work research with the following key features:

- A change orientation
- a more egalitarian relationship between researchers and the objects of their research
- accountability to service users for the products of their work

- a holistic engagement with the different aspects of the problem(s) of the people whom they are investigating ( Dominelli, 2005:230).

These themes and ethical dimensions were certainly at the fore when I initially conceptualised the study and continued to inform its progress throughout. Reflection and ethical thinking strongly underpinned the all stages of the research and were not seen as discrete aspects merely to gain ethical approval for conducting the study from the Faculty Research and Ethics Committee (FREC). Application for FREC approval was made and granted (see Appendix 1 for relevant documents).

Traditional ethical concerns centre around the topics of informed consent (consent received from participants after they have been truthfully and carefully informed about t the research ,right to privacy (protecting the identity of the subject ) and protection from harm (physical, emotional ,or any other kind) ( Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). To this end, the research needed to be conducted openly and honestly with all participants aware of what their participation entailed (Dahlberg and Mccaig 2010). I considered and addressed the following 6 key areas: participants' understanding, voluntary participation, the length of the research, participant risks, how the results would be used and whether there was to be any compensation or incentive. It was important that this information was communicated clearly by providing understandable and accurate information. .Prior to seeking the participants' consent, they were all sent a participant information leaflet about the research (Appendix 1) .The leaflet addressed a number of aspects including how the information they shared would be used ;how it would be anonymised; how the data would be securely and confidentially stored; what steps would be followed should any participant be unhappy with any aspect of the research; the voluntary nature of their participation and how to contact my supervisor if any participant was unhappy with any of my responses.In terms of anonymity which according to one definition means that those outside the research team will not know the identity of the participants (McLaughlin,2102:62)-this was slightly compromised as the student participants were recruited by the programme director. I did not give any absolute guarantees and made all participants aware of this before they agreed to participate. Confidentiality on the other hand refers to ensuring that the attribution of comments cannot be linked to a name or specific role and indirect attribution where a collection of characteristics may make it possible to identify an individual or small group. The social work teaching team and service user pool are both relatively small and I was aware that any comments about these roles could be identified by those who knew the team/individuals being described. This posed a slight dilemma as it could

have meant restricting the amount of contextual detail given were. In the event, all participants were satisfied with the measures taken and as one of the SU participants stated when I initially explained these aspects and considerations, she was more concerned to 'get my story out there' (Reflective Record) rather than try to offer any absolute safeguards regarding confidentiality. As lecturers and SUs also observed, they had already 'gone public' by virtue of their involvement in teaching. I will revisit some of these ethical considerations below when I describe the detail of the case study.

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlight the focus of narrative inquiry as the understanding of lived and told stories also leads to a questioning and re-thinking of ethical considerations and practices. I had been alerted to this possibility when undertaking the previous pilot study; eventualities captured by Clandinin and Connelly's discussion of a range of 'persistent' concerns including anonymity (of both participants and researchers), ownership and relational responsibilities. In a similar vein, Schroeder and Webb (1997) raise several concerns about a mandated ethical review process including the interpretation of informed consent; 'The reality of collaborative research with participants, however, is that the research tends to change over time' (Schroeder and Webb, 1997:239-240). Such observations—that informing for consent is part of ongoing process rather than a one-off event, have also been made by Kohler Riessman and Mattingley (2005) in their identifying the need for a context-based ethics model for ethnographic and narrative forms of social research in sharp contrast to those medico-centric models adopted by those working in the experimental paradigm. Citing feminist investigators, they argue that such research involves ongoing negotiation; "taken-for-granted hierarchies of power and control over 'the data' must be questioned" (Kohler Riessman and Mattingley, 2005:428). This 'new genre' whereby the narrative becomes the "primary vehicle for understanding and communicating the personal and the particular" (Kohler Riessman and Mattingley, 2005:428) poses particular challenges. "Thinking about ethical approvals as meeting the university ethical guidelines for human subjects, although technical, detailed, and legalistic, does not, however, allow us to consider relational issues, which in narrative inquiry underpin the entire inquiry process." (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:171). More specifically as Hull and Katz (2006) observe, there is abundant research on narrative and the important role that narratives of self—stories about who we have been in the past and who we want to become in the future—can play in the construction of 'agentive identities'. Miller et al (1993) suggest that "the narrated self is a relational self" (Miller, 1993, p.89). If "narrative practices are social practices," then implicitly one's narrated self is constructed with / responsive to other people" (Miller et al

,1993, p.172). This therefore highlights the dynamic nature of narrative practices which recur and change depending on who is listening. As the findings revealed, this had a particular relevance to this study. Similarly Bruner (1994, p.50) commented on the universality of “turning points”; moments when people report sharp change in their lives and demonstrate accompanying dramatic changes in their representations of self. Among the features of such turning points he noted are vivid detail and great affect, a connection between external events and internal awakenings, and 'thickly agentive' activity (Bruner,1994,p 50). Rather than viewing these accounts simply as true reports of past events, Bruner understands them as “preternaturally clear instances of narrative construction that have the function of helping the teller clarify his or her Self-concept. '(Bruner, 1994, p 51). I took opportunities to explore with all the participants how they might be affected by talking about their experiences. Although the SUs had previously shared their stories to greater or lesser degrees, I was aware that now talking about the impact of sharing their own story could potentially run the risk of exposure to harm. This has received some attention in the social work research literature. For example, such research 'often involves making contact with those who for a variety of reasons are isolated and excluded. This can lead to unrealistic expectations of the research relationship (Orme and Shemmings, 2010:47-8).Additionally as Oliver observes, even when participants give their informed consent, they cannot necessarily be expected to anticipate their feelings about participation (Oliver, 2003:47).I was very aware of this potential in part based on my previous experience as a practitioner and was at pains to stress this to all participants. One of the young SU's comments was recorded in my reflective journal “Bob, it's really all right .Really ,I know what you're saying but you'll just have to trust me on this one-I'll be fine'. I was also sensitive to the fact that participation in the study potentially could evoke similar responses on the part of the students and lecturers as our conversations evolved and more in depth data was generated and identified how independent support for the study's respondents could be accessed should the need arise. Lewis' (2003) observations were particularly pertinent here with the reminder that although fieldwork occurs in private places, it is a public engagement. Risk will be ever present no matter how carefully ones plans the research activities but where possible I identified, reduced and managed risk factors and to this end completed a risk assessment form as part of the University's ethical approval process (see Appendix 1).Aspects of power, control and ownership were also addressed. For example, participants were invited to select their own pseudonyms which in the event the majority either did or were happy for me to select one for them. Contact details of my research supervisor were also provided to all participants in case any difficulties should arise that I could not resolve and/or they had further questions that I could not address. All individuals

were sent transcripts of their interviews and short follow-up interviews were subsequently conducted with participants to clarify that these transcripts were an accurate record and to confirm that they were happy for them to be used. No amendments were made by any of the interviewees. As observed, '...the ethics of social work research must logically be at least compatible if not coterminous with the ethics of social work generally' (Butler, 2002: 241). This notion of congruence continued to inform my involvement throughout the process including how I spoke about the study and its participants when presenting aspects of the findings to internal and external audiences.

### **3.9 Types and sources of data**

The study's data was gathered from the eight sources detailed below:

- Individual interviews with three service users who had told their stories at least once to BA (Hons) and MA Social Work students (originally four interviews were planned but one service user did not subsequently attend the three dates set for her, telephoning beforehand to cancel due to family/personal health reasons)
- Focus group with six social work students studying in their second year of the BA (Hons) Social Work degree
- Individual interviews with two of the social work students in year two of the BA (hons) Social Work programme who had taken part in the focus group
- Individual interview with one social work qualified practitioner and co-facilitator of a joint service user and practitioner led session
- Individual interviews with three social work lecturers teaching on both undergraduate BA (Hons) Social Work and post-graduate MA Social Work programmes (including one who had been the subject of a previous pilot individual case study)
- Participant-as-observer records relating to four sessions where I had acted as a co-educator with four service users (one session involved two service users) delivered to a student cohort of approximately 30 undergraduate social work students

- Reflective journal and fieldwork records kept throughout the 18 months' life of the field work and study overall
- Review and analysis of 10 randomly selected reflective academic assignments written by students

It was an added bonus that all participants welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the study. They viewed it as important in furthering the work of the social work team and/or as a means of strengthening the team's profile and practice with service users.

## **3.10 Data Collection Methods (see Table i)**

### **3.10.1 Focus group**

A focus group was chosen as the primary means of data collection because the data that comes from group interactions might not otherwise be collected (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007). It was an attractive method as it would involve studying an established group of students who knew each other and who had been studying together for over one year. The group interview schedule was piloted with a small group of three non-participating undergraduate social work students to ensure clarity and relevance, resulting in the making of minor amendments to wording. In line with Croonin's (2001) guidance, I acted as a moderator and guided the discussion between participants. The focus group lasted approximately one and a half hours and took place at a time convenient for all parties. The session was audio recorded and I ensured that the room was quiet, comfortable and as free from any interruptions as possible. Straightforward language was used and I was vigilant to avoid leading questions. Numerical coding was used to identify the participants and their responses (Cronin, 2001, p.165). It turned out that this relatively small group had much to say on the issue and this enabled a depth recording of fairly detailed and critical comments. Despite the potential of not gathering the depth of individual interviews, the interactions between participants meant that insight could be gained into the ways in which meaning was made within the context of the group (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001). It also heightened a feeling of empowerment in research process by allowing the students greater

opportunity to steer the discussion in different directions based on the conversation flow (Morgan, 1997). My previous experience of conducting group interviews had shown that groups are not problem free and may well be influenced by the phenomenon of 'group think'. Also the management of group dynamics could potentially make it difficult for participants to talk about and reflect on sensitive issues (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). I therefore needed to maintain a good degree of sensitivity to the changing climate in the group as different themes and issues were covered. I was careful not to offer my views even when directly asked to do so. Being a lone facilitator proved challenging in terms of attending to both the process and content of the group, including observing and picking up on non-verbal communication.

I had not selected specific participants for the group as I wanted to elicit cross cutting data from across the wider the student body. In terms of group facilitation my role was at times fairly directive to ensure that I heard from all participants. It was important to keep one person or a small coalition of people from dominating the group and it was important to encourage two of the quieter students to participate as I wanted to encourage responses from the entire group to ensure the fullest coverage of the topic (Silverman, 2007).

### **3.10.2 Individual Interviews**

Qualitative interviewing was an appropriate tool as it enabled me to access the participants' understanding and the meaning of their stories, also discovering what could not be observed. Face-to-face interviews lasting approximately one hour were undertaken with all participants and then each followed up with shorter interviews as detailed below. All interviews -with the exception of those with two service users- were conducted in my office. Interviews with the two remaining service user participants, at their discretion, were held an alternative office site.

I used a semi-structured interview approach because of its flexibility (Merriam, 2002) and a uniform set of pre-established, open-ended questions to obtain demographic information on the participants and their respective perceptions and experiences of the impact of the stories and storytelling. In the case of the student interviews these were informed by the themes raised in the focus group. This interviewing approach also allowed the identification of new issues that were not originally part of the interview schedule and enabled me to vary the order depending on the flow of the conversation (Saunders et al, 2003; Esterberg, 2002). Probing and/or follow-up questions were used throughout to encourage the interviewees to elaborate/clarify their responses in their own words without attempting to influence the content (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).



With the approval of the participants I audio recorded each interview to ensure accurate transcription (Merriam, 1998). Handwritten notes were made during each interview as this enabled me to track key points and return to these later in the session. All interviews were transcribed in full using the conventions of oral history which involved recording the interviewee's words fully and in the order spoken. Pauses were indicated with the use of three dots. The text was transcribed into its narrative form and I used a narrative and biographical interview proforma as a 'live' working document to record key issues about the interview, identifying key questions illuminated by the data and organising and exploring the key concepts, words and themes (Merrill & West, 2008). I then reread and coded the transcript, naming core concepts and relating key aspects of the interview to theoretical and conceptual frameworks in order to avoid the narrative becoming overly descriptive (Belenky et al, 1997). The interviewees were given the transcript to read in order that they could confirm its accuracy and their willingness for it to be used. A shorter second interview was then held which lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes. In line with Skegg's (1997) dialogical approach: I discussed my analysis, ideas and interpretations openly whilst being fully aware that these could be challenged/contradicted or confirmed as part of a necessary process of 'interpretation through dialogue' (Skeggs, 1997, p.30) and the creation of the story. These follow-up interviews were recorded using handwritten field notes and proved a useful means of keeping issues of equality on the agenda as I was aware that interviews can run the risk of being governed by the interviewer (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **3.10.3 Participant-as-observer and the teaching and learning context**

Participant observation took the form of 'participant-as-observer' (McLaughlin, 2012; Robson, 1993; Silverman, 1997) where myself as the researcher and the parties being researched –i.e. the students and service users- were all aware of the fieldwork relationship. My aim was to develop a more holistic understanding of classroom based interaction. The apparent naturalness of the participant-as-observer method belies the complexity of its actual practice (May, 2001). Central to the task was my active engagement in an array of tasks: looking, listening, enquiring and recording; describing the activities being observed and detailing activities of interest.

The observed sessions focused on four three-hour long lectures involving four service users with myself as co-facilitator. These lectures were part of the students' year 2 undergraduate module: 'Citizens, Service Provision and Society'. The module was co-produced with service users with a primary aim to develop students' understanding of the lived experience of service users. Central to this was service users telling their own stories. This provided the forum for me to gather participant-as-observer data and draw on other teaching material(s) and teaching methods used in the delivery of these lectures. These included: small group exercises, 'group think'/flip chart material, question and answer elements, personal background histories and case scenarios/case studies written by two of the service users and used as part of their story telling.

As is standard practice, the structure of these lectures had been jointly planned by myself and the relevant service user. This followed a process of preparation with the participating service users in line with the Faculty's guidelines for preparation. I had met with each of the study's service user participants twice on either an individual or small group basis before teaching with them. These preparatory meetings had addressed a number of staged aspects and themes (see Appendix 4).

I was aware that my presence could 'contaminate' or bias the situation which may have been avoided by adopting a more neutral non-participant observation role. However, I was aware that acting in a participant-as-observer role had its advantages as I could draw on my own experience to help understand the research process. My role could best be described as 'active membership'; a mid-point location between Adler and Adler's (1994) 'peripheral' and 'full' membership. This enabled me to observe and interact closely enough with the students and service users to sufficiently establish an 'insider's identity' without fully participating in those activities which constituted the core of group membership (Adler & Adler, 1994, p.380).

I followed Merriam's (1988) guidance in relation to observation and the structure of data collection. Key elements were recorded in my field notes, including the physical environment and description of the context and participants. I also noted the frequency and duration of activities/interactions and other subtle factors such as informal, unplanned activities and non-verbal communication. Data collection was facilitated by my familiarity with the learning environment. Being open and honest in explaining what I was doing without being too detailed or technical and building in time to answer any questions created a more relaxed environment. I found that I was able to write in more detail over time as my involvement with the students and service users increased and their familiarity with my 'dual' role developed. I

also made a conscious effort to attend to power dynamics. For example, I made a particular note of whose opinions were respected and who occupied particular positions of influence.

#### **3.10.4 Use of reflective journal and field notes**

I found keeping a reflective journal a very useful aid. Its use within qualitative research, particularly reflexive research, is fairly standard practice (Etherington, 2004) and charted how I was making sense of 'impact' as the study progressed. It introduced transparency into the research process which I judged important both in terms of conducting the study ethically (Ortlipp, 2003) and on the grounds of its trustworthiness.

I maintained detailed written descriptions of each element of the case in an attempt to convey the actual situations that I studied and their surrounding contexts. I had to consider what level of detail I put into the field notes and what I was noting about my personal experience when conducting the research. It was important to review my notes to ensure that my analysis was balanced with observations and as a check on the rigour of my reflections (Wolcott, 2001).

I used the journal to (re) view my associated research activities and gather new insights. For example, in the course of the study I presented aspects of the preliminary findings at the Faculty's Staff Development Service User conference (involving two of the study's service user participants) and at two other professional conferences involving academics, service users and practitioners. Audience feedback helped me see some aspects in a new light and overall supported other reflective entries, including informal conversations and reflective records of teaching and learning activities. I used exact quotes when possible and described activities in the order in which they occurred including relevant background information to situate the event.

#### **3.10.5 Document Review: students' written reflective assignments and teaching and learning material(s)**

I collected and reviewed a number of documents which were used to clarify or substantiate participants' statements (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A sample of 10 students' written reflective assignments submitted as part of the module assessment formed one element of the study's secondary data collection techniques. I also reviewed the products of students' written reflective tasks which they undertook in small groups within two seminar sessions. The seminars followed service user taught sessions and students were asked by seminar leaders to identify significant aspects of learning that had occurred as a result of these sessions. These

provided further insights into the impact of the stories and enabled me to make further connections across the data (Goldstein & Reiboldt, 2004). I analysed the students' assignments after the module ended and the value of reviewing these was that it was a 'non-reactive technique' (Bryman, 2004, p.392). Qualitatively, the information they contained was not as subject to possible distortion as may have been the case in the interviews and as a result of the interaction between myself as researcher and the students. This involved a searching-out of underlying themes and understanding the meaning of the context in which they were created. In line with constructivist grounded analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I viewed these sources as constructions by the students of their own reality in contrast to verbatim accounts of what they did or thought.

The data collection methods used in the study are summarized below.

**Table (i) Data Collection Methods**

<b>Method</b>	<b>Participants/Data Source</b>	<b>Participants' profile / relevant information</b>
Focus Group	6 BA Social Work undergraduate students	In 2nd year of degree study Diverse pre-course social care /social work related experience All females aged 19-53 years
Depth Individual Interviews & follow up interview	3 social work lecturers	<b>Anna</b> -10 years f/t lecturer experience mainly teaching social work with adults substantial prior generic social work experience. <b>Ed</b> - 18 months f/t lecturer experience mainly teaching children's social work Children and Families'/Disabled children prior swk. experience
Pilot case study Depth biographical individual interview and follow up interview	1 social work lecturer	<b>Elena</b> -8 years p/t lecturer experience SUI lead & mainly teaching research and Adults social work.

		Prior experience in homelessness field
Depth Individual Interviews & follow up interview	3 service users	<b>Tom</b> -shared narrative 9 times <b>Lydia</b> -shared narrative 4 times Sara-shared narrative 2 times previously
Participant-as-observer field notes & reflective journal	1 service user (subsequently did not participate in interview)	<b>Tina</b> -shared narrative 2 times previously
Depth individual interview and follow up interview	1 social work practitioner and co-presenter of SU led session	<b>Jay</b> -20 years qualified swker & session co-facilitator and co-presenter Children and Families' prior social work experience Currently therapeutic fostering practitioner (10 yrs)
Reflective journal record	Written reflective journal kept throughout the 18 months duration of the study	Detailed reflections on process & content including : research activity, specific sessions, SU preparation, self-reflection, hypotheses; reflections on theory building
Participant-as-observer field notes	Detailed participant-as-observer records documenting 4 sessions where I acted as co-educator with 5 SUs ( 1 session involved 2 SUs)	Delivered to 30 BA swk students Stories: child sexual abuse; living with enduring mental health needs; homelessness; LAC*experience; impact of parental mental health illness Stories told using different methods (power point presentation, scripted, question and answer, directed auto/biographical reading & small

		group exercises )
		* Looked after child

### 3.11 Data Analysis

The study adopted thematic networks analysis which is becoming a more widely-used strategy for categorising qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulson, 2001). I was keen to avoid the 'anything goes' critique of qualitative research (Antaki, Billing, Edwards & Potter, 2002) which may well have been the case in the absence of any clear and concise guidelines.

To this end, in terms of thematic data analysis, Braun and Clark's (2006) discussion informed my understanding of the need for a systematic approach to dealing with the data. More specifically I followed Attride-Stirling's (2001) guidance in relation to thematic networks analysis. Here thematic analyses can be usefully aided by and presented as thematic networks to summarise the main themes constituting a piece of text (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p.386). I will briefly outline this, given that it provided firm organising principles that underpinned my thematic analysis of the data and then present the networks in Table (ii) below followed by one worked example (see Table iii )

Attride-Stirling's model for constructing thematic networks is grounded in Toulmin's (1958) argumentation theory which uses key terms (claim, warrant, and backing) as the underpinning logic to the process. As such, this model gave a structure to organise the data and provided a framework to evaluate its robustness as I began to build the networks. '*Argumentation*' is described as the progression from accepted data through a warrant to a claim. Toulmin's formulation proposes that a claim is the conclusion to an argument where its merits are to be established. '*Data*' consist of evidence (empirical or examples) given to support a conclusion or claim. '*Warrants*' are the principles/premises upon which the arguments in support of the claim are constructed. However, Attride-Stirling maintains, claims do not necessarily follow logically from the data and warrants at hand. For this reason, there are '*backings*' (supportive arguments for warrants), '*qualifiers*' (elements of doubt in claims) '*rebuttals*' (conditions which falsify the claim) and '*alternative claims*'. This then provides a means of exploring the connections between the explicit statements and the implicit meanings in people's discourse. This framework introduced a rigour to my analysis. The process highlighted -for example- the significance and purpose of triangulation, the need to attend to specific negative case examples and points of divergence and convergence across the data.

Building on the above, Attride-Stirling presents three classes of themes:

- Basic Theme: the most basic or lowest order theme derived from the textual data akin to a backing in that it is a statement of belief anchored around a central notion (warrant) and contributes toward the significance of a super-ordinate theme. They are simple premises of the data but in order to make sense need to be read within the context of other basic themes. Together they represent an Organising Theme
- Organising Theme: a middle-order theme that functions to organise basic themes into a cluster of similar issues -'clusters of signification' (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p.389). Like warrants they are the principles on which a superordinate claim is based.
- Global Theme: super-ordinate themes that encompass the principal metaphors in the data as a whole. It is similar to a claim in that it is a concluding or final tenet. Global Theme groups sets of Organising Themes that together present the argument, or a position/assertion about a given issue or reality.

It is important here to define key terms used throughout the process. 'Data corpus' refers to all data collected for this particular study. 'Data set' refers to all the data from the corpus which I have used for this particular analysis in relation to 'impact'. 'Data item' refers to each individual piece of data collected (for example, from the individual/group interviews, observations and those sources listed above) which together make up the data set or corpus. Lastly, 'data extract' refers to an individual coded chunk of data which has been identified within and extracted from a data item.

The primary purpose of the study's inductive approach was to allow the research findings to emerge from frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in the raw data. It was important to identify certain themes or patterns across the data set rather than a sole focus on these within any single data item.

I was exploring a relatively under researched area. I therefore aimed to provide a rich, thematic description of the data set in order to highlight predominant or important themes relating to 'impact' and how these were contained within the explicit and surface meanings of the data. I also wanted to provide a more nuanced account of any particularly significant theme. This could relate to a particular 'latent' theme across the whole or the majority of the data set which started to identify/examine underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations that in turn could be theorised as shaping or informing the data's semantic



content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This fitted well with the tenor of the study as latent analysis derives from a constructionist paradigm with a degree of overlap with 'thematic discourse analysis' (Singer & Hunter, 1999). I therefore adopted a more flexible 'middle-ground' position as I interpreted the data; a 'hybrid' semantic-latent theme analysis which helped give a fuller picture of the data items and how these could be understood in relation to the data set (Braun & Clarke 2006, p.15).

### **3.11.1 Constructing the thematic networks**

Attride-Stirling's (2001) six steps served to organise the data prior to its analysis. Although I describe these steps in a linear order, in reality this took a more interactive form. It involved a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set and the extracts of data I had coded to seek patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest. This iterative and recursive activity continued as a defining feature throughout the process.

#### **Step 1: Coding the material**

The first stage involved my initial naïve reading of the raw data in its entirety to make sense of it. This immersion in the data involved repeated and active reading and generating, at this stage, my ideas for coding. This 'indexing' (Ritchie & Spencer, 2004) was akin to the function of a book index and the coding was undertaken manually. I annotated the text in an adjacent column and/or attached notes to the fieldwork documentation using highlighters and post-it notes to show which concept featured where in the data. This was necessary to identify substantive evidence related to the study's original aims and as a precursor to then undertaking a thematic coding of the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). It enabled me to become familiar not only with the data but also its management and establish the initial framework as a structure for later analysis. It also meant that at an early stage I built into the process a foundation to begin to 'theorise meanings' (Holloway & Todres, 2003, p.347). In this sense it was a formative process as it helped me form a clearer picture of how the case could be conceptualised including its parameters.

The codes were derived on the basis of the specific theoretical interests underpinning the study's research questions and relevant issues regarding the phenomenon of 'impact'. By going

through the transcripts I identified the most salient constructs and shaped these into a finite set of codes that were discrete enough to avoid redundancy yet global enough to be meaningful (Attride-Stirling, 2001) as my emphasis was conceptual and any pertinent data item could be classified under more than one code. The extracts were comprised of relevant and meaningful pieces of text including passages/observations/quotations, single words such as 'shifted'/'altered'/'increased' or other criteria which I judged necessary for the subsequent analysis of the findings.

I began to identify examples of 'impact' based on recurrent issues and interesting aspects in the data items, including their similarities and differences as well as patterns. These then formed the basis of '*repeated*' patterns (themes) across the data set. In this way, I used coding as a means of reducing and simplifying the data which also meant that the task became increasingly more manageable. Writing proved to be an integral part of this initial process - and indeed throughout the networks building process- as I wrote down ideas, potential coding schemes and reflections. I had transcribed all the interviews which required a rigorous and thorough approach and came to share others' views that transcription was a key, and for myself, very necessary aspect in familiarisation with the data (Riessman, 1993; Bird, 2005). In line with an inductive approach I also resisted the temptation to re-engage with the literature during these early stages as this could run the later risk of narrowing my 'analytic field of vision' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.16). I also used file cards to structure this part of the process and coded for as many potential issues/themes/patterns within my time framework and aimed to code the data extracts inclusively to retain their context (Bryman, 2001).

## **Step 2: Identifying themes.**

This involved two stages:

- a) Sorting the different codes into potential themes and collating the relevant coded data extracts with the identified themes. I found mind-maps a useful aide (name of each code and brief description) to help organise into theme piles.
- b) Refining themes further so they were specific enough to be discrete (non-repetitive) but also sufficiently broad to encapsulate a set of ideas contained across the many text segments. Some of the initial codes went on to form main -or 'candidate' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.19) -

themes, whereas others formed sub-themes.

When refining the themes, it was important to see whether there were sufficient data to support them or whether the themes were too diverse. This called for careful judgement as data within the themes needed to cohere in a meaningful way but there also needed to be clear and identifiable distinctions between the themes. As this was done, I kept a record of the following: i) the issues that were being handled ii) the emergent themes iii) the reference of the specific quotations/evidence that contained each theme and finally, iv) the number of quotations/data extracts that contained the theme.

I obtained 567 data extracts. From the refined codes, 55 Basic Themes were derived. These were then grouped into 12 Organising Themes.

### **Step 3: Constructing the networks**

These themes then became the 'fountainhead' (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p.392) for the thematic networks and followed six stages:

i) Arrangement of the themes: decisions about how to group themes were made on the basis of content and on theoretical grounds. Each grouping resulted in a distinct Global Theme supported by Organizing and Basic Themes.

ii) Selection of Basic Themes: this involved renaming the original set and grouping of themes.

iii) Rearrangement into Organizing Themes: I clustered the basic themes on the basis of larger shared issues/commonalities to make Organizing Themes and identified the issues underlying them.

Deduction of Global Themes: this involved a return to Toulmin's argumentation theory and core concepts. In light of the Basic Themes, I then summarised the main claim, proposition, argument, assertion or assumption that each Organizing Theme centred on/was concerned about. This claim then became the Global Theme of the network defined as 'the core, principal metaphor that encapsulates the main point in the text' (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p.393). I will provide one worked example with commentary to illustrate the process (see table (ii) below) :

**Table (ii) Worked example**

Once the Basic Themes were identified, I reverted to the study's underpinning emancipatory and social constructionist theoretical perspectives to begin the process of categorisation. This led to analysis and fine tuning of the extracts looking for areas of convergence and divergence which in turn were then used to develop clusters of significance.

Below is a worked example in relation to Thematic network 1 (Global Theme: 'Promotes Reflexivity, self-reflection and self-knowledge')

Source	Data extract	Basic Theme ( BT )
Focus group (Students)	'The mental health couple, I still remember them just because for me-um...I didn't realize the level of education they had. I felt “They won't be able to talk to us” but the level of education they had was a shock' (Student 3 )	Changing perceptions of service users ( BT 6 )
Individual interview (Student )	'Um... it makes it real-you can see them as a human being, they're not a case study ...' (Hanna, student)	Reported experience as real, unique subjective experience ( BT 11)
Written reflective assignment (WRA)	'Before the module my views on mental health sufferers were personal images of tramps; adults talking to themselves in the street ,dirty people and	Stories ability to challenge personal attitudes (BT 7)

	weak-minded individuals that I may have crossed the street to avoid' (WRA 10)	
Individual Interview (Lecturer)	'They said they'd never really understood what life was like from the perspective of a person with autism before' (Anna, lecturer )	Direct exposure to others' experience promoting deeper empathic understanding (BT1)
Individual interview (SU)	'It's good hearing it from one person but it's better to have different people ... then you get a variety of understanding and not just- "Oh that happened, so that's the impact, the outcome..." (Sara SU)	Stereotyping obstructing objectivity (BT9)

Where data extracts shared larger thematic similarities and patterns, for example, BT 7 (realization of how personal stereotypes were challenged) and BT 9 (extracts about awareness of how stereotyping reducing objectivity), these were then grouped into Organising Theme 1 (stories stimulating personal learning and reflection) reflecting larger shared issues and commonalities. The Organising Themes were then in turn reviewed and scrutinized for dominant themes and underlying issues including how the notion of impact had been reported and could be understood within their specific context. This involved close reference to Toulmin's framework and looking for evidence to support the main claim, proposition, assertion, assumption or argument. In this example, the data that related to Organising Themes 1 and 2 highlighted the centrality of reflexivity to enhanced self-understanding as part of stories' wider potential to prompt reflection accompanied by signs of changes in perception and attitude (BT 11 for example where data revealed appreciation/acknowledgement of the effects of labelling culminating in increased awareness of individuality and the need to challenge one's own personal stereotyping). This was strongly the case here supported by firm links between data collected from different sources and which converged (interviews, participant-as-observer observation records comments made in the focus group and so on).

However, equally important were those negative case examples or points of divergence. This included examining the thematically relevant data rigorously and, in this example, identifying where an individual might have reported minor or no significant changes in his/her attitudes and/or had reported/ demonstrated very limited engagement in self-reflection following exposure to a story. In this way, I was able to assess the strength of the evidence and summarize the cross cutting themes and patterns prior to constructing the networks and subsequently analysing the study's 4 Global Thematic Networks.

v) Illustration of the thematic network(s): once the Basic, Organizing and Global themes were prepared, these were then shown as non-hierarchical representations.

vi) Verification and refinement of the networks: this involved carefully checking the text segments related to each Basic Theme to ensure that the Global, Organizing and Basic Themes reflected the data and, in turn, that the data supported the Global, Organizing and Basic Themes. This involved making only minor adjustments.

#### **Step 4: Description and exploration of the thematic networks**

This involved exploration of the study's emergent themes and identifying their underlying patterns. Once the networks had been constructed I returned to the original text and interpreted it with the aid of the networks.

#### **Step 5: Summary of the thematic network**

Once it had been described and explored in full, I presented a summary of the themes and patterns characterising it. Each Global Theme therefore produced a thematic network as shown in Table (iii) below.

#### **Step 6: Interpretation of patterns**

This involved bringing together the deductions in the summaries of all the networks and then bringing together these deductions and the relevant theory to explore the significant themes, concepts, patterns and structures that arose in the text. This involved returning to the original

research questions and the theoretical interests underpinning them and addressing these with arguments grounded on the patterns that emerged in the exploration of the texts.

The following chapter will present the study's findings in line with steps 4 and 5 above and with the interpretation of the patterns (Step 6) discussed in Chapter 5.

Table (iii)	Basic Themes	Organising Themes	Global Themes
1	Direct exposure to others’ experience (s) promotes deeper empathic understanding	Stimulates personal learning and reflection	Promotes reflection, reflexivity and self-knowledge
2	Learning occurs through identification (with the story / the story teller)		
3	Narratives as prompts to self-reflection		
4	Appreciation of wider context / impact of background factors on service users		
5	Awareness of oppression as subjective experience		
6	Changing perceptions of service users (as change agents)		
7	Stories' ability to challenge personal attitudes		
8	Attitudes as complex and unreflected aspects of behaviour		
9	Stereotyping obstructs objectivity	Individualisation and challenges personal stereotyping	
10	Stereotypes exert a strong influence on practice		
11	Reported experience seen as real, unique and subjective experience		
12	Appreciation of effects of labelling		



13	Emotional awareness is a key aspect of the reflective process	Emotionality	Emotionality as a key aspect of the educative process
14	Learning contains strong emotional dimensions		
15	Learning as an uncomfortable process		
16	Stories evoke powerful and spontaneous emotional responses		
17	Story contents as stressors		
18	Stories as stressful because of unforeseen consequences		
19	Story telling involves risk and unpredictability	Storytelling as risk taking	
20	Story tellers as coerced participants		
21	Stories' potential to shock		
22	Stories seen as enablers of personal and professional preparation/ orientation	Preparation and the professional context	
23	Stories as exposure to practice realities		
24	Emergent understanding of holistic practice		
25	Individuals' employ diverse strategies to cope with stressful situations	Role support	
26	Managing demands		
27	Coping as reflected in accounts		

	of success/failure		
28	Support for learning		
29	Power manifests in subtle and complex ways		
30	Resilience as essential to survival	Exercising authority and control	Influences role construction and performance
31	Personal agency as exercise of power		
32	Stories seen as a challenging and dynamic teaching method.		
33	Effective teaching articulated as a dynamic process	Role identity, definition and ramifications	
34	Integration of stories requires careful preparation of learning environment/climate		
35	Delivery style seen as key influence on the teaching and learning process		
36	Support for self and others seen as crucial importance of debriefing for reflective learning		
37	Story telling framed as an interactive activity		
38	Boundary maintenance within the process		
39	Identity as multifaceted and dynamic		
40	Preservation of identity-personal and professional		

41	Contested notions of 'expertise' and role demarcation		
42	Better understood through being brought to life	Stories as motivators for learning and knowledge extension	Promotes Critical thinking
43	Learning environment/context as contributor to stories as drivers /motivators for learning about service users' needs		
44	Narratives valued as exposure to 'un lived' experience		
45	Identification with story/story teller as core to learning		
46	Direct access to story teller seen as important		
47	Perception of story teller influences how story is heard	Learning and conceptualisation	
48	Description and descriptive language as powerful motivators		
49	Critical thinking as essential for effective practice		
50	Reflection and higher thought enabling complex learning		
51	Stories provide beneficial opportunities to explore and apply ideas/ theory		
52	Promoting new ways of seeing - defined as significant ' light bulb' moments		
53	Individuals have an intrinsic		

	urge to explore new ideas and learn	Theorizing and theory generation	(Based on Attride-Striling, 2001)
54	Personalisation promotes theoretical understanding		
55	Benefits of 'live ' construction of theory		

## **Chapter 4 Presentation of Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the study which are organised under four Global Themes. These will be described and summarised in line with thematic network analysis guidance developed by Attride-Stirling (2001). As detailed in the previous chapter, the data had been refined and reworked in line with a semantic-latent theme analysis. This involved scrutinizing the data set for explicit and surface meanings in the language used and involved attention to specific words and phrases within the content. I was also interested in drawing out those more nuanced accounts of any particularly significant theme, how these had been reported and what they revealed in terms of underlying ideas/conceptualisations and assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This entailed making careful judgements as to what counted as theme and the findings therefore identify those themes which were prevalent both in terms of space within each data item and their prevalence across the data set. In line with case study methodology, points of convergence and divergence within the data will be highlighted with attention to significant aspects of context. As discussed previously; I was particularly keen to highlight the different nuances, contradictions, differences and tensions in how the themes had been variously reported. Illustrative examples of each Global Theme will be given from the actual data and will be denoted by use of italics and indentation within the discussion.

#### **Guide to abbreviations**

i) The findings are presented with a range of examples of direct quotations from participants. Each participant is referenced according to their type of involvement in the study and the source of the respective data extract is provided. In terms of identifying participants, the following abbreviations have been used:

L- Lecturer

S- Student

SU- Service User

P- Practitioner

ii) In terms of the source of the specific extract, I have used the following abbreviations:

FG– Focus Group

FN- Field Notes

I- Individual Interview

PO– Participant-As-Observer Records

RR- Reflective Record

WRA- Student written reflective assignment (Sample numbered 1-10)

Each data extract is also identified in relation to the Basic Theme(s) (BT) to which it relates. For Basic Themes (1-55) and the four Global Themes network see Appendix ?

## **4.2 Participants' profile, experience and learning context of the study**

For purposes of confidentiality and anonymity all names included are either pseudonyms selected by participants themselves or those I selected at their request. Participants' details are outlined below.

The four service user participants ranged from 18 to 59 years of age and comprised those whose experience included: using mental health services, homelessness, being looked after by the local authority following difficulties within their families of origin (making it impossible for them to stay there), the experience of parental mental illness and social services intervention following personal experience of child sexual abuse. Other stories referred to and which featured in the teaching also related to personal substance misuse, social communication disorder (autism) and other learning variabilities and surviving domestic violence.

- The lecturers, all of whom are qualified social workers, comprised of two experienced female lecturers (with eight and ten years of teaching experience respectively) and one male lecturer who had joined the teaching team from practice 18 months previously. One of the female lecturers had been the subject of the

previous pilot individual case study. I had nearly 20 years' experience as a social work lecturer.

- One qualified practitioner, a female social worker with 10 years' of post-qualification experience in therapeutic fostering who had recruited one of the young service users and co-facilitated this service user's session.
- The students in the focus groups ranged from 21 to 42 years, were all female and studying their second year of the undergraduate pre-registration social work training. They had all completed their introductory first year where the curriculum aimed to develop understanding of core aspects of the professional social work role, context and its remit. This had included studying the value base underpinning practice as well as identifying the contribution of social sciences to social work. All students had successfully undertaken their Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice prior to embarking on their first practice placement in the second year of the Programme which commenced following data collection.

Their second year curriculum encourages a greater degree of theoretical critique and application of theory in relation to different service user groups and settings. These students had also recently completed a module which explored a range of social work practice theories and models. One of the teaching tools used in that module was Collingwood's (2005) theory circle. This overarching framework identifies 'theories to intervene' (or 'social work practice theories', Trevithick, 2005); those informing practitioners' direct interventions in the lives of service users and their networks and 'theories to inform' (or 'specialist knowledge'); those which may be used to develop understanding of wider influences on service users and their situations. I used this as a point of reference within my own teaching in those sessions which provided the participant-as-observer data for this study. In the final event this also served as a useful framework in terms of the development and generation of theory as part of the instrumental case study and as a conceptual tool to help structure my observations of the learning process(es).

### **4.3 Thematic Network 1: Global Theme: Promotes reflexivity, self-reflection and self-knowledge**

This thematic network comprised two Organising Themes and 12 Basic Themes. Overall

this network shows how the stories promoted varying degrees of reflexivity; a process often resulting in participants 'knowing themselves' better. This network rested on robust evidence, revealing how individuals processed and made sense of the stories including what the service user narratives had personally meant to them. One key cluster of supporting themes showed how heightened understanding of reflection as a process had provided a motivation to engage more deeply with the process (es) of self-evaluation. A second cluster of themes revealed insights into the nature of personal attitudes and highlighted the new learning that had occurred when these had been confronted via the stories and/or story teller. Closely aligned to this was the part stories played in challenging personal stereotyping.

Exposure to the stories resulted in enhanced levels of self-knowledge for many of the study's participants. For some a heightened awareness initiated a motivation to take a closer scrutiny of their own personal situations and networks:

'I took a superficial view, not considering the effect on daily living. For example, I have not had any interactions with someone who's been involved in an abusive relationship, or so I thought before I started discussing the topic with friends and family' (WRA7, BT3).

For other students, thinking about the specific stories afterwards revealed the importance of self-evaluation and reflection as a process itself. Here it appeared that stories served a key role in reinforcing the importance of self-reflection; the notion that one needs to know oneself before trying to understand and have a meaningful engagement with others. For a minority, this had stimulated a future commitment to continuing to engage in reflective practice:

'Thinking about it now, I am more aware than ever of the importance of reflection, and how this can lead me to understand my own thoughts, feelings and behaviours towards others. For me there isn't a clear end to this; reflection will be an ever developing and continuous skill' (Student, WRA3, BT3).

Such insights were not confined to learners but were also expressed by lecturers. For example, compared with the student participants and based on her much longer-standing experience of hearing service users' stories, one lecturer identified a range of personal benefits that had resulted over time. These insights had also been used to inform other aspects of her academic life:



'I found it stimulating. *It's made me often think about how to do things differently or better, or a slightly different way the next time. It's informed my reading, my thinking, my writing, my talking with practitioners when teaching people at post-qualifying level*'. (Anna, L, I, BT3).

From her vantage point of assessing students' reflective assignments and presentations, this lecturer also observed how stories seemed to have facilitated a distinct change in students' thinking. However, she catches herself in the interview, drawing a line between the changes in thinking she has witnessed and the practice context. Here she is less sure about their potential to exert any influence on other behaviour(s):

'I think from the reflective accounts I have read, also the presentations  
the students did, but also from the reflective accounts, there seems to  
be a real switch in that behaviour...or in their thinking anyway. Whether  
*that's borne out in practice, of course, that is another matter*'

(Anna, L, I, BT6).

The process of introducing service users and their stories also emerged strongly in participants' accounts. Most frequently recalled -often imbued with a sense embarrassment- were the times when this had not gone smoothly. However, in equal measure; these also served as personal, critical learning incidents. Anna continues:

'I think, as I was telling you before, there was this – um – situation where the people came, the people with learning disabilities came, from a particular group and – er – the first thing I did wrong, (laughs) I introduced them, you know, as I like to introduce service users, *'we're not service users we're co-workers'* and – er – they told me that, they had told me that and I had not registered it' (Anna, L, I, BT8).

This interaction mirrored several of the students' comments in relation to setting the scene for further self-exploration of themselves, their world views and personal constructs. The following quotation was quite typical of the students' comments in the focus group. Here an animated discussion centered on a moment of shared tension in one session where the service user took issue when (as it was later revealed to be) her own foster carer's competence had been called into question. As above, the incident prompted various

personal reflections and a replaying of the situation this time illustrating personal learning in relation to language used and reflections on how meaning was conveyed:

'I certainly thought about what words did I use? What did I say? What would I have done differently...?' (FG, BT2).

Evidence demonstrating connections between thinking and feeling became synthesised in many of the students' written statements. Several showed themselves able not only to acknowledge the impact of adverse life events as described by service users but also to appreciate their legacy:

'I see that it's essential for social workers to understand that failure experienced by the service user can be damaging and leave them with a sense of shame' (WRA7, BT1).

At other points these data extracts conveyed a stronger 'ownership' of personal impact and self-realisation. Here the teller's delivery of her story seemed key:

'The young woman spoke in a way which enabled me to empathise with her...This particular experience stood out for me the most as I realized how naïve I was about people *suffering with this problem*' (WRA, BT8, BT13).

From a lecturer view point, this theme was similarly echoed. Here it demonstrates a belief in the potential of a story -hinting at its immediacy- to help students recast their thinking to adopt a more holistic and person-centered understanding:

'They say very clearly that it suddenly made me see, someone who I had thought of in a particular way, as a person. So, it made me see, you know, an older person as someone who had their past and their history and they brought themselves with it...someone who has been a carer...more than just service users – someone who had hopes and dreams and wishes...' (Anna, L, I, BT1, BT11).

As will be discussed later, stories that illuminated narratives of resilience on the one hand and those conveying understandings of trauma on the other featured strongly in participants' accounts. What emerged in the data supporting this Global Theme was that for some, the experience also prompted some powerful responses and discomfort which were able to be articulated and understood through their reflections. Degrees of sophistication were also apparent in students' reflections. Consider the two following extracts. In the first,

the ability to make sense of her personal reaction is highlighted:

'I was not sure why I was feeling angry until the next day when reflecting on the session, I realised that I was angry about the father of H, thinking that if he walked through the door I would like to shout at him about the life he had given his children' (WRA9, BT 5, BT14).

In contrast, another student extended her thinking to encompass reflections on the implications of her initial response in the lecture:

'For me, the most significant moment arose when we (the students) were asked 'what causes domestic violence?' *"A lack of self-esteem"* was my response. At first I felt ashamed that this had been my answer. If I had been asked directly did I understand the victim to be the cause of domestic violence, I would have answered with complete conviction, absolutely not. However subtle, this was effectively the implication of my answer' (WRA2, BT4, BT8)

One lecturer had clearly reflected deeply on his experience of a particular story told by two parents with learning disabilities. In discussing this session, he identified significant points of learning in relation to parenting capacity and related issues. These seemed to serve as a trigger to scrutinise the nature of social work intervention. Although his reflections emphasised the inherent tensions in the social work role, the story had also served as a reality check for him highlighting the place of balanced perspective:

'I think that part of reflective and critical practice is being able to step outside that and I don't know, kinda remind ourselves that ...um...those are important decisions that social workers...feel a lot of responsibility for, on the one hand, that feels like a lot of pressure and it can create a lot of anxiety for social workers; on the other hand, people go on with their lives regardless of social work input...you know, they kinda get on with it outside of our professional involvement...' (Ed, L, I, BT 4).

Identification with the story teller and/or the story also prompted further reflection and self-understanding. One student who had been one of the quieter members of the focus group suddenly found her voice when I asked about the emotional impact of any particular stories. She revealed that she had been raised in a household where domestic violence had been a key feature, describing one specific story and its impact beyond the classroom:

*'I found it emotive, I have had that...that's my personal thing...so it's like, I share it with my*

mum, so I saw her (the service user) as mother – I just thought of her as my mum - I just wanted to hug her. So, that's where I was...other people have theirs in other ways – so, yeah, that was a good one for me 'cos it helped me, kind of, move on in that situation, you know. It's really interesting to go home with it too, tell my mum how, you know... the background and she'd go – 'oh, what did she say about this' and 'that's so similar' and it, kind of, comforted my mum in a way, it was really nice.' (FG, BT 1, BT2).

She continued talking about how this story's emotional impact triggered thoughts about herself as a professional-in-the-making:

*'It's been good learning for me as a professional, to know now that's something I've had to tackle over the last three years...to know if I'm in that situation I can't go up and just cuddle you and not let go and make your world all right all the time – I have to work on that, on my emotional resilience, to kind of...take a little bit of a step back' (FG, BT 3).*

This student stood out as other members in the group did not offer such personal disclosures but preferred to talk more objectively about the need to manage emotions. At this point the tenor of the group drifted into problem solving approach with two students initiating a conversation about ways in which the Programme could assist students to deal with the emotional demands of social work.

In her individual interview; one of the service users (Sara) had spoken to students about her experience of being looked after by the local authority, the circumstances leading to this and her subsequent numerous placement moves. She spoke very openly about how telling her story prompted memories -sometimes uncomfortable- and the steps she took to deal with this as part of her own process. At times this had involved a high degree of censor and adaptation of her story as this interview extract shows:

Sara: *'No, I think it becomes like a routine, like a play, you know...um...I think in a way, it does change because there are some bits I might have spoken about...that actually, I really didn't feel comfortable next time I went to talk about that and then I don't talk about it...um...there may be points where I had an event that I hadn't spoken about so, in a way, you kind of, get the same story but just maybe different parts...*

Bob: Different parts...? Did you think – “Oh, I'm not going to talk about that” because you didn't feel comfortable about it?

Sara: Yeah, I think obviously when my friend died, that was one of the topics that came up and like, just in general, and obviously, they asked me, obviously, I mentioned it and that *and all they seemed to focus on was just that and obviously, I didn't feel comfortable* sitting there when they were asking me all those questions – about how did I feel, what happened and all of that. So, *I think the next time I didn't bring any of that up so I spoke about living in the kids' home...*' (Sara, SU, I, BT 3, BT13).

A further cluster of significance within this network related to the nature of personal attitudes and the new learning that had occurred when these had been confronted via the stories. Across the data set numerous references were made to personal stereotypes and provided a range of insights into the process of stereotyping. This was particularly prevalent in the students' assignments detailing how the stories had led to significant 'unlearning' or a deconstruction of their image of 'a service user'. Typically:

'After hearing the accounts of service users that have experienced and survived mental problems, I now have no real picture of what a 'mentally ill' person looks like' (WRA10, BT12).

Direct contact with the service user(s) as key to this process was a recurrent theme and for many the live encounter challenged wider depictions of service users:

'Television portrayals of domestic abuse had embedded in my understanding and images of frail victims, shy and withdrawn came to mind. However, the person standing in front of me completely challenged the preconceived ideas I had comfortably formed. A strong woman who didn't come across at all like a victim, a woman who looked very much in *control of herself & her situation*' (WRA3, BT9).

Related but with a slightly different emphasis, the opportunity to interact with service users played a pivotal role and so it seemed particularly for those students with less practice experience:

'So, particularly in the BA session, there were one or two people who said you know, 'I never thought I'd be able to do this, I never thought I'd be able to talk to somebody with a learning disability, but I just *did it and it was fine*' so I think it did break down some barriers in that way. The MA students were more, I think, just had a bit more life experience and a lot of them had, you know, worked in care, you know, caring roles and worked in a setting where they had worked with – er – or had had some interaction with

*people with learning disabilities so there was less of that there in that session' (Ed, L, I, BT2, BT7).*

One service user, Lydia, spoke extensively about stereotyping and its influence and drew on a range of incidents to support her assertion that:

*'People, kind of, fall into ...um... a habit of putting a stigma on people, as much as you know they're kind of, taught not to, and stuff like that' (Lydia, SU, I BT 12).*

This resonated with Anna's narrative where she returned to the above incident, clearly troubled that she too had engaged in stereotyping. This had clearly played on her mind and highlights the subtlety and ease with which one can become its prey:

*'I think it can also challenge us as – er - you know, however, far advanced as we are, we can still get caught up in those, kind of, - er...um...stereotypes, stereotypical kind of traps. We can still go in there – um – I think, as I was telling you before, there was this – um – situation where the people came, the people with learning disabilities came, from a particular group and I introduced them as service users not co-workers and I hadn't remembered it. I, kind of, put them into that category' (Anna, L, I, BT10).*

However, direct encounter also offered the opportunity to challenge stereotypes:

*'One thing I noticed with quite a lot of people is they meet me and they speak to me, then they find out my story and then they're almost surprised that I've become well-rounded' (Lydia, SU, L, BT 1, BT12).*

Service user presence in the room also offered the potential to challenge stereotypes in ways markedly different to the lecturer's particularly, it would appear from the following, when they are 'articulate' and 'academic':

*'They challenge stereotypes in a way that I can't do in the classroom. I can say "Yes, that's the situation for lots of users" but actually, having one of these who is articulate, who is very academic, actually, you know, this particular person, I'm thinking of...he's able to confidently cut across their views, their experiences with respect and all of that, really challenges, I think, these...this passive notion of the service user as a recipient of our service that perhaps, without realising we do in the classroom by referring to people even as service users...' (Anna, LI, BT7).*

This strong belief in the potential of a service user to challenge stereotypes also resulted in a degree of professional manipulation on occasion:

'I have a particular perspective, which is about challenging stereotypes and making people think differently...um...so I would choose a group or an individual who I thought would actually challenge some of the stereotypes, not necessarily, but sometimes in the things they would say and things they would do but also in the way they were and the way they would work' (Anna, L, I, BT 7, BT11).

A similar commitment to challenging stereotypes through his teaching was also explored at length by Ed. However, this revealed an intellectual and professional struggle where he was grappling with a number of multi-layered and interwoven issues:

'...the folks with learning disabilities might fall into some of those other groups as well, they might have had abused backgrounds...I think particularly, there is something about working with people with learning disabilities, that...um...raises those issues, particularly, I mean maybe, because learning disabilities is a bit broader category and a bit less *constructed as, you know, there's still an element of tragedy in the kind of discourse* around the learning disability, but perhaps a bit less so than something like child sexual abuse or, you know, domestic violence or...*maybe that's just how, that's how we feel most comfortable dealing with that particular kind of difference...um...it's kind of using humour*' (Ed, lecturer, BT3).

More starkly, and although conveyed in a much less searching and analytical way, direct exposure to different stories/ storytellers served as a very strong driver to shifts in students' attitudes. The written reflective assignments particularly documented previous and often very strongly held negative stereotypes towards certain service user groups. These were described by a significant number of students and often in graphic terms:

- 'When I read the paper, or heard on the news about people committing crimes or failing their children due to substance misuse, I immediately imagined an individual with bad skin, missing teeth, dark circled eyes and dirty clothes' (WRA 1, BT2 , BT9).
- 'I acknowledged that I had negative views on homeless people. I viewed all homeless people as alcoholics or drug addicts who do not contribute to society and I also believed that they were violent people with no morals. I did not think of them as

*people with feelings' (WRA7, BT1, BT7).*

- 'Before the module my views on mental health sufferers were personal *images of 'tramps', adult talking to themselves in the street, dirty people and weak minded individuals that I may have crossed the street to avoid' (WRA 10, BT7, BT8 ).*

It was not all one sided; conversely, personal stereotyping also manifested in one young service user's account of her anxiety about speaking to older students:

*'...I feel older people can judge you a bit more...um...I know that's being stereotypical but they've had to deal with a lot more things and think - "oh well, that's nothing, I had to do this, this and that" so you do feel a little bit, you know, anxious. I think it's just nerve-racking being in a bunch of university students and you're still in school – (laughs)' (Sara, SU, I, BT, 10).*

The data in this Global Theme overall showed that the impact appeared to be less in relation to those students who had greater practice experience. That said, even among those there was evidence that stories still held a capacity to challenge:

*'I didn't have these stereotypes about those with mental health needs because I had previous experience of working in that field. But as the session went on I realised I did have preconceptions. This surprised me as I always view myself as being open minded and the realisation that I had these pre-conceived ideas troubled me as I understand that it would have implications for how I work in practice' (WRA 2, BT9, BT10 ).*

A cluster of extracts related to individualisation including a heightened awareness of the service users' unique needs and situation. A recurrent thread running throughout this data was best captured in the notion of 'making it real'. At times this was stated as an explicit aim by story tellers and was also prized by lecturers to promote greater understanding. However, it emerged particularly strongly in students' group and individual interviews and was expressed in various ways:

*'Um...it makes it real – you can see them as a human being, they're not a case study...I don't quite know how to explain it' (Hazel, S, I, BT2, BT11).*

*'What I mean, you don't want to be reading it and go – "Oh, just another child ...another same type of story... ", you don't want it to be like that so yeah, her story did shock me*



especially as it was a close family relative...that shook me, (Hanna, S, I, BT 11 ).

For some, there was a realisation that they had pigeon-holed and stereotyped service users and by so doing had failed to appreciate that the range of skills and knowledge that they possessed:

'The mental health couple, I still remember them just because I think, for me – *um...I didn't realise the level of education they had. I felt they won't be able to talk to us but the education level they had was a shock*' (FG, BT6).

'Making it real' was a dominant theme in the focus group where all the students tended to focus on more shocking aspects of the stories but with one noticeable exception; a student who had been drawn to the less dramatic content of a particular story:

Interviewer: 'So what message did you take from that for your practice?

*Student: Um ... that life – I think that situations change people... they don't necessarily strive for the same things that they might have before and ...um... that simple things, I think, can make people feel the happiest and not – I think he was quite lonely at one point – he had a cat, simple, really simple things that can change people's lives – so I took away from that, just don't forget the small stuff'* (FG, BT 2, BT11).

As a theme, this notion of authoring -or the re-authoring of the sense of self after traumatic or negative life experiences- was a frequent topic in the student data. It was reflected in many references to the strength shown by the service user; not least their ability to tell their story:

*'It's quite shocking – how many people do you meet who would actually say to you they've been sexually abused- it's not an everyday occurrence is it?'* (FG, BT 4, BT14).

Service users too were also often keen to convey a sense of their personal resilience and to show that they had not been broken by the damaging events they had described. In a related vein, they perceived the students to be particularly interested in their personal coping and survival strategies. For example, one service user –Tom- recalled a volley of questions in relation to his six weeks' wait before he could see a psychiatrist; an observation which was supported by my participant-as-observer records of this as well as other sessions where I recorded numerous examples of students' active interest in how

service users had dealt with major life stressors.

Although 'making it real' and the power of personalisation showed as one of the defining features of the stories' impact, evidence relating to participants' capacity for discernment or a more discriminative listening was scarce. In fact, just one lecturer alluded to the risks of generalising from an individual experience:

*'They said they'd never really understood what life looked like from the perspective of a person with autism before. We did talk about that, and that it wouldn't necessarily be every person with autism's understanding of the world' (Anna, L, I, BT1).*

In a similar vein, only a very small minority of student data extracts showed awareness of the dangers of an overreliance on any one story and this was offered as a cautionary note within the focus group:

*'So, I think there's a bit of danger there and that maybe, there needs to be lectures around this – we are bringing these service users in, these are their experiences, you know, these are just some of the ideas that might work and that there are, you know, other service users, so just be mindful... (Focus group, BT3)*

The importance of exposure to different stories was also highlighted by one young service user who seemed to demonstrate maturity by her ability to stand outside herself:

*'It's good hearing it from one person but I think it's better to have different people 'cos then you get a variety of understanding and not just – "Oh, that happened, so that's the impact, that's the outcome" 'cos obviously that impact can have lots of different outcomes so it's good to hear that from a lot of different people' (Sara, SU, I, BT9, BT11).*

## **4.4 Thematic Network 2: Global Theme: Emotionality is a key aspect of the educative process**

References to emotions and emotional reaction(s), including their management and engagement in emotional introspection, featured strongly across the data. These were linked to different perspectives; as tellers of the stories, the audience as their recipients and co-facilitators. Here emotionality included not only outward signs or physiological indicators of emotion but also the participants' description and expression of specific emotions. This led to the identification of emotionality as central to the educational

experience as a Global Theme supported by two Organising Themes: i) Emotionality and ii) Story Telling as Risk Taking which in turn were underpinned by nine Basic Themes.

For many students, the content proved difficult to hear; an element featuring strongly across the interviews and written assignments. Typically:

'I found the stories difficult to listen to, sharing not only harrowing details of the physical abuse entailed but the depth of the mental abuse she lived with, even after the bruises fade *the mental side effects still remain*' (WRA3, BT 15 ).

Many students referred explicitly to a written case study given out by one service user (Tina) which culminated in her disclosure that this was in fact her own story. From the outset, a stated intention to shock was a driving force and motivation which had featured in an earlier a preparation session with her:

*'I'm going for the shock value. They need to see people don't get destroyed and I want to shock them -does that sound weird?'* (RR, BT 16).

It would seem that this mission was accomplished as this one session alone generated numerous data extracts where many reactions were described. For example, one student's account describes the overall experience in almost 'incremental' terms:

'I felt slightly uncomfortable reading the article because I found aspects of the experiences very distressing. Therefore, when she revealed the story was about her, I was very shocked and at first I found it difficult to acknowledge that such horrendous events had happened to her' (WRA9, BT 16 ,BT18).

A similar reaction was also described but this time by a service user who had also been present in the same session:

'You had a young lady come in with a story, one of those stories from those awful magazines, you know, - *"I was abused by whatever"* – and then everyone had all these *ideas about how they'd deal with that person and stuff*, and she stood up and said – *"Well, that's me"* – and everyone was just like, you know, and I thought they were quite shocked to see like, what this articulate young lady had gone through that. I thought it was really, *really powerful, that...*' (Lydia, SU, I, BT15, BT21).

She thought, however, that she had been less shocked than the students. She accounted for

this mitigation on the grounds of having heard similar stories told by people who are now:

*'Very, very grounded' despite experiencing 'awful, awful things' (Lydia, SU, I, BT13).*

Another focus group student had reflected on this story, her own emotional response and the lessons she had learned in terms of managing her emotions in a practice context. There was a sense of having processed the experience:

*'Cos it works both ways...in practice you're going to have to deal with the shock factor 'cos in practice you will actually be told things in the spur of the moment without having any sort of notice' (FG, BT 13).*

These were not universal responses however. Two students in the group, one still clearly on the verge of anger, expressed strong views-that this process had not been made transparent at the outset:

*'I think a few of us in the class got duped by it because of the way she went about it. Whether that was the right thing to do is questionable. I just thought it was a bit like – "Da, da... it's me, look"' (FG, BT 16).*

Emotions were also very visible in recollections of other specific sessions where on occasion students had left the room in a state of distress:

*'I did notice in one particular session where a couple of people actually got out – left and, you know, they'd obviously been crying and then they came back and I think you are aware of, you know, some of the emotions in the room – more so in that module than any other before that' (FG, BT 15, BT16).*

This was born out in my observations of sessions. For example, one session featuring child sexual abuse:

*'At the end of the session, one student looked very tearful and I caught her eye. I approached her after the session and asked if she was OK as I thought she had been possibly affected by the story. She replied: "I was. She is so brave, so brave. I won't ever forget this- it's been my most important session at the Uni." (PO, BT14, BT16).*

I later reflected on this incident:

'I strongly suspected that his student may have experienced CSA (child sexual abuse) herself but sensed she didn't want to talk any further about the session. Mental note to keep *an eye on this student* '(RR, BT 13, BT18).

In contrast to this 'rawness' and physical manifestation of emotion on the day; other students seemed able to adopt a more measured, arguably greater empathic response. Some time after a session, a student in the focus group recalled her sense of fear that permeated a story about domestic violence. Although still struggling to imagine herself living in fear, the session had left her feeling:

*'Kind of, like I'm a bit closer to what it is like'* (FG, BT 15).

Emotions featured particularly strongly in the account of one lecturer, Elena, who had worked more closely with service users than the others. One aspect related to the motivation of service users to come forward to share their stories; an observation that this did not come from a neutral place because they often had very strong, negative feelings about what had happened to them or their families which they were keen to broadcast. Uncertainty and a sense of her own nervousness in the classroom also emerged:

*'It is very fluid and I never know what will happen... 'you have to think on your feet...'* (Elena, L, I, BT17, BT19)

There was very much a sense of these being uncharted activities and underpinned by a sense of tension. This had left her doubting her skills and ability to manage emotional dimensions effectively and was not without a personal cost:

*'It can also be very overwhelming as well because it's so open, it can descend into bad practice, really, a sort of chaos...'* (Elena, L, I, BT17)

At points, she described explicit feelings of anxiety, isolation and distance from social work colleagues:

*'Drained, absolutely drained, and very exposed to service users.'* (Elena, L, I, BT14)

However, although containing numerous examples of frustration and negative feelings; this interview also revealed moments of real exhilaration and animation. She described an immense personal and professional fulfilment when co-teaching with service users, seen as providing a good quality learning experience for students:

*'...it's such a productive and dynamic sort of interaction. That's when I feel that it's all worthwhile and when you get good feedback from service users' (Elena, L, I, BT14)*

These aspects are later developed in relation to the teaching role but what was striking here was that, by far, the richest and most vivid descriptions were of co-teaching where she highlights the energy within the sessions, an active ('big buzz') involvement by students and where the teaching became very creative.

Emotional impact was a view similarly expressed by Anna, who described in great detail the emotionality surrounding one particular session and its consequences. This incident had clearly left its mark and refers to a service user led session where the woman was describing her own autism; a session which had previously gone very well with another group of students. On this occasion, it had gone far from smoothly, provoking a very strong reaction from one student who had a familial link to autism and personal knowledge of the subject as she lived and helped care for her autistic brother. The lecturer had been unexpectedly called away to cover teaching for another colleague leaving the service user alone. Her post-session reflection reveals her thoughts about how the situation may have been handled differently had she been there:

*'Everything went OK, all planning and prepared...I wasn't too worried because she was fine with it because she was going to do more or less the same stuff she'd done before, but in fact when I came back into the room some two or three hours later it had all gone horribly wrong. She had...um...got into an argument basically with one of the students or one of the students got into an argument with her...I don't quite know what happened...It made me think that we'd got to think a bit more about this in the future. One of the students had a brother with autism and one of the things the presenter was talking about was what she had learned, that when she wants to go and do something she loved like skating or trampolining...she had learned that she had to wait her turn and that it wasn't just for her. The student became incredibly upset because she was going through the same kind of problems with her brother and she was saying: "this is absolutely unfair, my brother should have priority, he has special needs" and they got into a kind of big debate about it which, had I been there I would, hopefully, been able to address, although it probably would still have left an uncomfortable atmosphere, no doubt about it, but the student banged off and the presenter was very upset because she hadn't meant to upset anyone, you know what I mean?' (Anna, L, I, BT16, BT 18, BT19).*

This dimension -the impact on those students who occupied a dual role and identified themselves as both students and service users and/or having close personal connections with service users - was also revisited by students in the focus group. Here a forceful reaction to aspects of Tina's story had been observed and had been met with what they perceived as defensiveness on her part:

'There were points when we attacked her, not personally, but the role of her foster parents, *because obviously, there were foster parents in the room and they were saying, "I wouldn't have done that, I would have done this". Had we known I don't think maybe we would have attacked it that way... but it came across that way'* (FG, BT18, BT19).

Emotions related to participation also featured strongly throughout Sara's interview. She vividly recalls being 'scared' when talking in front of the student group:

'I just kinda, sat there and I *didn't really, didn't want to look up and that, because they were all just, kinda kind of staring at you...um...I dunno, I think however many times I talk about it it's still quite nerve-racking...when you're like, told to think on the spot, you don't really know what to say.*' (Sara, SU, I, BT19)

Although she described feeling good after the event, even recalling parts of it as 'fun', I picked up on an underlying sense that she had felt she needed to comply with the request to tell her story. I explored this further:

*Interviewer: 'What I guess I'm really interested in is that you said, you know...' I really wanted to do it, it was about their learning" and yet you said, several times...' I felt very nervous", "it was a bit of an ordeal", "it was a massive relief when it was over" and I'm sitting here wondering why did you put yourself through that then?'*

*Sara: 'I dunno, I just, I dunno...the thing with me is I don't... it's more to do with, you know, if someone needs help with doing something I'm just going to do it, you know...I don't really know what's going on – I just went 'yeah, I'll help out' that's the person I am, I like getting involved, I like having the experience and that...' (Sara, SU, I, BT16, BT17, BT19)*

Sara spoke about how the recall of specific incidents at times evoked painful memories but wanted to share these with the students. These had included the effect of numerous placement moves. At this point the interview took a different tenor and direction as she

volunteered the experience of the departure of one trusted social worker from her life:

*'If you get close to people or you like them, then they're going to move so that's why I started not liking people and saying I hated them because it was easier than actually liking them and leave – so that's how I believed it to be in my head when I was younger...'* (Sara, SU, I, BT16, BT17)

She continued:

*'...no matter how many times I talk about it, you know, there will be a day or two after when I'm a bit unsettled, whether it's conscious, you know, or not conscious.... you know, whether that's me being a little bit moody or whether that's wanting to just be alone for a few hours or whatever. So, in a way, it does affect me either way...'* (Sara's, I, BT 13, BT16)

This account differed significantly from Tom's interview. He welcomed the element of anonymity and the fact that the students were strangers. Overall, he likened the experience to meetings he attended in his role as a local councilor:

*'I feel it's like going to one of those. I don't really feel anything bad afterwards, or anything. It's like I might be discussing something in planning, preparing my notes beforehand, say what I have to say and ask a few questions, then I go away and I just park it in my mind. I don't feel threatened or intimidated by the groups'* (Tom, SU, I, BT 3, BT11).

Data suggested that, in contrast, other service users seemed to possess higher degrees of emotional literacy or at least a greater interest in their audience. Sara spoke in detail about her belief in her ability to 'read' students in the group:

*'I dunno...um...people say that I should be like a therapist or some psychological person because you pick up on things...you can tell by their facial expressions, you know, the way they act, they really understand where you're coming from. Others will sit there completely blank but you can see in their eyes, the cogs are still turning...I know that some people in that room probably did understand where I was coming from, you know'* (Sara, SU, I, BT 13).

This theme also featured in a post session conversation I had with Tina where she stated



that she thought there were some students in the room who had been through similar things. When I asked what her evidence was for this:

*'...she shrugged her shoulders and said:" I could just tell by their reaction "and added" some of them wouldn't make good social workers...not the right attitude" (RR, BT13).*

Aside from Sara's description of feeling 'scared' about talking to the students, vulnerability also emerged strongly as a theme for Lydia. It was particularly important for her not to appear vulnerable in front of the group, a feeling she recalled from her childhood and linked to an experience of social work intervention as a child:

*'...when standing up and speaking to everyone through your lectures I did think – "Oh God, they're going to look at me like, poor little Lydia, what she's been through...I didn't like the idea of that' (Lydia, SU, I, BT 16).*

This sentiment reappeared in a different guise when Tina spoke about her 'personal thing' about sympathy:

*'I don't want any one feeling sorry for me – I really don't' (Tina, SU, I, BT14)*

To some extent this aspect was replayed by some students who expressed concern for the wellbeing of those who had shared their story. Some reported feeling nervous for them during the story, anxious that they could handle questions or that questions had probed too deeply. One was worried that:

*'...we'd ask a question that would set something off, trigger something that they might have thought they'd put to bed ...." (FG, BT 13, BT17).*

There was a very close boundary between data that underpinned 'emotionality' as an Organising Theme and the data supporting the conceptualisation of stories/the act of storytelling in terms of risk (taking). Certain preoccupations were visible in the lecturers' accounts. This included an active sense of responsibility on their part to support the process and one which appeared to have grown as different events had been experienced. This included a heightened sensitivity to different parties' needs and agendas. For Anna, this was important to prevent a tokenism permeating the process:

*'I think there's a risk it becomes tokenistic' when people are in fact talking about very intimate, very 'real ' issues' (Anna, L, I, BT 19).*

She identified the need for a judicious approach and her interview demonstrated awareness of a breadth of perspective and introduced the notion of 'audience readiness'; the notion that inexperience itself could pose, if not a direct threat, then a challenge to service users:

*'They're taking a bit of a risk to come and speak with people who may not have that greatly developed awareness but are in the process of developing that awareness...I think it's about talking about the potential risks and the benefits, kind of weighing all that up...'* (Anna, L, I, BT, 19)

For Ed, the sharing of emotional content was seen as potentially posing a similar threat but he articulates how this could model positive risk taking to others:

*'...whoever's telling the story is taking a bit of a risk. Maybe that's connected to the emotional engagement or the kind of emotional content but that then encourages students to be willing to take a risk either in challenging their thinking or asking a question...some kind of idea about modelling...'* (Ed, L, I, BT19).

Jay, a practitioner who co-delivered the session with Sara was unambiguous about the risks involved with part of the interview containing a clear message about the duty of care:

*'...if you don't know the young people well, then it could become quite a dangerous situation and could actually be dangerous for them if they haven't been through their story several times...'* (Jay, P, BT18, BT19).

The data contained several rich practice-grounded examples which illustrated how risk and uncertainty had been enacted in the classroom. Elena for example had facilitated a session with a service user who had experienced long-term homelessness and was new to his teaching role:

*'We started the session by saying: "What do you think you know about homelessness?" and the first thing the student said was: "Homeless people beg for money when they don't need it"'* (Elena, L, I, BT18).

With a more interactive and dynamic focus, she also spoke of her work with a group of specific service users with a range of mental health needs. How they managed their own health issues within a group setting as well dealing with rudeness and attempts at domination had also caused her much anxiety and had left her at times feeling very

stressed.

Although Tom maintained that he personally had not experienced any degrees of (di) stress, he did acknowledge that the content of the story and the type of personal experience could have a bearing. He remembered talking to another service user in his early days of becoming involved with the University but who subsequently had decided to withdraw:

*'She would have been really good. She had a lot of problems on the maternity side of the Health Service...she had two miscarriages, then depression but she told me that she couldn't do this kind of lecturing...Imagine, say, someone killed someone, either accidentally or on purpose- there'd probably be a combination of shame and horror going through it all again'* (Tom, SU, I, BT16, BT17).

It was noticeable that Anna returned to the above incident centering on autism later in her interview, furnishing further details. She did know the student's identity and heard no more from her about it. However, the service user had telephoned Anna twice after the session stating she had been taken completely off guard by this and was left feeling that she had done something terribly wrong. This culminated in her decision not to participate in any future teaching sessions. When Anna relayed this incident a second time around, it was with a greater degree of self-recrimination as well as regret:

*'The other thing I should have thought about...service user narratives can be particularly powerful and can hit straight to the heart of something. It has more of an emotional impact on students. So, all the more reason why we need to be there and think more about how to manage it, rather than just leave it'* (Anna, L, I, BT 13, BT18).

## **4.5 Thematic Network 3: Global Theme: Influences role construction and performance**

This network was comprised of four Organising Themes with 17 underlying Basic Themes. The data contained many examples of how the use of stories in the curriculum influenced participants' perception, configuration and construction of their own and others' role(s). This included a number of insights in relation to how professional, academic, service user and learners' identities came to be defined; a process revealing reconfiguration as well as illuminating untapped or latent resources. As discussed below, the findings also highlight the importance of preparation-of self and others, as well as attending to practical considerations as part of the wider pedagogic process operating within a University

environment.

All the lecturers highlighted the importance of preparation and saw this as key to their teaching role and promotion of collaborative working. Although their accounts revealed different nuances/ emphases it became evident that past experience(s) of problematic situations and those which had presented dilemmas had led to varying degrees of discomfort in their role. However, these had served to reinforce the importance of preparation but also, revealed awareness of its complexity:

*'I don't think I had thought about that very much but especially after things deteriorated...that one particular session...I've tended to prepare students for that. But how do you prepare them? It's quite difficult...I mean really, we could say: "This could be very direct" but the trouble is, until they've experienced it, they don't know that they're going to actually have that kind of reaction...'* (Anna, L, I, BT 34).

Elena had clearly reflected a great deal on this aspect of her role and her sense of responsibility towards service users in managing their introduction and induction into the University environment. She articulated key messages including the need for models of preparation and training:

*'To demystify a little bit, the university world...alerting people to potential pitfalls of presenting their life in front of 40 students...'* (Elena, L, I, BT36).

She very clearly articulated potential pitfalls:

*'The students, of course, will find it very interesting to see someone there who's sharing their personal experience, but it can also end up being voyeuristic...'* (Elena, L, I, BT34).

She gave less attention to the importance of preparing the student group although students' comments across the data indicated that many saw service user preparation as key to the effective delivery of their stories and the effectiveness of sessions. It was perceived by one as a two-dimensional process:

*'They looked well prepared to me, they looked like they knew what they were coming to do, or to say and therefore, not just them preparing themselves, but also being prepared to come and do what they came to'* (FG, BT34, BT36).

The knowledge that the services users had been prepared also seemed to lessen the degree

of responsibility some students felt towards them. Two of the focus group students' views are captured in the following:

*'Cos, she chose it, she was prepared and, I remember, you said that you did ask her, over and over again, whether she was ready to do it and she agreed to it, so she knew what she was coming to...um...and what sort of questions she was going to be asked...'*(FG BT 36).

Preparation of students was seen as a valuable opportunity to air initial anxieties which could then be incorporated meaningfully within their learning:

*'...it gives people sometimes a chance to talk about -er- the things that they feel, which is, kind of often embarrassment, they don't know how to speak to someone with disabilities ...how we are going to welcome someone but also not patronise them...often people feel they're not sure. ...'I don't know how to speak to someone in a wheelchair...'* (Anna, L, I, BT19).

Such conversations could be subsequently used to inform her teaching. Worries expressed by students, for example, that they may make unintentionally offensive comments; were seen as pivotal to learning and could then be used actively to develop more critical and open discussion.

Many students spoke about the need for a lecturer to be present and a clear group of data extracts centred on one specific session previously described by Anna. Several of these accounts conveyed a sense of 'abandonment' highlighting the need for management and containment in the room:

*'The lecturer introduced her and then left and it was, kind of, like, oh, ok...here's this new person that I didn't know I was going to meet today' and...er...yeah, because she wasn't a lecturer as well, it was a bit disjointed...she felt like, she was doing the wrong thing and felt like we weren't engaging and then maybe we thought: "Oh, we don't really know what we're supposed to be doing here" so I guess that's why I think that a lecturer should be there...'* (Hazel, interview, BT 34, BT35).

First impressions of the University were also referred to by three of the service users. Specific aspects of the built environment and lay out of the buildings generated interest particularly in those who had never visited a university campus. For Tom, it was the atmosphere that struck a chord:

'There always seems a lot of fun...there always seem to be things going on, like in the coffee lounge, some sort of raz-a-ma-taz...' (Tom, SU, I, BT34).

He particularly welcomed the approachability of staff who seemed conscientious and well-motivated comparing it to his own university days when his lecturers seemed to view students as an 'occupational hazard' obstructing their own research pursuits.

Attending the University also fueled Sara's personal ambition to become a university student:

*'That's my next step, to go to uni...so it's quite daunting to see actually how it all works as well. But it's made me more comfortable about going to uni....'* (Sara, SU, I, BT22)

In an instrumental vein, she was also keen to use this experience to support her goal:

'Obviously, it kinda works both ways...I think obviously, you know, I can put it on my CV, on say a personal statement, and that looks good' (Sara, SU, I, BT22)

Relational aspects in this network included the importance of face-to-face pre-lecture meetings between those involved in delivering the sessions. This was a strong theme articulated by service users with support for their teaching role being highly valued. Below, Lydia contrasts her experience with some of the realities surrounding young peoples' involvement in social work education:

'...everyone's busy in the care team and for me, young people can be roped into things in a tokenistic kind of way and just, kind of, be bunged out on to the stage and say: *"Oh, just tell them about yourself"*...or someone will say to them: *"What are you doing today"*... *"Oh, I dunno, some talk at the uni."* but they don't really know what they're doing, so...um...prepping is really good' (Lydia, SU, I, BT34, BT36).

From an educative standpoint, one lecturer continued to grapple with the potentially very broad spectrum of learning that any one individual story could encompass. She felt too that the delivery of this type of teaching was not always so 'direct' but rather more dynamic and organic in nature, where she had to respond to the often very differing needs and circumstances of both students and service users. This had influenced how she approached her role:

'My personal take on that now, has been to not rush into inviting people into the

classroom. The teaching that has taken place has been with those who have an established relationship with lecturers and the university' (Elena, L, I, BT26).

Her story also revealed a struggle to maintain clear boundaries within her lecturer role. At times, she had experienced service users' personal agendas taking over and going beyond their original remit which was to facilitate learning and teaching:

'People think that they can come to complain or to make things better for themselves or, you know, *they have expectations we cannot fulfil*' (Elena, L, I, BT 38)

Other challenges had arisen when introducing service users into the educational environment leading to a scrutiny of role, responsibility and identity. Included in this were her thoughts about the blurring of roles:

*'...you get engaged into a process that resembles very much client work, even though it isn't...I'm not, you know, counselling people or anything like that or getting involved in their day to day lives but you are dealing with a lot of need...there's a blurring about who the service user is to start with, within the academic environment as you're also offering a service to students as well'* (Elena, L, I, BT38).

This interview was interesting in that it shed light on points of tension. She prized creativity and aspired to this in her teaching role. Co-teaching with service users was seen as very much in line with this. At times, though, the unpredictability and nature of such work challenged her keen sense of order:

*'...I think it is very creative sometimes to the point of chaos because...actually, I do like structure, you know, I do like linear things where you can see what the outcome is and it's not always like that'* (Elena, L, I, BT33).

Further relational aspects featured in Ed's account where it was important to establish a trusting and 'levelling' environment before one service user was able to talk about the experience of her child growing up in foster care and her, often traumatic, dealings with social workers and foster carers. This was described as 'breaking the ice' in the form of:

*'An equalising discussion about interests and getting to know each other as people'* (Ed, L, I, BT 34).

This 'ice breaking' had not happened in Sara's session. However, this had motivated a

confident feedback as to how sessions could be better organised and structured, reinforcing the importance of the practice Ed described. Tension could have been eased by knowing the students' names and a little bit about them as people:

*'...because you're sat in the middle of all these university students but you don't know them and when they ask questions or are looking at you, you think: "Oh, who's that?"'*  
(Sara, SU, I, BT 37).

Similarly, she spoke of the perceived benefits of having more than one service user delivering their story in a session to reduce feelings of isolation and where in:

*'You've got three or four young people who are going through exactly the same thing in a room full of adults'* (Sara, SU, I, BT 36).

Four students in the focus group and reappearing in a follow up individual student interview, identified the lecturer's presence as a mitigating factor in alleviating anxiety:

*'...massive anxiety about service users coming in... I think Gordon and Dora were the first two that we had come in and they sat there with Elena...it was nerve-racking. It was, kind of, a comfort for me, as a student, to have a lecturer there. I kind of rationalised it like: "Oh, it must be a comfort for them as well, to have someone who knows both them and the students"'* (Hazel, S, I, BT 36).

Support for themselves in their learner role to help process emotional content and the personal impact of stories was also identified as an unmet need by four students in the focus group being typically expressed:

*'We need some supervision or something offered afterwards, almost highlighting to yourself how you're going to cope with things'* (FG, BT 36).

The data provided examples of personal agency which took the form of exercising authority and a control over and within one's role. These tended to show in the guise of quite subtle types of evidence. For example, the importance of service users choosing to tell their story in their own way and this being respected permeated the data. Student and lecturer data largely supported this with the exception of the contested view in relation to Tina's choice of delivery of her narrative. Tom's account showed a preference for a structured approach assisted by brief power point material and then reading his scripted



story aloud. This suited his predilection for orderliness:

*'I find it easier to do the chronology and the outline and then you don't forget things. I go over that a few times before I put it all down so that I'm happy that that's, you know, keeping the story right.'* (Tom, SU, I, BT31).

Tina, on the other hand, adopted a more directive approach in terms of devising the session's outcomes to reflect the specific points she wanted to get across. She demonstrated a mature approach and impressive degree of thoughtful preparation. This included drawing up some session specific learning outcomes to stress a child-centred perspective and planning the learning activities with, and at her behest, very little assistance from myself.

Sara and Jay's interviews illuminated a different story telling aspect. Their accounts provided very rich descriptions of a joint approach to preparation and planning of the session. I had recorded participant-as-observer notes of this and had subsequently also made reflective journal entries. Until I had conducted their interviews, I had been unaware of the degree of work that they had undertaken together prior to Sara telling her story. I was struck by Jay's commitment to safeguarding Sara's wellbeing and the pair's attention to the detail of story delivery and their preparation. This had involved Jay sharing her previous experience of teaching and different ways of engaging students' interest. It also involved a degree of censor where the two together identified and agreed those parts of her story that Sara would feel comfortable to talk about. A list of prompts was devised and put on an iPad in front of Sara and it was agreed that if she was diverted or found it difficult then Jay would use certain cue words to help her get back on track and refocus on the agreed story. In the event, both confirmed that the session had strayed from the agreed content at points driven by the students' questions.

Notions of being present and available were brought sharply into focus by Jay. Here she highlighted the centrality of debriefing to her role imparting an explicit ethical message:

*'I think to do it with someone you don't know very well and that you aren't going to be around to support afterwards, then you shouldn't really be doing it...until you tell your story, you don't fully understand the impact it has on yourself. So, I think we need to take some sort of responsibility to protect people* (Jay, P, I, BT 36)

The notion of orientation and preparing oneself for future roles also featured in a number of the students' comments. These included an enhanced capacity to appreciate the realities

of service user situations as part of advancing professional understanding and development:

'After the domestic abuse sessions, I discovered what keeps a victim in an abusive environment' (WRA6, BT22).

This manifested as a dominant theme in the focus group where a specific service user's 'presence' and/or their narrative seemed to have crystallized understanding:

*'It's not just a university course for us...this is a profession that we're going into, so it's really important for us to remind ourselves where we're going and the people that we'll be dealing with, not just "Carl Rogers said this so we've got to do it..."'* (FG, BT 22, BT23)

and:

'...social work is essentially about people...the more people we have that kind of dialogue with and those kind of narratives, actually the stronger we build our communication and build up that relationship...All these things we talk about, actually we get an opportunity to put it into practice, even if it's just for an hour or two hours. (FG, BT 37).

Participants expressed many views in relation to how they constructed and defined their own and others' roles. The extracts yielded rich insights into academic, service user and professional 'selves'. These included a range of nuanced descriptions of how participants perceived and carried out their respective role(s), claims to specific and/or specialist knowledge as well as how identity-related aspects came to the fore within the academic context.

The sense of having a story worth sharing by virtue of his experience as a recipient of mental health services emerged strongly in Tom's reflections:

'Lots of them were interested in my chronology...all the things that led up to me actually having a breakdown...I remember saying: *if your family's OK and the jobs OK and finances are OK... if one of those three things go wrong, you can normally get through but if all three go wrong, that's when you're out on the street*' (Tom, SU, BT23).

Key to this was his desire to impart a political message grounded in his experience of the Mental Health Service, described as 'a Cinderella of the Health Service'; a situation which from his current vantage point of being a local councillor was continuing to deteriorate. In

a more reflective vein, he saw the transition now to becoming the teller of his story as a natural progression from service user to educator:

'I actually felt, because I was there from the early stage, when I was a health service user, I almost felt it was like an organic process you know, it developed and it worked very well.'(Tom, SU, I, BT39).

In a more impassioned way, Sara was keen to promote a more effective child centred social work practice:

'These social workers are going to have to work with these children...the young children...*they're still going through it...the older children, they're still going through it...trying to express themselves or, you know, don't feel like they're being listened to*' (Sara, SU, I, BT23 ).

In Lydia's account, what emerged was how telling her story was an also an important way to alert students to power imbalance(s) and the various ways subtle -and not so subtle- ways these came into play in the relationship between a social worker and a young person:

'They make...um...debilitating decisions for you. They think: You're the child, I'm the social worker...' (Lydia, SU, I, BT29).

More than this, and echoing earlier themes expressed around vulnerability, her involvement in the process of education also seemed to provide a means of regaining a sense of control and autonomy. Core to this seemed to be the need to re-establish herself in a new light where 'turning the tables' in a learning environment had clearly resulted in some key personal benefits:

*'Yes, it's brilliant and, you know...I think it's very helpful for people to think that "I can learn a lot from my service users" rather than: "I learnt this and this is what I'm going to do with them" (laughs)'* (Lydia, SU, BT31, BT39)

This resonated in Sara's interview where she voiced a desire to promote a more critical understanding, grounded in reality and to challenge the portrayal of young people in the care system:

*'I kinda hoped that they would realise it's not like the Tracy Beaker sort of thing. Even growing up as a kid...I've always been compared to Tracy Beaker...that does my head*

in...because it made it look easier, made it look fun ...it kinda helps that they actually see *what you have to go through and understand why things were happening...* (Sara, SU, I, BT 40).

For the lecturers, promotion of learning was understandably high on their professional agenda. However, varying degrees of awareness/understanding of how to use the story's content in an active way or to make sense of specific issues were also evident. The notion of providing a scaffold to learning and contextualising the story emerged strongly in Anna's interview, highlighting how in her role as an educator she tried to promote this type of learning:

*'I always felt there was a role for us in drawing out the issues...when people tell their stories we, as the lecturers, we're there to ask the trigger questions. So, if a person is talking about their experience, what does that tell us about scapegoating, stereotyping...to bring that...the academic brick-building, the wider issues, the principles...how does that relate to social work values?'* (Anna, lecturer, interview BT 33, BT40).

As a relatively novice lecturer and newer to the vagaries of students' learning and its often opportunistic nature, Ed's account of a person-centred planning (PCP) lecture revealed a degree of surprise. The most significant learning for himself and the students regarding anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice(s) had in fact been triggered by their spontaneous interactions with service users in the classroom rather than located in his planned for academic learning outcomes.

Anna identified a clear demarcation between her own academic domain and service users' roles. For example:

*'...social work values...that bit...we can't really expect -er- service users necessarily to do that, I'm not saying they can't, but somehow I just feel -er- that's our goal and our responsibility'* (Anna, L, I, BT41).

Although she acknowledged service users as 'very helpful' in exploring aspects of teaching and learning:

*'...actually, they're there to tell their story and not to think about the implications of it...it's not really about us being taken out of our role...it's not a case of saving time...'* (Anna, lecturer, interview BT38, BT40)

This was also mirrored by Ed who saw himself as a conduit to enable links to be made to other types of knowledge, although he was much less clear in identifying exactly what that was:

'I think some way to link to, you know, what we would call...academic, something that links to theory or to *some kind of knowledge base that the students can connect that to...*' (Ed, L, I, BT41).

When prompted, he saw his role as helping students to 'think differently' or to see 'different perspectives' via critical thinking and analysis; a response overall revealing more breadth rather than focus:

*'...something that connects that to some kind of, I dunno...to some kind of theme or underlying knowledge whether it's theory or reflective practice or social work education generally or developing practice, you know, practice research or action research, social work research'* (Ed, L, I, BT40 ).

It was clear that the tensions within his teaching role related to a strong desire to conduct both himself and his teaching ethically:

'...for me, it was more the tensions of wanting to involve people meaningfully and how do *you do that, not just for people with learning disabilities but for anybody...*' (Ed, L, I, BT32).

A further lecturer acknowledged that the knowledge that service users brought was different to her own and valuable in its own right. This appreciation was also accompanied by an awareness that this could well involve a reconfiguration of roles together with pedagogical implications:

'If your knowledge is not the knowledge then you have to, perhaps, redefine your role as a lecturer and as a teaching team and all these sort of things' (Elena, L, I, BT41).

Many students and academic staff identified how service user narratives made an effective and valuable contribution to a range of learning and teaching activities. Their expertise was seen as firmly grounded in their experience and ability to convey insights 'from the inside:

'...they had loads of fantastic points to bring up but I could sit and listen to him for

*ages...he's got so much knowledge and so much, kind of, obviously personal experience...to link those both together, it's really good' (Hanna, S, I, BT 41).*

Conversely, when service users gave inaccurate information to students it also produced a degree of professional discomfort. Below it presented as a social dilemma highlighting a conflict between the individual (lecturer) and collective (student) interest:

'Tom provided some inaccurate information about specific drugs in terms of withdrawal and their side effects/action. At the time, I struggled with whether correcting him would be seen as undermining and chose not to but later in the session after he had left, I gave the correct information to the group explaining the need for accurate information. I did say that I would also talk to Tom about this -and will do- and think that he will be fine with that as we've had similar conversations in the past' (RR BT41 ).

The focus group introduced another dimension; the degree to which the students perceived the service users both as confident and an 'authority' on their topic. This seemed to influence how they then rated the 'credibility' of the teller and how they subsequently experienced the story:

'I think that she was, maybe, more relaxed in talking about her experiences as a survivor of domestic violence *than, perhaps she was talking about her role as a carer and that's what we picked up on, it was her uneasiness with one topic rather than the other* 'and general consensus (FG, BT35, BT41).

Ed explored how he delivered sessions very differently depending on whether service users were present or not and the nature of the learning topic/task. The majority of his teaching involved working with learning disabled individuals. Here he tended to plan lectures to a great extent around the service users' direct experience, detailing services and with close attention to their specific interests. He acknowledged that partly this was because he questioned whether the service user(s) themselves would be interested in hearing from him in any depth about more theoretical or legal/policy aspects of learning disability. He elaborated:

*'I probably wouldn't do as much of that sort of academic, theoretical background information. I probably wouldn't be focused on as much as that in service user sessions. I'm probably more focused on the here and now...' (Ed, L, I, BT38).*

This led to a considerable adaptation of his usual his teaching style in attempts to achieve greater whole group participation as well as his own more active involvement as part of the group:

*'...I did a bit of facilitation but I participated...when they went round I said what I was interested in so I participated in the group in the same way as everybody else... (Ed, L, I, BT26).*

The benefits of sessions co-facilitated by a lecturer and service user(s) were unambiguously voiced by individual students and collectively in the focus group. The role of the lecturer in guiding the session as well as the value of having a social work qualified lecturer perspective was seen as important:

*'With a lecturer, there I feel a little bit safer in saying what I want to say because the lecturer will be there to, kind of... not protect me as such but if I'm thinking the wrong thing they can guide me in the right way' (Hazel, S, I, BT28, BT38).*

and:

*'Someone who understands, who's been a social worker, I think has a different insight...someone like you, for instance or Elena...would put something in that we didn't see, like: "Oh God, I didn't think about..." They're the useful lectures actually' followed by general agreement (FG, BT 38).*

The importance of debriefing with a lecturer, which more often than not occurred without the service user being present, was also highlighted by several as an important part of the learning process:

*'It's a different dynamic and good to talk about it afterwards with the lecturer about the more...the legalities and the theory around it' (Focus group, BT38).*

The use of stories also imposed a range of demands on the teaching role including the management of interpersonal and affective dimensions. Lecturers voiced a strong sense of professional responsibility to safeguard the needs of all participants. This was supported by my own reflections after co-teaching a session featuring a service user's personal account of child sexual abuse:

'Hearing about other people's same experiences can be incredibly powerful, a self-learning and therapeutic experience. You can't be responsible for how some one feels after listening to someone's experience as they make their own connections and this is what social work is about but we do have a duty to make sure that people are able to process this for themselves (RR, BT40).

The findings also highlighted a number of aspects related to use of service users' knowledge and its potential to enhance learning. Ed demonstrated an openness to using service users' latent resources and interests but this remained, as yet, untested:

'I think it would be an interesting thing to explore, actually...I mean I was constantly surprised by what people were...are actually interested in and willing to spend time on, it *might be that they've got knowledge and information that would be really interesting to talk about*' (Ed, lecturer, interview BT39).

Service user interviews, on the other hand, showed that there was certainly a willingness to become more theoretically involved. For some there seemed a strong motivation and willingness to pursue the academic content of lectures outside of the lectures. Tom, for example, had phoned me and asked for a reference prior to one session. Following the co-facilitated lecture, he also handed me two articles which he said were: "to help with the teaching", one of these related to Baby Peter (a well publicised child death in Haringey) and the other, a newspaper clipping about malpractice by foster carers. I noted this in my reflective record:

'Tom had previously given me similar articles which I had not really taken too much notice of other than thanking him as I had other more robust teaching materials. Now I think that *this was a very "generous" act or perhaps* indicates a (greater) willingness on his part to get more involved in the teaching' (RR, BT39).

Tom's interview also communicated a growing awareness of how his story was being used and insights into his experience of co-teaching:

'The lecturer picks up...um...the theory when I relate my story, you can actually extricate *things that relate to social work or mental health theory...I've seen, quite often, on the board: "This is a classic theory about this..." and then you ask people, then you test their knowledge: "What do you know about Epstein's (sic) Ladder?" Something like that...some people in the room really know it, other people it draws blanks. I think it probably helps to*



*test their theory, to my mind, that's really why they're at university, it's the theory'* (Tom, SU, I, BT39).

Other evidence revealed a strong interest in contributing to academic discussions and debates. Lydia's account of a lecture about attachment demonstrated a personal confidence in critiquing and challenging theory:

*'It was this notion: "things that make people resilient" and obviously, they were talking about...um...a loving family...a support network and all of that...I said: "Well actually, that is all good for resilience and stuff but people gain resilience through not having any of that, in fact, perhaps more so, because they've had to find it on their own..."'*(Lydia, SU, I, BT41).

When asked to elaborate, she showed not only how she was beginning to question the theory/practice relationship but also the influence of face-to-face learning:

*'I think there are a lot of exceptions to the rule and exceptions to theory and stuff...also I think it's good to see a face to a story, 'cos then someone can actually think: "Oh well, actually that person who came and spoke to us..."', you know, so I think it's more powerful for someone to empathise with someone when they've got them standing in front of them'* (Lydia, SU, I, BT35, BT42).

She concluded her interview by summarising her own contribution:

*'I like to put across maybe the parts that aren't taught in theory'* (Lydia, SU, I, BT31, BT41).

## **4.6 Thematic Network 4: Global Theme: Promotes critical thinking**

This now leads to discussion of the final Global Theme of the findings. Here I will present the ways in which stories stimulated and promoted critical thinking for participants at a number of levels. This network comprised is comprised of three Organising Themes with 14 underlying Basic Themes and contained significant indicators of the ways stories impacted on five key aspects. Data extracts were categorised in relation to: stimulation of engagement in learning, conceptualisation, role of critical learning incidents, theory generation building and application.

The data contained numerous examples of ways in which different experience(s) and participants' reflection thereupon had transformed their beliefs and/or actions. This process had entailed engaging in ethical debates and dilemmas as well as the ability to process and apply new insights in a more critical way. Significantly, evidence of enhanced understandings of the purpose of social work emerged in the student data. This was more marked in relation to those students who identified themselves as having more limited involvement in social care/social work related practice prior to undertaking the degree. This along with other observations will be explored more fully in the following chapter. This network also revealed a more informed awareness of the wider influences impacting on service users' lives following exposure to the stories and evidence supporting a greater ability to discriminate and account for 'Otherness'.

Engagement with the story and/or story teller was identified as an important first step in a longer process of learning which could lead to shifts in thinking. As a starting point, the integration of stories within the curriculum was seen as a very positive move by the vast majority of students, lecturers and service users alike. They served a specific role in engaging interest. Indeed, many students prized these service user-led sessions over 'traditional', more 'academic' lectures. Typical references included:

*'I feel like, that I have to pay more attention because what they're going to say is going to be more important than any other lecturer I've ever had' (FG, BT43).*

and more directly:

*'It sticks in your brain more' (FG, BT46).*

This view was not confined to students; academic staff also stated that at points the stories had developed their own subject specific knowledge and how service user perspectives had shed new light on aspects of social work practice. These new insights together with the levels of interest generated seemed to have injected a new energy into teaching and learning environment. Numerous examples of how stories -and/or their telling- had provoked heated discussion and evoked post-session depth reflections featured strongly across all parties' accounts and recollections. Even when difficulties had arisen, these were still considered to be useful ways to promote learning:

*'...so personally -and as a teacher and a professional- I have never regretted it' (Anna, L, I, BT 51).*

Both students and lecturers highlighted the benefits of service users' direct involvement, and also as a useful adjunct to other teaching methods. This emerged repeatedly across the student data. For example:

*'Especially a year and a half without any sort of placements and it's just books, books, books, power point, power point, power point...you need to break it up. (FG, BT 55).*

Lecturer interviews and participant-as-observer notes also consistently revealed a high level of engagement in learning by students taking place within an animated learning climate. I recorded the very many questions one student group posed in relation to mental health; an observation mirroring other lecturers' versions of story-led teaching sessions. Students' questions and their notably respectful interrogation of the service user's experience covered the topics of: coping with panic attacks, self-medication via use of alcohol and other drugs, social and financial consequences, drug treatments versus talking treatments and the effectiveness of counselling:

*'This session seemed to really flow with a lot of conversation and student participation. I saw that the students put many questions (and more than to me) to Tom.....' (PO, BT54)*

This was further confirmed by Tom's account of his sessions where he invariably experienced a volley of questions following his story:

*'We always take questions for about an hour, they always fire questions' (Tom, SU, I, BT33, BT 55).*

For many of the student participants, the stories and the way they were told stimulated their motivation to pursue out-of-session learning:

*'It motivates doesn't it, when the service users say certain things...an area they're talking about. I was thinking, 'Oh my God, I need to go and read about that' and you think: "Do I know enough about that?"' (FG, BT43, BT48)*

There was evidence too that their participation in the learning environment also stimulated service users' motivation to extend their own learning and connect to other types of knowledge. Previously, Lydia's motivation to contribute to discussions about resilience was highlighted. Below Tom talks about his interest in the anti-psychiatry movement:

*Tom: Yes, I've looked them up, I've actually Googled them.*

Bob: Really?

*Tom: I haven't got much time to devote to it...but I found it very thought provoking...I mean, one of the theories I really like is that one about the anti-mental health group...But I can see where they're coming from, you know, about people being compartmentalised and there was always that terrible feeling, like you see in a film, like 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' with that awful nurse who over medicates people to keep them under control' (Tom, SU , I BT53).*

The data taken from the students' written assignments showed that the stories had a significant impact on students' ability to contextualise service user situations. Fairly typically, this involved greater appreciation of the 'bigger picture' and impact of related factors:

*'...experiences, choices they made as well as national/ global trends and of course, unforeseen occurrences' (WRA1, BT24).*

Key to this was the need to question and look beyond stereotypes and labels. For example; one student's realisation that she had now been able to individualise the needs of two service users experiencing what, on the surface, appeared to be very similar situations meant that she would now be more aware of how of such processes operated and how to avoid making such mistakes within her practice. (WRA5BT 49).

The need to practise holistically emerged as a significant theme. One student stated this simply, recalling how -as one session progressed- she realised that:

*'I hadn't looked at L. holistically, I'd only taking account of her mental state' (WRA, 9, BT 50).*

Some students began to consider the risks involved in naively approaching situations and/or without taking a full account of personal bias:

*'... had I made my original judgements as a practitioner, rather than sitting here as a student, it would have negatively affected my initial interactions with her and the subsequent practitioner/client relationship' (WRA2, BT49)*

For lecturers, personal details contained in stories served as an important reminder to remain grounded in the 'real' to balance the abstract. Typically:

*'I'm more likely to be reminded of that in a session because if I'm teaching something on risk assessment or assessment models...I can, you know, get very focused on a theoretical background,...' (Ed, L, I, BT 50).*

The focus group revealed a strong desire to unpack the details and nuances of different stories. However, it was universally felt that this could be hampered if this was done in front of the service users who had told their stories; the notion that their presence could obstruct other learning taking place:

*'But then I do think it's difficult if they are there, for us to be able to critique stuff...it kind of goes back to that situation with Tina where...if you want to really kind of, unpick it, you might be a bit more apprehensive if they're still there, you might be: I don't want to question that 'cos I don't want it to come across like I don't believe them' (FG, BT43).*

Some students cited the overall experience as hugely beneficial in terms of identifying and strengthening personal philosophies and ideology. In this way, the stories had served to trigger significant personal learning:

*'I have realised that I have a strong political drive and would like to work in this broader sphere of social work. This has developed out of the internal questions arising from these particular lectures and the subject matter...' (WRA2, BT 51, BT52).*

At a micro level; specific sessions were cited as emphasising learning points for future practice, as a form of 'dress rehearsal '. Recalling Tina's story and her self-disclosure:

*'When it came out that it was her, you really thought: "Oh, maybe I shouldn't have said that" ...but if we hadn't had that, then we would never have made that mistake and we'd never seek to not do it again...so you're not going to go into practice and be perfect, you're going to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. I think Tina's session was a perfect example of that' (Hazel, S, I, BT 51).*

Analysis of the written assignments showed that three students used the phrase 'light bulb moment' connected to different aspects of stories. In the following example, one student records the impact of hearing about an innovative approach introduced by Tom into his treatment. Her train of thought is well articulated but it is the ongoing refinement of her

thinking, charted almost step-by-step, that becomes significant. Faced with a constant flow of new workers, Tom was faced with having to repeat his life story on numerous occasions. He therefore decided to write a curriculum vitae which he updated and passed on as the need arose. The student here reflects on her initial response:

'I was astonished with Tom's ability to find a simple solution to this problem and felt like applauding! Had the stereotypical image of a MH (mental health) patient influenced my reaction & lack of confidence in Tom's ability to provide the solution to his own problems? Questioning my ability to be non-judgmental' (WRA10, BT45).

She then considers how she might integrate this within her own practice:

'The CV was something I immediately thought I might like to bring into my own practices with SUs. A simple chronological list of events specific to the SU and providing an initial basis for any future social worker to use as a tool to aid assessment and build effective relationships' (WRA10, BT 52).

However, it is only later that she revisits and interrogates this desire from different standpoints, realising that not all service users would necessarily be willing or able to do this:

'In my excitement of the 'light bulb' moment, I hadn't considered the implications of the *professional and ethical impact of introducing new practice*' (WRA10, BT 50).

In her writing, it is in fact this reflective process which then subsequently comes to be reconfigured as her 'real light bulb moment'.

A similar critical learning incident is articulated by Ed who recalls a specific session which was led in part by members of a local Mencap group. They showed a video of themselves dancing to accompany their narratives. This clearly did not sit comfortably with him as he struggled with some core ethical dimensions surrounding involvement:

'It was well intentioned but that, kind of, raises the question in my mind...you know, nobody else did that, *none of them. I didn't for my presentation...I didn't show videos of myself you know, kind of dancing or doing silly things or things like that so why do we think that's OK? The kind of laughter was laughing along with people but if we interrogate it, isn't that a bit paternalistic and condescending?* (Ed, L, I, BT49).

He partly seemed to reconcile these tensions for himself academically and intellectually by focusing on the benefits of the student/service user interactions and conversations that took place. These had:

*'...nudged the counter more towards the participation rather than the tokenism end of the spectrum' (Ed, L, I, BT53).*

He concluded that his experience was that these two elements (participation and tokenism) may well be features of this type of service-user led teaching but that this specific presentation overall had left him feeling uncomfortable.

Anna talked at length about the story given by a woman living with autism. In terms of extending her own knowledge of autism, key to this was the service user's description of how she saw the audience:

*'Well, one of the images I remember she talked about was she had to give a speech to about 200 people and she said to her they were like maggots or worms, because they never stopped moving...So she saw things like, all these people moving...a moving type of tapestry for her, whereas, we would focus on just one person or be aware of and...um...so that's what she was saying' (Anna, L, I, BT48, BT54).*

A further teaching session which had had a marked impact on her own and the students' learning centered on the use of terms and terminology which had been the cause of some debate and conflict. Here the service user's direct experience came to bear:

*'We had a woman in with a physical disability and one of the students said: "wheelchair bound" and I said: "We say 'wheelchair user"'. She said something about: "Well, what's the difference really?" I could explain the difference but to have someone there who was saying: "You know, the difference is, people see me as an active user of my piece of equipment rather than someone who's just passively wheel bound". She, I think, the student, got it much better from her than from me...From me it sounded almost like a reprimand, from her, it sounded like: "No, listen. Just think about it differently"'* (Anna, L, I, BT46, BT55).

The stories and related interaction with service users were central in helping students making sense of prior theoretical learning. For some this also served as an important 'stepping stone' prior to undertaking the practice placement. The notion of how it

contributed as part of a longer and incremental process became apparent in one student interview:

*'...I didn't really have any personal experience, I guess...I don't really count it as experience when you talk about case studies in lectures and stuff like that, so it was a good way to build my confidence, in that I would see someone and not go: 'Oh, God a real person'' (Hazel, S, I, BT 54).*

She described the experience as a bridge between what she defined as a mainly 'academic' first year and the forthcoming practical placement in her second year:

*'...so yes, I've got that theoretical foundation and then you get into the second year and you're meeting these real people and...you've now got an understanding of what you're meant to be thinking about when you meet them' (Hazel, S, I BT 44, BT51).*

For her, it appeared to make a valuable contribution as part of a wider 'additive' approach to learning:

*'...it's a foundation, something to go on. You don't want to go out into placements and be like: "Oh, my gosh, I don't know anything, how am I going to do this?" But, if you've got that step between reading books and going to placement, it just makes that process a bit more gradual, see what I mean?' (Hazel, S, I, BT 44).*

Although this 'fit' seemed to suit this student's preferred learning style of learning the theory first 'as a security blanket' and then meeting people, it had first been evident as a theme in the focus group. Here it was articulated in terms of being protected from/exposed to reality:

*'I think for the first year we spend it in the classroom in our own protective bubble of theories and methods and how to deal with situations that you don't really know until you come face-to-face with the person that's actually had to deal with these, kind of, the horrific stories that we'd just heard about in books' (FG, BT 46).*

Closely linked to this, the notion of stories making the theory 'real' emerged very strongly across all data. Their potential to deliver much more than just a case study -to embody- was a key point in the focus group and in lecturers' accounts:

*'The opportunity to explore their lived experience a bit more, that was...particularly useful*



to them and also brought some of the theory and academic *work to life*’ (Ed, L, I, BT 55).

There was evidence that story telling provided an opportunity to test their thinking and hypotheses and to judge service users’ reactions to these live, in situ:

*‘It’s about realism. It’s nice to see that some of those things we possibly would have done...to reaffirm: “Oh that would have worked for that person” ...to bring that with our theories and all the things that we know and to test thoughts about intervention’* (Hannah, S, I, BT51).

This re-emerged, this time from an educator perspective:

*‘...if there are service users in the room it helps ground the theoretical material...um...in the same way that people quite enjoy lecturers who have been in practice telling their tales...they really enjoy that’* (Anna, L, I, BT54 ).

For many students, a strengthened commitment to their professional development was expressed most often in relation to specific service user groups and/or settings. Typically:

*‘It has led me to carry out wider reading around substance misuse and the complexities many families face’* (WRA9, BT43).

There were also very encouraging signs that students were developing a better understanding of specific social work practice theories. One student, for example, wrote at length about how one story in particular had illuminated systems theory leaving a much clearer picture of what ‘inter-relatedness’ actually looked like in practice:

*‘The domino metaphor can be seen as the systems theory in social work terms; how one part having an intervention can have an effect on a different part of the same whole system’* (WRA, 3, BT54).

Much less frequently reported in the assignments, although appearing in one student interview, were references to sessions which had stimulated an interest in/making connections to theoretical perspectives and knowledge that had not appeared explicitly within the taught curriculum:

*‘I remember reading about existentialism after the domestic violence one...maybe that’s because she was speaking about her identity and I guess I was interested to go into that...’*

(Hazel, S, I, BT 53).

The potential of stories to support other pockets of students' learning/knowledge was observed by Anna:

*'...everything was directed towards her and made you think this whole idea about: "Do they take sugar?" and I think it's really important to remember that it does really still go on. The fact that we have some theoretical understanding of the social model of disability doesn't mean that the everyday slights and disregards don't actually affect people...I think it's really important that people come and talk about that...' (Anna, L, I, BT51).*

The desire to target and focus theoretical learning accompanied by a sense of readiness was apparent in the focus group and individual student interviews. Their first year of study was described as an introduction to social work but:

*'By the end of it, we were like: "OK then, we're really over keen to learn all these theories but where do I put any of this?"' (Hanna, S, I, BT53).*

Participant-as-observer notes and reflective record entries highlighted a variety of ways in which students had engaged in theory identification, generation and building exercises in the classroom. As stated earlier, Collingwood's theory circle was used as the basis to explore this and was used within two different sessions with the two service users participating in the discussion and feedback. There was a very good engagement with the learning task on both occasions where small groups produced comprehensive lists related to mental health and child sexual abuse (CSA) respectively. Below is one of the lists compiled by one group in relation to CSA included by way of illustration and being fairly typical of the wider group's output. This learning exercise was led by myself but Tina also contributed her own thoughts and commented on the students' ideas:

i) **Theories to inform:** Attachment, loss, grief, social learning theory, CSA effects, power dimensions of CSA, Life span/developmental theory/resilience, Gillick competence, Protective factors, humanistic psychology, sociological, ADP, Smale and Tuson exchange model.

ii) **Theories to intervene** (practice theories): Task centred practice, crisis intervention, brief solution focused, behavioural, psychodynamic, systems theory, life story work, counselling, child centred practice, victim support.' (PO, BT 55)

In a similar vein frameworks for practice such as ASPIRE (Assess, Plan, Implement, Review and Evaluate) and Egan's model of helping (explore, focus, prioritise) had also been introduced within the module teaching. I had explained a further framework remembered from my days working as an addictions counsellor and the following extract records the result:

'A-Affect (needed to explain this), B-Behaviour and C- Cognition. I asked the group what 'cognitive' and 'cognitions' meant to ensure they understood. I gave them a small task to do over their break which was: *“Based on Tom's story, can you come up with a framework like this or add to the ABC framework?”* After the break, I checked to see if anyone had thought about it or come up with something and one student eagerly raised her hand and said: *“A affect, B behaviour, C cognitive, D development and E environment”* followed by *applause and laughter from several students* (RR,BT 51, BT55).

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings**

“The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon.” (Brandon Sanderson, 2010, *The Way of Kings*).

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of the impact of service users' stories within pre-registration social work education. To this end, eight sources of data were analysed to address the three fundamental questions that framed the research:

- What is the impact of the use of service user narratives of their lived experiences on social work education?
- What is the nature and extent of learning as a result of service users sharing their narratives?
- What are the challenges for service users, students and educators when service users share their real-life experiences?

The main aim of this chapter is to critically discuss this study's findings in relation to each of the Global Themes and analyse aspects of significance within their networks. I will now concentrate on what the findings more broadly indicate about learning with reference to the issues identified in the literature review. I have used the study's three questions above to structure this chapter's discussion in relation to impact, the nature and extent of learning and the challenges that were identified. This will be followed by a critical reflection on the study.

### **5.2 What do the findings reveal about the impact of the stories?**

At a personal level of impact, the findings illuminated the concept of reflexivity where the notion of participants 'knowing themselves' better as a result of the stories featured very strongly. For many this seemed to extend beyond simple individual introspection and was accompanied by a growing realisation that their views played an important role as part of professionally responsible and values-driven practice. This was particularly visible where students were beginning to recognise and acknowledge and question personal stereotypes; a process quite often accompanied by feelings of extreme discomfort and mirrored in the literature (Bruce, 2010 in Ubels et al, 2010). Graphic descriptions of certain SU

groups/situations and expression of, at times, extremely negative terms and views made it difficult to believe that these were social work students already embarked on their second year of study. It was as if the direct experience of meeting and listening to the SU had shown that their previously held knowledge was now (at best) insufficient to account for the situation of the individual standing in front of them. These labels simply fell short in terms of being able to offer depth explanations. Of note evidence of such impact emerged strongly in the students' WRAs. They wrote very openly about their personal stereotyping and often expressing shame and embarrassment and frequently acknowledging that this had been grounded in their naivety. The stories in combination with the direct encounter itself proved to be forceful drivers to a 'personal stock taking'. Their reflections revealed a significantly heightened awareness of complexity prompted by the SU biographies which had exposed the multi-faceted nature of individuality. It may be that the students wrote so openly as the written task afforded a degree of anonymity and privacy compared to expressing these views face-to-face or in a group setting. This aspect features to a limited extent in the literature (Noble, 2001). It also may have been that as the module had finished, they were able to draw on the range of experiences that they had heard leaving them better placed to reflect on the overall experience. Some WRAs described how during the process of actually writing about the impact the stories had led to different thoughts and reflections.

Analysis also revealed a semantic tension between 'reflection' and 'reflexivity'. The stories prompted many participants to step back from the experience, to make sense of it and engage in a process of personal learning; all well documented elements of reflective practice (Schon, 1983; Fook, 2002). In this way, there was very encouraging evidence of participants developing the ability to engage with the experience beyond a superficial level. Dewey (1934) argued that all direct experience is essentially qualitative but that reflection goes behind immediate qualities as it is 'interested in relations' (Dewey, 1934, p.293). We can do something yet remain ignorant of how various elements are related and it is this lack of awareness that can impede immediate understanding and growth. Many participants reported that not only were they beginning to see that they had made assumptions but at a deeper level were appreciating the need to interrogate how they had formed certain stereotypes and prejudices.

Personal exploration of the 'event' of the story/storytelling was not just confined to the audience. Sara's experience of sharing her story led to enhanced awareness of the need to censor certain aspects as part of self-preservation. Mirroring this, the lecturers' accounts contained many examples of 'replaying' particular sessions and recasting either their views or practice.

The active process of transforming experience into knowledge via 'the doing' distinguishes reflective practice from other approaches to learning. This was an interesting aspect within the data. The nature of the study was such that it was unable to test the extent to which enhanced insights/personal learning actually impacted on the students' longer-term direct work/interaction(s) with service users in any external work-based practice setting.

However, it was striking that a number of students had used the classroom experience itself to reflect on the story content as well as on interactions with the story-tellers. Sessions were seen by a significant minority as opportunities to practise their interpersonal skills. Indeed, for some it was seen as a crucial 'dress rehearsal' or as a 'bridge' before going 'live' into the practice placement. It was this aspect of 'doing' in the learning context that came to the fore in these particular students' reflections.

The findings indicated the strong potential of a story to serve as a prompt or trigger to engagement in intellectual and affective activity. There was a wealth of data relating to how participants explored subjective, often strongly and long-held views resulting in a more 'neutral' if not objective understandings/appreciation. The findings suggested a very close connection between participants' own lived experience(s) and the type of mark that the 'events' of the stories and/or the storytelling made. I began to conceptualise life experience as the filter or lens leaving participants with very different understandings and experiences. I have long held the view that one individual cannot 'make' another feel a particular way; how something is experienced is unique to each person. Schon (1983) alludes to this but in terms of learners and the reflective practicum as they take the 'plunge into doing': 'The teachers cannot tell them. The teachers can say things to them but they cannot understand what's meant at that point' (Schon, 1987, p.1). My interpretations here highlighted a clear demarcation between the 'experiences as told' and how 'told experiences' were personally received and understood. For example, the differential

degrees of 'awkwardness' between under graduate and post graduate students were attributed to the latter's overall greater degree of life and social work related experience. Lydia's reflection on a peer SU's account of sexual abuse had been mitigated by her previous knowledge and personal contact with those who had experienced similar trauma. The stories still had the power to make a deep impression on those even with relevant experience. At times, the stories had revealed their own preconceptions and lack of awareness of SU's needs or ignorance of the 'felt' impact of particular social work interventions on individuals.

The findings also challenged earlier claims that engagement in reflective practice is usually prompted by incidents that cause us discomfort (Boyd & Fales, 1983; Atkins & Murphy, 1993). Although this was undeniably a strong feature in the data it was not always the case by any means. The stories themselves or, indeed characteristics of the storyteller, were often described positively as 'critical incidents' or, as 'light bulb' moments. These included statements in relation to the inspirational features of some narratives, vicarious feelings of elation and celebration, their power to instil a significant degree of hope and/or how they came to be translated into goals for their own professional practice. In this way, at a micro level, these stories represent examples of aspiration and optimism, both much needed and sadly lacking in the current discourses surrounding social work.

Connected to this, a raft of data highlighted significant personal learning in relation to how participants thought about their own practice and themselves as practitioners. What emerged was a greater ability to contextualise service user situations as well as for lecturers, positioning the stories as part of a wider learning and educational remit. Students' WRAs described how the 'trio' of beliefs, self-knowledge and professional identity altered as a result of their direct interactions with SUs coupled with the hearing of the narratives. For a minority, this resulted in a 'joining up' of how socio-economic, political and other background factors had impacted on the lives of service users. Less surprisingly, this emerged as a particularly strong theme for the lecturers. Here stories themselves could be used to promote a greater understanding of these influences as part of a values-based approach and professional responsibility to address equalities perspectives. For one student discussed earlier this seemed to have resulted in the potentially life-changing realisation that a newly acquired political drive would now influence the decision regarding which

social work career path to take. If social work education is concerned with creating better informed students and is also committed to promoting ideas about a more socially just and egalitarian society, these findings suggest that using stories as part of a wider approach to emancipatory learning may be a useful place to start. Not least, their worth seems to lie in the ability of SU's individual delivery of their own 'case study' to captivate interest.

I started this chapter by describing how the findings profiled a 'tension' between 'reflection' and 'reflexivity'. A similar tension has been noted in wider social work literature where these terms and 'critical reflection' are used by different authors to mean very different things and sometimes interchangeably (Jessup & Rogerson, 1999; Pease & Fook, 1999). This diversity may well indicate that such concepts are relatively new to social work and that their meanings for the profession and social work education are still being debated. Nonetheless, reflexivity as a concept is increasingly gaining a firmer footing in professional practice literature and particularly in relation to working with uncertainty (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000). I adopted the following definition during my analysis and interpretation of the data as it fitted well with my role in undertaking reflexive inquiry but also went to the heart of what I was witnessing across the data in terms of the processing of impact. Here reflexivity is defined as the act of 'turning back to discover, examine, and critique one's claims and assumptions in response to an encounter with another idea, text, person, or culture' (Qualley, 1997 page 3). Reflexivity encourages a commitment to what one believes but is crucially developed following a careful consideration of others' ideas, beliefs or opinions. In other words, as I reconfigured it in this study's context the notion of really taking account of others' world views. In contrast, 'reflection' tends to have a primarily intra-personal focus whereby the individual considers and dissects an idea but where ultimately s/he looks for meaning within him/herself. It has been argued that the legacy of individualism has influenced the direction of reflective practice where the locus for reflection is 'in' the individual, with its concern more on enhancing 'one's (my emphasis) awareness (Hugman, 2003). Although the findings clearly supported this individual focus and self-preoccupation, they also revealed a strongly self-critical approach on the participants' part with an 'added' dimension going beyond a more limited self-introspection and quest for the knowledge embodied by the SU.



Others have observed that reflexivity is concerned with the part that emotion plays in social work practice (Kondrat, 1999; Miehl & Moffat, 2000; Ruch, 2002). Some have referred to this as the core of 'personal reflexivity'. Ryan (2005), for example, coins the term 'interactive introspection'; the tool used to study one's thoughts, feelings, mental state and emotional being within any given context (Ryan, 2005). Numerous references to specific feelings, as well as the generation of emotions, were peppered across the data set. This supported the above observations but with one crucial difference; here it illuminated emotional dimensions of reflexivity but played out within the context of social work education. In this regard the findings have also contributed to a deeper understanding of this aspect of reflexivity as part of personal impact. However, I was able to identify very clear strands to support the case for emotionality to stand as a themed network in its own right. This in turn provided further insights into the nature of learning including its theoretical closeness to affective learning and which I will now explore.

## **5.3 What do the findings show about the nature and extent of learning?**

### **5.3.1 Managing emotions- the challenges and opportunities of affective learning**

Central to the findings was the extent to which emotions influenced the teaching and learning environment. Emotionality here included: the experience of emotions themselves, the expression and willingness to express emotion, emotional introspection and self-awareness, emotional range, and the ability and willingness to engage in reflection and discussion about emotion (Deonna, 2006). This also involved the observed behavioural and physiological components of individuals' emotional reactions (Döring, 2009).

Emotionality manifested in two key ways within the learning environment. Firstly as an emotional impact relating to the content of the story itself. Second, as connected to the wider process (es) of integrating stories and their narrators within the teaching and learning context. The latter included the impact of the act of storytelling incorporating threats to self and where the sharing of one's story in itself could be seen as a risk taking activity.. The management of emotionality was a very dominant theme for some participants.

The findings revealed that for many their engagement in the teaching and learning process involved an emotional cost. Professionally, the negative effects on social workers who are repeatedly and directly exposed to the brutal conditions of service users' lives including the fallout of oppressive societal structures feature in the literature (Barlow and Hall, 2007, p.399). The stories themselves involved a similar exposure but played out within the classroom setting. Hearing service users' stories of child sexual abuse, domestic violence, discrimination, poor practice within mental health systems and other services, deceit, betrayal, oppression, vulnerability, disregard of individuals' suffering by professionals and the impact of addiction and stigmatisation evoked intense responses in students. Data extracts reported a range of specific emotions including: anger, frustration, shame, sadness, distress, and disbelief, anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, shocked, troubled, emotional, duped, fearful and humbled. Statements such as feeling 'inexperienced' and 'out of my depth' also featured strongly for some. Although the expectation that such exposure may leave one untouched or unaffected: 'is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet' (Remen, 1996, p.52), the depth of feeling and breadth of emotions expressed in the findings was impossible to ignore.

My own thoughts were that some students were possibly responding to what was their first exposure to inhumanity, injustice or violence. Some students graphically reported the impact of hearing about such experiences for the first time. WRAs contained numerous and vivid descriptions of personal, emotional reactions; the concept of a 'felt thoughtfulness' (Williams, 1977) and the capacity to feel another's pain: 'even in their angry, violent or self-destructive enactments and to think critically about the injustices that produce it' (Frost & Hoggett, 2008, p.455). Exposure to the reality of SUs lives was evidently important learning but the extent to which this was processed 'critically' was not at all clear-cut in the data as I discuss later. However, undeniably, problematic and disturbing stories were those most frequently recalled and accompanied by negative emotions and/or strong reaction serving as antecedents to students' personal reflections.

The findings referenced visible expressions of such emotions where on a several number of occasions, students became earful and/or left sessions which were perceived to be personally difficult or challenging. This supports other observations that witnessing survivors' stories often leads to a personally difficult journey of internal redevelopment

and personal reorganisation (Harms, 2015). Guilt and shame also featured strongly in students' written and verbal accounts particularly where stories triggered a re-examination of negative personal values/beliefs and revealed previously unquestioned assumptions.

Intensity of emotion appeared very strongly connected to students' identification with either the storyteller or aspects of stories. Here some stated that they were reminded of their own difficult pasts and/or the stories reflected some current personal or family based difficulty. Nowhere was this more visible than in the case of one student where both the service user and her story of domestic violence in combination formed a potentiated reminder of her own mother and her own mother's experience of domestic abuse; Sinason's (1992) notion of 'intense compassion'. Examples of this counter transference phenomenon continued to be revealed within and across the data and manifested in various guises and characterised by differing degrees of intensity. This confirmed other evidence that the personal life experience brought to an encounter functions to mediating the experience and impact of the stories. Counter transference clearly is not a new concept per se but fine grained analysis of these data items showed their resonance with others' refinement of the concept; King's (2005, p.10) 'elicited counter transference' (the reaction induced in the practitioner by the service user) best accounts for this phenomenon.

How participants expressed personal reaction varied considerably. Some of these took the form of criticism and a degree of rejection, most noticeably in relation to Tina and what several in the focus group described as her attempt to 'dupe'. More commonly, students' responses indicated a desire to compensate for the pain or upsetting aspects of the stories. Although this could arguably be seen as a more sensitive and 'in tune' practice, the way this was at times reported ran the risk of overstepping the line between a helpful, more empathic response and an unhelpful sympathetic response and framing of the story(teller).

Three of the four service users, expressed specific emotions in relation to sharing their story and/or the nature of their participation. This included feeling very nervous, anxious, and exposed and not wanting to appear vulnerable in front of others. The latter emerged particularly strongly in Lydia's interview; a theme to which she returned several times, connecting it to a childhood sensitivity of feeling totally disempowered. Interestingly, only Tom stated that he did not experience any definable emotion when telling his story and

appeared the most relaxed in front of the group. This could be attributed to his role as a local councillor with a more developed confidence in addressing a variety of audiences; that he had been a direct service user much longer ago than the others; that he had greater experience of telling his story to students; that the experiences he spoke about were not so 'raw' for him or that he was more distant from his emotions. I used such hypothesising with the students. This in itself proved a useful tool to engage them in a more critical learning and a meaningful way to support teaching about the nature/ purpose of social work assessment and the application of hypothesis formulation skills in practice.

Lydia's refusal to be labelled or categorised as a victim was also mirrored in both Sara's interview and Tina's reflections. Here they were keen to portray themselves as individuals who had survived past personal adversity. For all three, as described in Tina's words, there was a strong desire to show to others that they had not 'been destroyed' by their experiences. For Tom, this theme seemed more subtly cast via his many references to personal coping strategies and mechanisms. Resistance, framed as resilience, can in this way be seen as a constructive and creative expression of power (Harms, 2015, p.148); a notion encapsulated in Edkin's (2003) discussion of 'personal positioning' against, and the withstanding of, past trauma.

Uniting all the service users was their wish to show to others that they had survived past trauma. This too has been explored in relation to narrative understandings of resilience where resilience can be seen as an interactive process; interactive in the sense that it can be regarded as 'the outcome of experiences, identity stories and connections with others' (Yuen, 2007, p.5). The SUs articulated a very real achievement that they had told their story despite it often being challenging. Lydia's sense of pride and self-affirmation that she had turned the tables on people's expectations were similarly expressed by Tina and Sara. As has been observed, a narrative identity is formed by what we tell ourselves and others and have others tell us (Harms, 2015, p.108). In this light, the act of telling one's story seemed to address resilience possibilities in significant ways; providing the possibility to re-author personal stories and identities and providing opportunities for personal restoration; a process that 'requires moving beyond simply telling and retelling stories to an active deconstruction of oppressive and unhelpful discourses' (Brown, 2007, p.3).

Service users' motivations to tell their story were unanimously reflected in personal and strongly held convictions that this would make a difference to students' learning and future practice. These were themselves articulated in fairly emotive and forceful language: a desire to 'make them better social workers' (Lydia), to 'help them protect children' (Sara), to 'open their eyes to reality' or 'shock' (Tina), to impart messages that were 'not addressed in theory or text books' (Lydia), to 'expose students to the realities of mental health services' and to 'being on the receiving end of poor practice' (Tom). This was also accompanied by a strong belief that their stories were worth telling. For Tom timing was important. The decision to become involved in teaching was when he personally felt ready to make a 'natural progression' from being the recipient of social services to contributing to students' professional education. Individuals' capacity to learn from experience is fundamental to a person-centred perspective highlighting the potential to build on the ability 'to readjust themselves, once they have come to see their situation more clearly' (Harms, 2015, p.102).

As is demonstrated, Schon's 'plunge into doing' as enacted in the classroom setting was beginning to reveal the many layers and forms of emotionality. The research experience itself also seemed to act as a reflexive learning space where 'learning conversations' (Critten, 2007) were taking place. The interviews revealed participants' strong willingness to explore key, and at times, intimate aspects of their role(s). Their typically high level of engagement in the interviews seemed to reflect an understanding that this was a safe forum where they could voice their thoughts and feelings about their experiences as educators, learners and co-educators; an opportunity particularly for the lecturers that seemed to be otherwise lacking in their professional lives.

In contrast to the expressions of negative emotions described above, the data revealed a number of significant positive dimensions; equally strongly conveyed but overall less often reported. These were variously expressed by participants using terms such as: 'proud', 'achieved something', 'pleased to have been of use', 'appreciated' 'challenged but in a good way'. As a teaching and learning strategy the use of stories received universal support from the students and lecturers. They defended their use even in the light of the problems had experienced. Stories brought specific issues and SU situations to life with an immediacy and directness that could not be achieved by using more traditional teaching methods or in

forms such as written case studies. Co-teaching with SUs when it worked well was seen as a highly effective way to enhance learning. It injected an energy into the room with some stories seen as accelerating key aspects of learning.

On the other hand, the lecturers' data also provided insights into the nature of personal stress and at times, distress. A strong sense of uneasiness permeated Ed's interview when recalling his responsibility towards creating and ensuring a non-patronising environment to support learning disabled service users' participation. Elena's reflections revealed a sense of isolation and an overly onerous degree of responsibility to manage unpredictability and uncertainty. . My own experience of the defensiveness shown by Tina in the face of what was reported as an 'attack' by several students (including 2 foster carers), was reflected in numerous accounts. At best these narratives could be seen to convey a sense of personal and professional discomfort, at worst, degrees of trauma. Just as these featured strongly in the lecturers' accounts, stories either featuring trauma resurfaced and were most often cited by students as having the greatest impact.

The act of storytelling was not without personal cost. Sara's feelings of exposure were further compounded by lack of familiarity with the students including their names. Lydia too was very clear that she was uncomfortable disclosing any intimate details of her childhood and avoided such questions. Tom voiced a degree of empathy; his view that specific background experiences could become sources of distress in the retelling. This begins to raise questions about the extent to which younger service users such as Sara or Lydia -and other service users who share their stories- are willing or coerced participants. Or, as Allain et al (2006) highlight, whether it is a case of manipulating relatively powerless groups further? I will return to this theme later but now want to consider the management of emotionality and what implications the findings highlighted in relation to affective learning.

The findings provided a number of insights into the management of emotionality within the learning environment including interpersonal dimensions.

At times stories often provoked intimate and personal sharing among the student group with a particularly strong sense of professional responsibility to safeguard the needs of all participants voiced by lecturers.

The findings illuminated a further dimension; the correlation between those students who were or had been service users or carers (or identified themselves as such) and the degree of emotional impact and response. Within just one particular student group I was aware of: two students as survivors of domestic violence, (one of whom participated in both the focus group and an individual interview), three students who had personally experienced a range of mental health needs (depression) and/or had close family members who had, two where family members were experiencing problematic substance use, the above student who cared for her autistic brother, one student who had previously been looked after by the local authority and two students who are currently foster carers. The data showed that emotionality/expression of emotion had been particularly observed -behaviourally, in interaction and verbally- on the part of some of these students.

Data indicated some encouraging signs that students were beginning to recognise the need to manage their emotions, including intentions to adopt greater professional objectivity and distance. Moreover, the direct interaction with the service users, for some, also provided an important opportunity to practice their person-to-person skills and to allay their very real fears that they 'would get it wrong' and/or upset the service user. This seems positive; social work needs practitioners who are emotionally self-aware and who are able to appraise emotions in themselves and others. Empathy is essential to good and effective social work practice if we are to avoid the dangers of the 'practitioner-technician' whereby the personal relationship becomes: 'stripped of its social, cultural, emotional and inter-personal dimension (Howe, 1996, p.92). This is significant too given that relational factors have consistently been shown to be at the heart of service users' feedback where social workers' ability to empathise and communicate effectively is prized (Spratt & Calln, 2004).

In both the individual and group interviews, I was struck by participants' eagerness to talk about personal impact and their emotional responses to the stories. In fact, the majority stated that they had welcomed the opportunity to talk through these emotional aspects with

me in more depth. The data also showed -albeit to a slightly lesser extent- that some participants were beginning to really question why particular emotions had surfaced and/or had 'come out' in the room. My later reading in relation to emotional literacy began to help me make further connections. 'There is a growing realisation that psychological processes considered to be purely cognitive or intellectual in fact depend on a synergy between cognition and emotion' (Matthews et al, 2004, p.542).

Significantly, the emotional engagement with the story/teller -albeit for a minority of the students- also seemed to 'kick-start' other connections such as a heightened sensitivity to aspects like the impact of power differentials. In this light, the data supporting this Global Theme as well the data underpinning reflexivity in the first Global theme begins to hint that narratives -with their potential to create a synergy between emotionality and cognition- can be central to learning. Evidence that the narratives helped students critically review personal analyses and triggered crucial questions in relation to how they had generated knowledge about service users was robust. It also indicated that they had begun to interrogate a range of assumptions and values: personal, social, intellectual and professional as well as their less conscious motivations.

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Given that emotionality was deeply embedded in the data, it therefore seems crucial to be able to harness it to positive effect as part of the learning process. Hannah seemed able to make sense and process her (over)identification the SU. This had stimulated new learning of her need to develop a greater objectivity and resilience as a social worker. This, however, is far removed from the experience of the student who ran crying from the room or the student whose written reflections still contained fairly immaturely expressed feelings of outrage and anger. To leave these situations unresolved or unprocessed means that social work education is neglecting a key role in developing the emotional intelligences required for practice. This task poses a particular challenge.

The affective domain is arguably the most complex, as it is rooted in the individual's emotional life reflecting beliefs, attitudes, impressions, desires, feelings, values, preferences, and interests (Friedman, 2008; Friedman & Neuman, 2001). Social work education and its professional practice often stresses critical components of the affective domain; including values, attitudes, ethics, and self-awareness. However, there is a clash:



all too often teaching typically relies on cognitive learning strategies (Bisman, 2004). This is due in part because the affective domain is poorly conceptualised, highly individualised and difficult to directly assess. As Kaplan (1986) observed, this is further compounded by fairly limited research in the area and a lack of a consistency in terms of definition and vocabulary. Affective learning also cuts across all learning domains, incorporating cognitive and behavioural learning in addition to exploring values and feelings (York's & Kasl, 2002). This study revealed two key aspects of affective learning. First: the participants' attitudes, motivation and feelings about the learning environment. This included: the subjects featured in the stories themselves, delivery style, format, other aspects relating to content and –crucially- feelings about the storyteller. Data highlighted the importance for all parties of creating a 'containing' and supportive environment. Second: it showed the stories' powerful potential both to evoke and transform/modify feelings, attitudes and values.

It was striking that those more recently in practice (Ed) and currently practising (Jay) also had much greater experience of direct and therapeutic work with service users. I include myself here. Notwithstanding my long term experience of teaching social work, prior to this I also had substantial experience as a practitioner in therapeutic group, individual and family counselling. These participants seemed much more 'at home' and in tune with acknowledging, planning for and managing emotionality within sessions. Again, the findings suggest that relevant (work) experience seemed a critical variable. In contrast, Elena had had a very different experience as a practising social worker abroad and in the UK, both roles heavily bureaucratic and administrative. By her own admission she felt that she lacked direct work skills and many times felt ill-equipped to manage particular dynamics. 'Dreading' conflict and actively seeking to avoid it emerged strongly as personal themes. Conversely Anna's was neither fearful of emotion nor managing it but rather saw her role as using it to facilitate new learning. Emotional 'material' was used very actively to promote new learning and to help students re-evaluate existing ideas, beliefs, and attitudes.

### **5.3.2 Stories, criticality and the social work curriculum**

The findings indicated that stories are potentially stimulating sources to promote critical thinking. I adopted the definition favoured by the Foundation for Critical Thinking on

grounds of its relevance and given that the Foundation's primary aim is to promote educational reform. It is also in keeping with the aim of this case study research with an emphasis on the generation of knowledge. Here critical thinking is seen as the ability 'to conceptualise, apply, analyse, synthesise, and/or evaluate information generated by or gathered from a range of sources'. These sources comprise experience, observation, reflection, reasoning and communication which serve to guide belief and action.

(Foundation for Critical Thinking. [www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766](http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766) Accessed 25/1/2107).

There was strong evidence that the stories engaged participants in the learning process and at times had stimulated them to extend learning to fields outside of the taught curriculum. One student's interview, exceptionally, showed how she had been motivated to read about existentialism when reflecting on the issue of choice and self-determination prompted by a narrative on surviving domestic violence.

Stories were frequently seen as a very useful adjunct to other teaching methods, often described much more effective learning tools than more traditional methods such as power point presentations or written case material/scenarios. Their greater impact had brought theory and other knowledge 'to life' and made/left deep impressions on both personal and professional learning; aspects similarly permeating lecturers' accounts. In this light the findings highlight key features of the storytelling process as well as content. By so doing they have refocused attention on orality and its place within social work education. Kearney's (2004) discussion of the relationship between theory and practice stresses social work as 'situated practice'. Central to this is the importance of face-to-face interactions between social workers and service users ;as 'persons-in-conversation' (Kearney,2004:178).This study's findings more than hint at the potential of service users' stories to help students identify obstacles in understanding and communicating with service users including their potential to address relational aspects directly within the classroom.

As illustrated, the stories and/or qualities perceived to be embodied by the storyteller had an impact on personal attitudes and stereotypes too powerful to be ignored. This evidence suggests that they have a strong potential to transform learning in the classroom.

'Transformational learning' involves learning 'how to negotiate and act upon our own purposes, values, feelings and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others' (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p.8). Within this psychocritical perspective, transformative learning theory usefully articulates and accounts for the impact of the stories that the vast majority of the students described. Many had constructed and appropriated new and revised interpretations of the meaning of their experience. At the individual level, learning is conceptualised as incremental and progressive; presenting as self-discovery and a deeper understanding of one's self. Again, the findings were very strong in this regard, shown -for instance- by the numerous self-revelations and insights the process had resulted in. However, Taylor 's (2008, p.8) critique of Mezirow is that in his rational emphasis, the role of relationships, personal contextual influences and more holistic ways of knowing as part of the process are overlooked. In this study, however, themes of: holism, 'otherness', the influence of interpersonal facets and context were heavily studied across the data.

High on the lecturers' educational agenda was the value of stories in promoting equalities and values-based discourses. This theme emerged strongly in both Elena's and Anna's interviews, as well as for 1 service user's, Tom. Here Elena reflects on her SUI vision for the programme:

'...what I'm trying to achieve is better social workers. I want the social work students to come out having that fired up approach...you know, that thing about injustice. Actually I want them to be political...I don't want them to be just people who fancy a bit of power...'(Elena, L, I, BT4).

The purpose of emancipatory learning is to develop understanding and knowledge about the nature and root causes of unequal circumstances in order to develop real strategies to change them. The findings here, however, provided much more limited evidence that the stories that had effected noticeable changes in this realm. One student only expressed an explicit intention to work in a more political sphere of social work as a result of the stories' impact. Far more common were statements reflecting individual, intra-personal transformation and self-insights; accompanied by enhanced empathetic understanding. However, several students seemed to be beginning to realise the impact of budget

constraints and increasingly limited resources on the lives of service users, with an emergent understanding of power imbalances and oppression coming through the data. Taken together these could be seen as encouraging signs that the more compassionate engagements with practice could be extended to promote a more critical awareness. In this vein, I will now revisit the findings in light of affective learning as discussed above.

The tripartite conceptualisation of learning as cognitive, affective and behavioural is particularly useful in social work education where its curriculum encompasses professional knowledge, skills, and values (Ediger, 2007). As seen, as a pedagogical tool, the use of stories certainly seemed to deliver in terms of gaining the students' attention, receptivity within the classroom and stimulating their motivation. The findings were in many ways highly consistent with Neuman & Friedman's (2008) alternative affective learning hierarchy, offered as a contrast to that developed by Krathwohl (1964) and Bloom's (1956, 1964) established taxonomy of educational objectives.

In the first level (identification) the students identified and articulated their own beliefs, values and attitudes. At the second level (clarification) they began to clarify their feelings and values. In the third level (exploration), the data showed how many students engaged in exploring the implications and limitations of their viewpoints in relation to practice. The fourth level (modification) is of particular interest. Here Neuman and Friedman's taxonomy suggests that either the student alters in some way their beliefs, values or attitudes or that they modify the alternative position in such a way as for it to be acceptable to them. Piaget (1952) previously described these two processes as 'assimilation' and 'accommodation'. In assimilation, new or external information generated in the environment is modified to fit the learner's existing internal and cognitive structure. In accommodation, the internal structure is itself modified to accept incoming information. Data revealed encouraging evidence of the latter with a very significant number appearing to modify their original attitudes and beliefs about 'this type' of service user behaviour, leaving them more positively - often more compassionately- or at least more realistically disposed towards them. In the final level (characterisation) the student is said to have developed an understanding of their attitudes, values, beliefs, and feelings and organised them into a coherent structure that now characterises the learner and forms their identity. This study's findings can make no grand claims as to this final transition, although do suggest that the

stories could be a significant step towards this as part of a wider incremental and additive view of the social work curriculum.

I had been keen to explore the use of stories in terms of their place in supporting students' learning and understanding of social work theory more generally. There was strong supporting evidence that students engaged very well with the stories and indeed, more so than in those lectures relying on other types of teaching methods. This was seen via an active and critical questioning of presenting problems/situations and a keenness to develop a better understanding of the underlying causes and solutions. This was accompanied by an eagerness to extend their 'specialist' knowledge ('theories to inform understanding') of areas such as mental health or addiction. Similarly, the data demonstrated that students were able to apply a range of relevant values-based theories that underpinned concepts such as empowerment, anti-oppressive/anti-discriminatory practice and strengths perspectives. This was backed up by observations of the numerous questions the stories frequently generated in students' written reflections. Less evidenced, although featuring explicitly in six data extracts, was the value of being able to 'test' tentative and personally constructed hypotheses with the service user in situ.

The stories had provided a stimulating means to support students' in naming specific social work practice theories. Encouraging too were the glimpses that showed some students themselves were able to develop and generate theory and engage in devising basic frameworks for practice. Service users' capacity and motivation to engage theoretically and contribute to discussion/debates was strong in relation to two of the narrators suggesting that this may be a source of untapped potential within the room. Less evidenced was students' more critical theoretical application, for example by demonstrating the ability to critique and evaluate theories in any depth. I understood this as being commensurate with their current status as relatively early stage learners having just embarked on their second year of study. They had not yet had any extensive exposure to 'theory' in all its guises and relatively limited experience of its application to and within practice. This therefore seemed to me more in keeping with Piaget's concept of assimilation where the new or external information generated in the story telling environment was modified to fit their existing academic knowledge and internal cognitive structures/schema.

Stories being used actively by the lecturer had, with some significant exceptions, resulted in an animated, productive and lively learning climate. Overall it proved to be an interactive means of creating and sustaining enthusiasm in the classroom. The use of stories as a teaching strategy showed itself to be very compatible with other tools such as Collingwood's theory circle. It would suggest stories are an effective means of consolidating and extending learning in relation to practice-centred theory and other taught knowledge and offers an exciting potential for a 'live' engagement with theory. Coupled with a pedagogic approach that recognises the importance of affective learning, the findings suggest that these 2 elements provide an effective platform to support the teaching of the values-based dimensions of social work. The findings also suggest that SU narratives have a creative potential to support students' future learning in these areas and that this platform provides a very solid base on which such yet-to-be learned knowledge could be scaffolded.

In many ways, the findings resonate with core aspects of Whitehead's (1989, 2008) living educational theory. In their entirety the data extracts provided rich insights into individuals' explanations of the impact and influence of stories on their own learning and on the learning of others. At points the data told the stories of 'narrative wreckage' (Whitehead, 2008, p.114) as well as positive impact in the form of narratives of success and celebration. Listening to the lesser heard voice of the academic as part of this-from accounts of despair to exhilaration- was crucial to accessing a more 'balanced' view of this SUI panorama and being able to describe a learning environment which included all perspectives. This now leads to a discussion of the challenges experienced by the study's participants as revealed by the findings.

## **5.4 What are the challenges for service users, students and lecturers when service users share their real-life experiences?**

By piecing together key findings from the networks, I became better placed to begin to theorise the study's main interest: 'what actually happens when service users share their stories?'.

The introduction of service users into the educational environment as tellers of their own stories impacted on the notion of 'role' in a number of ways. A distinctive feature of the concept of role orientation (or role definition) is that it is concerned with how individuals construe their role (Parker, 2007) rather than affective reactions (i.e. job satisfaction) to that role. As such, these findings departed from the emotionality themed network above in a number of ways.

This Global Theme network provided insights into the participants' perceptions of their own and other roles within the learning context as well as into a somewhat contested area in relation to 'specialist' knowledge and authority. Attachment to their role was very strong for some participants. For others, it showed role orientation more as a set of malleable beliefs that can change in response to changes in the external environment or changes within the individual (Parker, 2007). In this aspect the data highlighted some significant findings in relation to the construction of 'service user', 'academic' and 'student' identities.

From the lecturers' perspective, as one would expect, the promotion of students' learning dominated. Stories had the potential to confront stereotypes and address a range of equalities. At times certain SUs were actively selected to support this aspect of Anna's role. This included complementing theoretical teaching on the social model of disability and person-centred practice by showing 'life from the inside' of living with autism. Certain SUs were perceived as being able to make a particularly effective contribution and as potentially strong allies. Co-teaching had a number of benefits. 'Confident' (and 'academic') SUs could challenge in ways that she felt unable to do due to their direct experience of a particular situation carrying with it a valuable degree of personal authority and knowledge. However, she also drew a demarcation between what she saw predominantly as her and their roles. She was there to draw out the issues, to ask the trigger questions and do the 'academic brick-building'. There was a somewhat hesitant acknowledgement that while it might be possible for some SUs service users to do this, ultimately she could not expect this as it was her responsibility. Later this theme re-emerged although this time perhaps more revealing of a sensed threat to her professional identity: '...it's not... about us being taken out of our role...it's not a case of saving time...' (Anna, lecturer, interview 2). Aspects of this reappeared in Ed's account but unlike her, he

was much less explicit about how he had used the content /storytelling process to enhance 'formal' theoretical aspects. As he was more professionally inexperienced as a lecturer, it could be that this accounted for the vagueness of his responses as he was less clear about his role and had not yet identified himself as a social work academic. Elena's narrative contained many examples of a blurring of her role and the demands of this formed a thick thread within this network. Deal with many the competing needs was akin to performing a social work or counselling role resulting in feeling she was losing her 'academic' sense of self.

I was also mindful that I had not explored Elena's -nor indeed Anna's- experience from a gender perspective in any depth. However, specific aspects of her story -guilt, a very well developed sense of responsibility and the need to 'fix things' for other people- resonate with themes identified by feminist scholars such as Jaggar (1992). Jaggar's analysis examines how structures of feeling and emotion are central to epistemology and the creation of meaning within institutions. She introduces the term 'outlaw emotions' to describe those which are not conventionally acceptable within the norms or values of organisations such as universities. When experienced in isolation these can become problematic. She terms these 'feminist emotions' and emphasises their important function: 'Outlaw emotions can help in developing alternatives to prevailing conceptions of reality by motivating new investigations' (Jagger, 1992, pp. 160-161). This perspective, more broadly, also helpfully articulates the role specific levels of emotionality contained in the findings.

Expectations of role also re-emerged on my part but with a different focus as the extract below illustrates:

'...one of the focus group participants told me afterwards that she had volunteered to take part in the group because it had been Tom's session about drinking and the subsequent conversations about addiction that had had a big impact on her and....become more concerned about a close family member's use of alcohol. She wanted my advice on how to handle the situation because I had worked in this field ...This raised a number of issues for me about my role(s) as lecturer, practitioner, researcher, the impact of the story for her personally and how/whether 'the personal' could be put to one side in her professional life



when working with similar. I wondered whether if this aspect of Tom's story had not been discussed she would have volunteered to take part in the focus group...' (RR, BT 38).

Although I discuss this later in relation to the lessons learned in my researcher role and related ethical dimensions, here it introduces another theme that the data revealed; the connection between roles, perceptions of role and 'specialist' knowledge.

Here some aspects of the data were consistent with elements of role-identity theory; individuals will be inclined to display specific behaviour if they define that behaviour as appropriate within the role and hence reflective of their sense of self (Kamdar et al, 2006). I understood Anna's firm commitment to her educative role and remit to be played out in how she very proactively and consciously used the stories and the storytelling process within her teaching. Elena also had a firm view of herself as 'an academic' and struggled when she perceived the demands of her role as diverting her away from that. In contrast, Ed's narrative seemed to occupy a much less extreme position. In this vein, it was interesting too how the service users seemed to unite in a desire to shed any fixed 'service user' identity, keen to show themselves in different lights, not as vulnerable but as having withstood.

In terms of role perception and identity, some students expressed great surprise at the level of education some of the SUs had and how knowledgeable they were about 'academic' subjects, citing social sciences. For others it was an embarrassment that they had cast the SU in a role as someone unable to exercise any control or influence in a situation. This seemed to challenge their perceptions of 'a service user' in profound ways.

Whilst they enjoyed co-taught sessions, the lecturer role seemed to represent an important stabilising presence in the classroom. Several students identified the importance of the lecturer knowing both the student group as well as the SU; as a channel between the two. When on one occasion the lecturer was absent, it was very conspicuous in terms of managing and containing one specific session on autism. Lecturers were experienced as very helpful in terms of facilitating conversations and discussion and as pivotal to 'moving these on' by introducing 'theory' and 'new perspectives'. Post session debriefing and reflections were seen as particularly useful. Here SUs were invariably not present and on the whole this seemed to provide a greater freedom to critique and explore issues. At times,

the SUs' credibility with the students seemed to dissipate quickly. Where the SU was perceived as having limited/indirect experience and/or did not seem particularly knowledgeable about the particular topic or struggled to engage due to their delivery style. Conversely, those sessions where stories were conveyed in both an open and engaging way rich with details and information were typically accompanied by much in-session animation and questioning.

Preparation for the professional social work role revealed a number of insights. This included a greater appreciation of practice realities including the impact of waiting lists, the operation of eligibility criteria, glimpses into the workings of the court system and reception into care from the child's perspective and the nature of the social worker/SU relationship. Across the student data, service setting specific knowledge was seen as very valuable 'new' learning about: specific resources, fostering, substance use treatments, life inside a women's refuge, actions and side effects of medication, rationing of resources and implications for SUs and legal/ policy aspects of homelessness.

I was, however, struck by the students' willingness to believe the truth of all aspects of the story. In fact, their WRAs specifically tended to generalise an individual's experience and showed very little evidence of discernment or ability to discriminate. It was the notion that if this had been Tom's experience of mental health services, then this must be the case for all SUs with mental health needs. In fact, I only noted two explicit exceptions: a focus group comment and one written statement about the dangers of over generalising in this way based on 'only one person's background'. Had this study's participants included post-qualified social workers with a greater degree of practice experience it would have been interesting to see whether this variable had any bearing in this aspect of the study's findings.

Lecturers were overall seen as the main imparters of 'formal' theoretical knowledge by all student participants and this also came out in two of the SU interviews (Tom and Lydia). SUs tended to describe their contribution as in some way apart from this, with an emphasis on helping students learn through their experience and personal 'exposure'; 'seeing a face to a story'. Lydia's comment, however, I also judged to be indicative of her greater understanding of the wider educational picture: she aims where she likes to put across the

parts that 'maybe aren't taught in theory'. This small observation was significant: it begs the question not only about what 'theory' is but what type of impact, if any, the stories themselves made on 'theoretical' learning as was discussed earlier. Now to explore another aspect of the findings; how roles within the learning context were understood and played out.

Elena's commitment to using SUI knowledge in the curriculum had required her to rethink her lecturing role. This had subsequently led her to reconfigure how she conceptualised and defined 'the teaching team'. She spoke at length about the changing SU landscape and the implications of re-conceptualising SUs as co-educators with her narrative containing several references to the changing language and terminology ('experts of their experience' 'survivors of the psychiatric system and 'social citizenship' for example). This data also evidenced teaching-related reflections. For example, in the teaching context of learning disability, Ed stated that he tended to teach less theoretical and policy content. Sessions tended to be much more structured around the SUs' interests and needs. He used 'less academic' language. Earlier I outlined my own dilemma occurring when Tom gave inaccurate information about illicit drugs (see chapter 4). The students were relatively inexperienced as a group in terms of practice so tended to take most aspects of the individual story at face value. I detailed how this particular incident had resolved, which in my view was to a great extent based on a solid and open working relationship with Tom established over time. However, as text extracts related to others' experiences of lecturer-SU dynamics have already illustrated, this was not always the case.

Factors such as capacity for understanding and different forms and levels of involvement naturally need to be agreed and acceptable to all SUs and all parties. However Ed's experience -although based solely on his reflections of two sessions involving only learning disabled SUs telling their stories- carries a potentially important message. It may signal the need to ensure a balanced approach in terms of planning and teaching content. A failure to manage or structure the learning environment or, as above, but in extreme measure, curtailing or omitting 'academic' content in light of perceived SU needs/interests may prove problematic. Students and SUs alike may be denied the benefit of hearing other ideas and perspectives. In this light, as the findings already revealed Tom and Lydia were very actively engaged in the academic lecture content as well as wider learning contexts

and social work related issues including independent reading and research. Tom and Lydia had a greater experience of involvement of social work education including interviewing student applicants so may have been much more well-versed in terms of its academic aims and content. Tina however impressed by her almost natural ability to organise her session designing both specific learning outcomes and materials with little assistance. As she was less experienced, an interest in finding out more about how social work was taught and to experience the university environment in line with her intention to study social work was key to Sara's motivation.

For lecturers, the need to prepare SUs and students for particular sessions was seen as central to their teaching role. The need to pace, themes related to familiarisation and a measured approach emerged particularly strongly in Elena's account. Explicit examples of pre-session planning and attention to the detail of involvement on the day were evidenced. However, while all voiced a strong commitment to this process, in practice this was reported as sometimes much more ad hoc, subject to time pressures/availability and had not happened at all on occasion. In a similar vein, post session debriefing for students was seen as important with strong evidence that this had taken place, although inconsistent evidence that this had been adopted as a standard and parallel practice for SUS either individually or with the students. From the students' point of view, the knowledge that SUs had been prepared appeared to give licence for more open conversations and probing questions. For some students, SU preparation lessened the feeling of responsibility they felt towards .SUs particularly welcomed the opportunity for preparation and appreciated the time that lecturers spent with them. Lydia thought that the university experience of preparation had been very positive in sharp contrast to other more negative experiences she had witnessed. Sara had had the experience of Jay's input as well as the lecturer's but the lack of any on-the-day ice breaker to learn at least the students' names was what she remembered .

The findings revealed how ethical considerations related to one's role surfaced in the data. As a starting point, ethical dimensions related to the nature of involvement were articulated in Ed's narrative:

'It was well intentioned but that, kind of, raises the question in my mind...nobody else did *that, none of them. I didn't for my presentation...I didn't show videos of myself you know, kind of dancing or doing silly things...so why do we think that's OK? The kind of laughter was laughing along with people but if we interrogate it, isn't that a bit paternalistic and condescending?*' (Ed, L, I BT50)

Jay's narrative very clearly highlighted a strong sense of a duty of care towards Sara reflected in the degree of care and attention demonstrated towards pre-session planning. Ed's narrative remained essentially qualitatively very different from Anna's and Elena's. He clearly struggled much more with a range of ethical concerns and dilemmas. Again, it was noticeable that the awareness of the ethics of involvement featured to a much greater extent here than in data related to the other two lecturers. These specific findings suggest that closeness to professional practice may well be an important dimension. Jay's current social work role within therapeutic fostering and Ed having moved recently from children's social work, could have influenced a heightened sensitivity to these issues compared to those who were much more distant from a practice environment. I was mindful that the data contained some disturbing incidents in relation to management of interpersonal dynamics with significant implications for the ethics of care. Could it therefore be that practitioners have much to teach those lecturers who are more distant from practice realities and the practice context?

Further evidence regarding relational issues and interactions came to light in this Global Theme. Tina had appeared a willing participant when I approached her to take part in the research. There were also two previous sessions prior to her telling her story which involved careful preparation to establish her readiness for the task and keeping herself safe including dealing with questions she may not want to answer. She was adamant that she had made the decision to tell her experience of child sexual abuse and while appreciating my concern, was quite clear that she was old enough and mature enough to make that decision. She subsequently told her story twice. However, she subsequently did not attend for any of the three interviews I set for her but telephoned me beforehand on each occasion citing personal or family illness or other domestic emergencies that had arisen. Sara's narrative too had revealed very mixed feelings about telling her story, including a number of aspects of the event that had caused her stress. She also conveyed an

underlying tendency to comply when asked to participate in these type of events as Jay had asked to do. When young people and children are involved, relationships can become complicated (Einarsdottie, 2007). They are potentially more vulnerable to unequal power relationships with adults -be these researchers or practitioners- than other groups. Unequal power can exist in terms of age, status, competency and experience; elements that emerged in both Sara's and Lydia's narratives. They may be unaccustomed to adults who are interested in their views and who ask for their opinion. They may perceive the adult as an authority figure and consequently may try to please him or her for fear of the reaction if they don't (Punch, 2002; Robinson & Kellett, 2004). I became aware that although Tina, for example, had given her consent to tell her story- indeed seeming particularly keen to do so- but being interviewed by myself, particularly as a male, may have seemed a more threatening activity possibly causing her anxiety about the parameters of the interview content. Her non-attendance could therefore have indicated her real view (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005).

## **5.5 The study's strengths and limitations: critical reflections on the research process and case study methodology**

I will conclude this chapter with some final reflections on the study.

### **5.5.1 Strengths**

A key strength of the case study is its flexibility (Robson, 1993) .This enabled me to incorporate the previous pilot study within the study .It also meant that unplanned events such as Jay's participation would be accommodated transparently as part of the study's ongoing dynamic. Participant-as-observer methods also provided access to naturalistic learning opportunities that the spontaneous interactions offered.

The study was also conducted in the context of a social work education programme, a learning environment which the majority of participants knew well and in which they felt comfortable. This was important for as 'local interpreters' they were often able to engage with 'experience-near concepts' (Geertz, 1983, p.57) including the words and meanings underpinning the research purpose and activities. In many ways the more important accounts were of those for whom this was a new less familiar environment as these brought a particularly nuanced dimension.

In terms of appropriateness and location in building theory, in its favour this case study is located and supported by wider past literature (Eisenhardt, 1989). Relevant empirical observations and experience feature within social work education research and other professional fields but the impact of narratives remains relatively under researched. In terms of originality, reports of service users in relation to the lived experience of impact connected to sharing their narratives has not featured to a great extent within the literature and noticeably so when compared to the 'narrative impact' (Roscoe et al, 2011) reported on the part of the student. To date, empirical evidence related to the subjective experience(s) of social work educators has received very little research attention at all. In this way, the study will contribute to the existing knowledge base and offers a new perspective on 'live' 'educational (author's emphasis) theory' (Whitehead, 2008, p.105) as well as offering a (literally) creative pedagogical model to construct and enhance theoretical understanding in the classroom.

It has been observed that data analysis is at the heart of building theory from case studies but it is both the most difficult and the least codified part of the process (Eisenhardt, 1989). One criticism of case studies is that while often detailing research sites and data collection methods, scant attention is paid to data analysis. I was therefore very keen to avoid the 'huge chasm' that separates numerous pages of field notes and the final conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p.16). To this end -within case thematic network analysis- I kept the process on track, strengthened by the application of Toulmin's framework to evaluate the robustness of evidence in the data set. Methodologically this assured a greater degree of certainty in relation to the study's four ultimate claims as well as to the hypotheses and theory generated as part of the process. Importantly, it enabled me to describe and audit the process in ways that were transparent and credible.

### **5.5.2 Limitations**

Throughout the study I was aware that being the sole researcher as well as lecturer could present difficulties, not least in relation to bias and interpretation of the data. In recognition of this I used third parties to recruit participants where possible. Multiple investigators have several benefits including offering complementary insights and where the convergence of others' observations can enhance confidence in the findings (Eisenhardt, 1983:538). As I had no other person to aid interpretation, I followed up each individual interview to ensure that I had captured participants views as faithfully and accurately as possible.

Due to the time and availability of resources it was not possible to include a greater number of students or service users. It would have been very interesting to see whether post-qualified social workers rather than pre-qualification students would have yielded significantly different results.

The study highlighted some critical issues in relation to other methodological challenges; use of research methods and ethical issues related to confidentiality, informed consent and protection. I was aware that one of the features of qualitative research is the often long-term and close nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Einarsdóttir, 2007). I was known to the majority of the study's participants, which was a strength in terms of having an established rapport. However, as discussed, it could have been that this led to some agreeing to participate as they had not wanted to 'let me down' or to placate. Every attempt was made to ensure that all participants were given detailed information to ensure their informed consent. In Tina's case, as seen, this presented a dilemma; I was keen to keep her in the study but at the same time I had the ethical duty to give each participant the opportunity to withdraw. With hindsight, three attempts to reschedule her interview may have been perceived as me 'harassing' her. It can be difficult to remove or even reduce the unequal power relations between an adult researcher and a much younger person/child (Bourke, 2014).

Realistically, roles change over time as well as the perception of them, e.g. researcher, social worker, assessor data collector, data interpreter, learner, service user, colleague, co-educator, research participant and so on. Similar observations have been made by Kohler, Reissman and Mattingley (2005) in their exploration of the need for a context based ethics model for ethnographic and narrative forms of social research in sharp contrast to medico-centric models. I found that this study called for ongoing negotiation and keeping ethical considerations alive throughout the process: any 'taken -for-granted hierarchies of power and control over the data' must be questioned' (Kohler Reissman and Mattingley, 2005, p.428). Meeting the University's ethical guidelines for human subjects does not always allow full consideration of relational issues which in narrative inquiry 'underpin the entire inquiry process' (Clendenin & Connelly, 2000, p.171).

On reflection, and prompted by one of Sara's comments, it may well have been more effective -or perceived as possibly less threatening- to interview the service users in pairs (or had there been more, in small groups of three). I had run a focus group with students but not for service users. Partly this was due to their smaller number but I had also not considered this as a real option as, unlike the students, it was rare for them to be together at one time and they did not all know one another. Again, with hindsight, I could have tried harder to coordinate this. Not



least I was familiar with good practice guidelines in relation to conducting research with young people (National Children's Bureau, 2011) where it is suggested that they may well be more relaxed in the company of peers than being interviewed alone by an adult. The students had certainly seemed more relaxed and powerful in a group so it would have been useful to afford the same opportunity to all on the grounds of equity and inclusion.

## **Chapter 6 Recommendations and Conclusion**

“Personal stories work for other people when those stories become both paradigms and parables. The intensity of a story...releases into a bigger space than the one it occupied in time and place.” (Jeanette Winterson, *Why be Happy When You Could Be Normal*, 2012, P.61).

### **6.1 Introduction**

I have started this chapter with a quotation from Winterson as it captures the heart of the study's findings; that stories -simple or otherwise- tell the experience of real lives and help us learn lessons. This study has also provided an example of how focused qualitative research can advance knowledge. By attending to the details of a story - through the deconstruction and reconstruction of content and context- the process has revealed key patterns as well as exceptions to the rule.

The case study methodology adopted proved to be a valuable tool to bring the concept of 'impact' to life and enabled me to explore what actually happens when service users 'go live' and share their stories. The in-depth nature of this study with its exploratory focus would simply not have been possible using quantitative methods; a statement borne out by other evidence suggesting that social workers too question whether such an approach could ever do justice to the complexity, individuality and meaning so characteristic of their professional lives (Felton, 2005). As I conclude this study I am left feeling that this approach was the right one to take. It provided the platform to understand impact from the perspectives of both 'the tellers and the told' and to witness a dynamic interplay between the many factors that influence the learning environment.

In moving from the detail contained in the data and tracing it back to literature and theory, I have revealed how impact manifests both personally and organisationally at a social work programme level. As such, the findings have revealed some important messages for SW education in terms of practice and policy and indicate areas for future research. I will start with policy and practice implications.

## 6.2 Recommendations

- Emotionality and affective learning were central to the data and manifested in very significant ways. The students were in their second year of a professional social work course and were therefore not early stage learners. However, the highly negative stereotypes and beliefs expressed prior to SU led teaching sessions and held about certain SU groups and situations raises professional concerns and several questions. The findings suggest that core components of affective learning such as emotional literacy, emotional preparedness and emotional resilience need to be more soundly addressed earlier in the curriculum. As shown very clearly, these aspects need to be monitored as students progress through their studies. This is important to counter a tendency to privilege a more formal 'academic' approach to learning which often neglects the emotional components of critical thinking and criticality.
- Linked to the above, the findings suggest that a greater vigilance at programme level recruitment and entry stages regarding students' emotional maturity/readiness to undertake the demands of SWET could be beneficial. This should be reflected in any changes to relevant programme policies, suitability guidance and interviewing practice(s).
- There was very strong evidence of the potential of the stories to facilitate positive change in relation to personal stereotyping and helping students develop more professionally congruent values. The findings suggest that the use of stories can be an effective teaching strategy to complement other methods in teaching about (in)equalities and values-based dimensions of the professional curriculum.
- Given that this form of teaching is so well received, with solid evidence of engagement in learning, it is suggested that stories and SUI feature more prominently in the first year curriculum. This is also in light of the first direct practice placement opportunity currently not taking place until halfway through students' second year.

- Evidence from this study strongly suggests that stories may be used very effectively to complement and diversify the use of other teaching methods. As such, they may be a positive addition to educators' repertoire of teaching 'tools'.
- Findings clearly highlight that stories may be a powerful way to enhance theoretical learning. In the context of the study I define this as a 'live' theory approach and conceptualise it as a 'constructive' pedagogic model to improve theoretical understanding and its practical application.
- With regard to the above, educators should actively and explicitly identify where stories' content is of direct relevance to the professional knowledge base and signpost to other (specialist/research) knowledge to help students make these links.
- The findings also suggest that affective learning demands careful management of emotional content and process. This includes good interpersonal skills to deal effectively with and process conflict(s) as well as a sound ability to manage group dynamics. The need to recognise and constructively address differing degrees of emotional robustness/personal background experience(s) as part of professional development was also highlighted. As shown, where individuals identify a dual status (students or educators as SUs or SUs as students/educators), this may pose particular challenges.
- Linked to the above, findings indicated that those educators/lecturers who have more recent experience of direct social work practice and/or are current practitioners may be more 'in tune' with SUI ethics of care and relational aspects. As such, they may be well placed to support those academic staff members who are more distant from practice and/or would benefit from a more practice oriented perspective. One lecturer in this study unequivocally expressed her need for further professional development to develop these skills and to improve her confidence when carrying out her role.
- Preparation and on-going role support were highlighted by the vast majority as key ingredients in enabling effective participation and in promoting confidence. The findings indicated the need for a consistent and rigorous approach for all parties in this regard.
- Similarly, the importance of de-briefing -including opportunities to reflect on the experience- was highlighted. With greater preparation there seem few reasons for such sessions not to be run collaboratively with both students and SUs

present, particularly given some SUs' clear interest in learning more about other aspects/subjects in the social work curriculum. This could serve to maximise learning for all parties.

The findings also indicated that some SUs would welcome further and continued guidance to support their teaching role. They were the only group of participants in the study who did not have access to any regular development opportunities; a significant neglect given evidence of their untapped potential in the learning environment. This seems a very realistic request and one to address with a degree of urgency given the value placed on their particular insights and the rich sources of knowledge their stories brought into the classroom.

## **6.3 Recommendations for future research**

The findings suggest three key areas for future research:

- As this instrumental case study was a single-case design, it would now be useful to test the findings using a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2012) involving similar social work programmes in other HEIs. As a multi-site comparative case study this would yield more robust analytic conclusions.
- Given the nature and scope of the study, it was not possible to follow the students through to a practice environment to explore whether the stories' impact was visible at an individual practice level in a context external to the university. A longer term study building on the current research would shed further light on this question. A related dimension could be the exploration of the impact of SU stories/narratives in the work, setting on this study's students as they progress to roles as newly qualified social workers. Prefaced by the current study, this would make for an informative longitudinal study.
- A further area of potential pedagogic interest would be the management of emotionality and affective learning on the part of social work educators in order to explore the barriers and enablers of effective teaching and learning.

## 6.4 Conclusion

One writer who has continued to inspire me throughout this study is Clive Baldwin (2013) who demonstrates the narrative nature of social work and has led me to think more critically about how social work constructs narratives about service users. I have applied this thinking within my own professional territory -social work education– and to this end, this study has explored a diverse range of narratives that have been shaped within this one learning context. I can see that qualitative reflexive research, as an approach and the ideals/good practicing of social work itself have much in common; critical reasoning, reflection, the positioning of self and others as well as the attempt to understand the meaning(s) behind action. This study has revealed that SU stories have an exciting potential to stimulate and extend learning in ways that perhaps other more traditional pedagogic approaches fail to deliver. As Nussbaum (1997, p.34) in *Cultivating Humanity* observes: 'Books are not “alive”...they certainly cannot think’.

Aside from policy and practice recommendations, on a subjective level, undertaking this study also led to new insights and learning about myself as an educator and as a researcher. This has included a developed confidence in positioning myself theoretically more firmly within emancipatory discourses and debates. This 'immersion' in an area of research which has been a long-standing interest has been articulated as doctoral study taking place in 'a tight compartment' (Wellington and Sykes, 2006:724). I can see that this in fact proved to be of extreme relevance and a key strength in terms of my chosen method-a qualitative instrumental case study-to which the concept of context and its influence were central. As such it has enabled me to contribute to the growing body of research concerned with conveying more 'faithful representations' (Philips and Shaw, 2011:609) of SUs' lives. It also enabled me to bear witness to the many trials and triumphs experienced by those who remain committed to create a sufficiently robust and responsive learning environment in which individuals' stories could be told. As applied research, the study's findings contain key messages for the teaching of social work and advances a more developed understanding of the pedagogy of SUI. Throughout this process I have developed my own voice as a researcher. In part this was due to the opportunity to examine aspects of academic and professional practice more rigorously than I had previously been able to do and, in part via an increased understanding of narrative(s) and what they may represent. As practice-focussed research, my motivation-and my voice as a researcher - was to articulate and speak to 'real-world' (Robson, 1995) issues. As the findings revealed, central to this is the need to listen to the language of emotion as affective learning was shown to be core to participants' narrated experience. In some

ways this was to be expected given that personal stories often articulate pivotal moments and sharp changes in lives or seek to convey 're-authored ' selves . The findings showed too that conception of identity is inherently multiple and dialogical. We enact the selves we want to become in relation to others; '...sometimes in concert with them, sometimes in opposition to them, but always in relation to them' (Hull and Katz, 2006:47). Data extracts revealing the emotions engendered and the values confronted within the story telling process formed 'clusters of significance' (Attride-Stirling 2001) too strong to be ignored. Equally significant, the data revealed participants' inability and, often at key moments, to work with and manage such feelings 'live' in the classroom . Case study methodology allowed me to capture these rich contextual dimensions and to see more clearly their implications in relation to how we teach professional social work .By continuing to do promote such messages , the 'outlaw emotions' Jagger (1989) identified nearly 30 years ago whereby emotion has come to be construed as 'epistemologically subversive, may become ,pedagogically, more 'in-law'. The Western tradition has tended to obscure the essential role emotion plays in the construction of knowledge and its continued neglect is a disservice to all parties involved in social work education and professional practice. A much greater acknowledgement of emotionality including its influence and management must surely be a core aspiration if social work education is to equip future practitioners with the skills and ability to working with their service users in 'the real' and in 'the now' .As one of the students observed, effective classroom-based preparation for professional life demands requires far more than a written case study.

I will conclude by returning to a comment made by one of the study's SU interviewees. Lydia's deceptively simple statement that she likes to put across the parts that 'aren't taught in theory' raises important questions .It is time for a much closer scrutiny of not only theory but also how it may be generated and delivered. The findings have questioned the nature of essential learning and the content of professional education. This study has shown that stories have the potential to push boundaries and cross thresholds. In its own way, each narrative re-authored the curriculum and established SU knowledge more firmly as knowledge in its own right but this process requires careful handling. If this is done, then a creative potential exists to use SUs' stories as a pedagogic tool which moves beyond voyeurism. This makes an important contribution to wider emancipatory discourses as it shows how those involved-service users, students and lecturers alike- may construct a more equal partnership in the classroom.

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