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MAKING THE EXPERIENCES OF THE EMERGING PRACTITIONER MORE VISIBLE: SOCIAL CARE STUDENTS' PREPAREDNESS AND ANTICIPATIONS FOR PRACTICE

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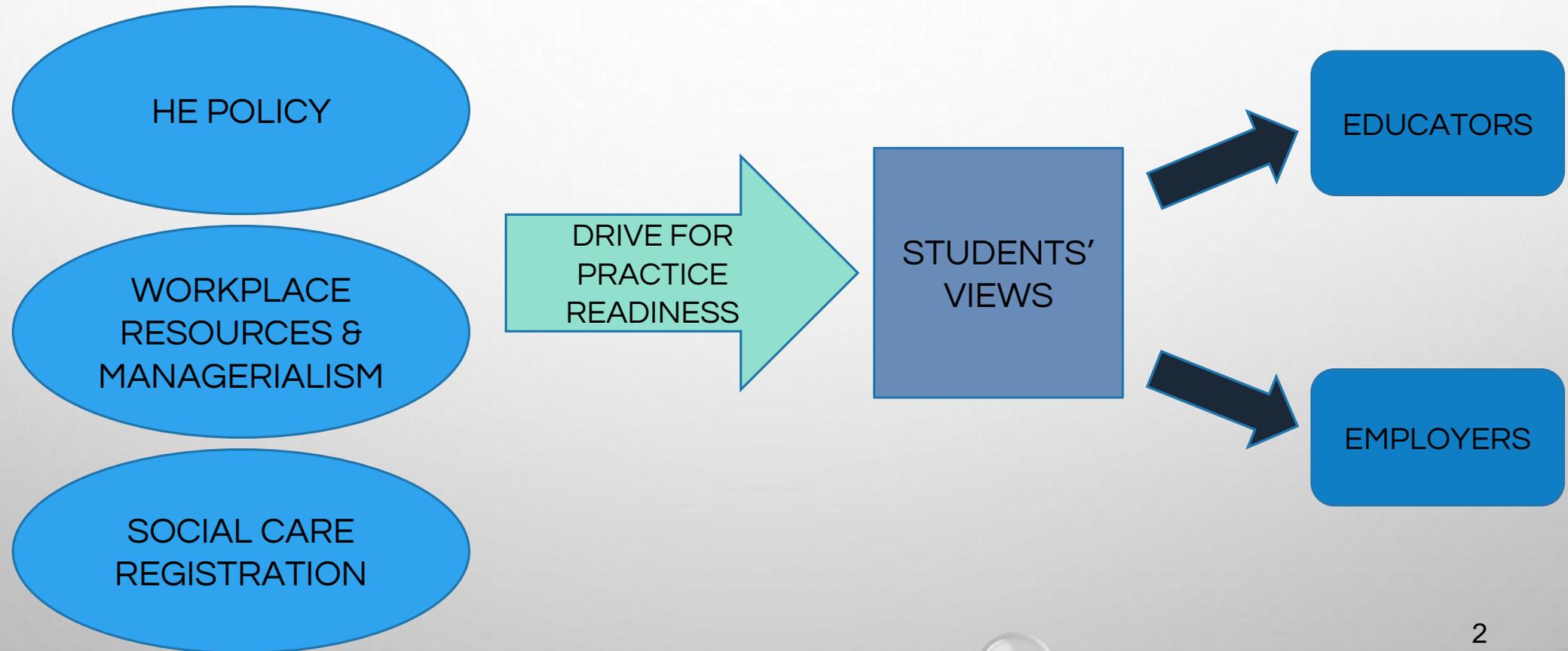
INVISIBLE PERSONS : MAKING HUMANS, COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL PROFESSIONALS MORE VISIBLE



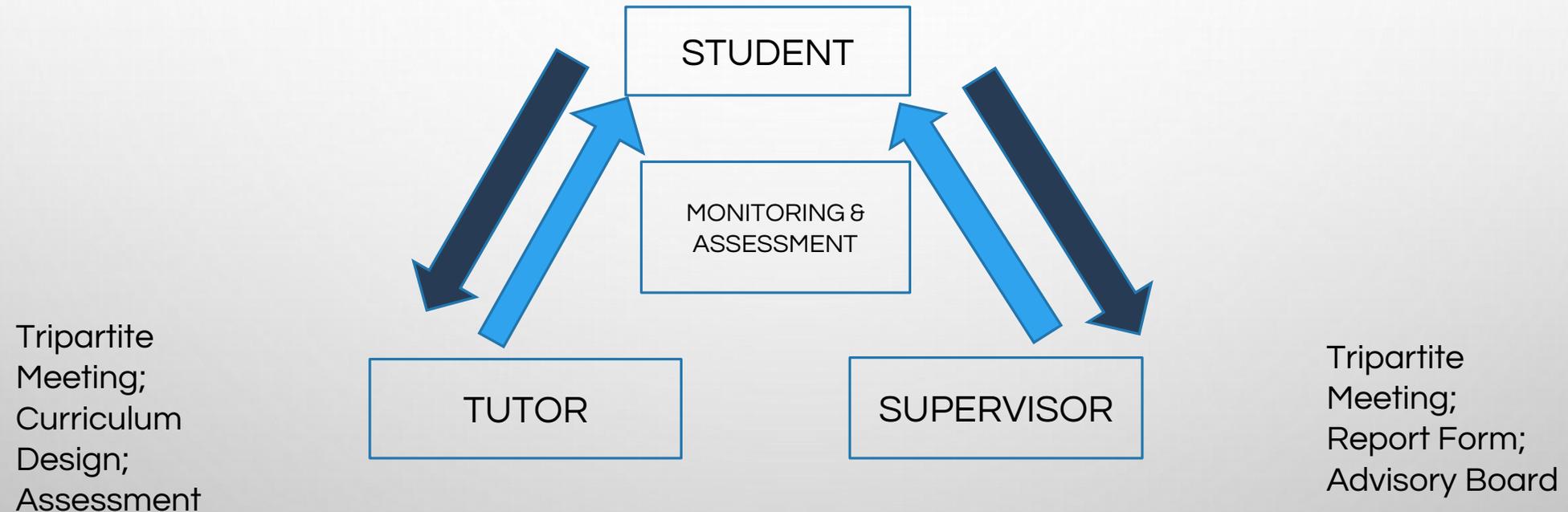
MAKING THE EXPERIENCES OF THE EMERGING PRACTITIONER MORE VISIBLE: SOCIAL CARE STUDENTS' PREPAREDNESS AND ANTICIPATIONS FOR PRACTICE

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CONTEXT - RATIONALE



MAKE THE STUDENT VOICE MORE VISIBLE



EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME

- 3 YEAR HONOURS DEGREE - B.A. (HONS) SOCIAL CARE
 - 1000 HOURS ON PLACEMENT
 - PLACEMENT EACH YEAR
 - MODULES ON PRINCIPLES OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE; PSYCHOLOGY; SOCIAL POLICY; SOCIOLOGY; PRACTICE SPECIFIC AREAS; CREATIVE AREAS; RESEARCH.
 - TUTOR SYSTEM – GROUP OF 20 TO 25 STUDENTS ASSIGNED TO A STAFF MEMBER RESPONSIBLE FOR PASTORAL CARE; ADMINISTRATION; ORGANISING PLACEMENTS; PLACEMENT PREPARATION AND VISITING STUDENT ON PLACEMENT

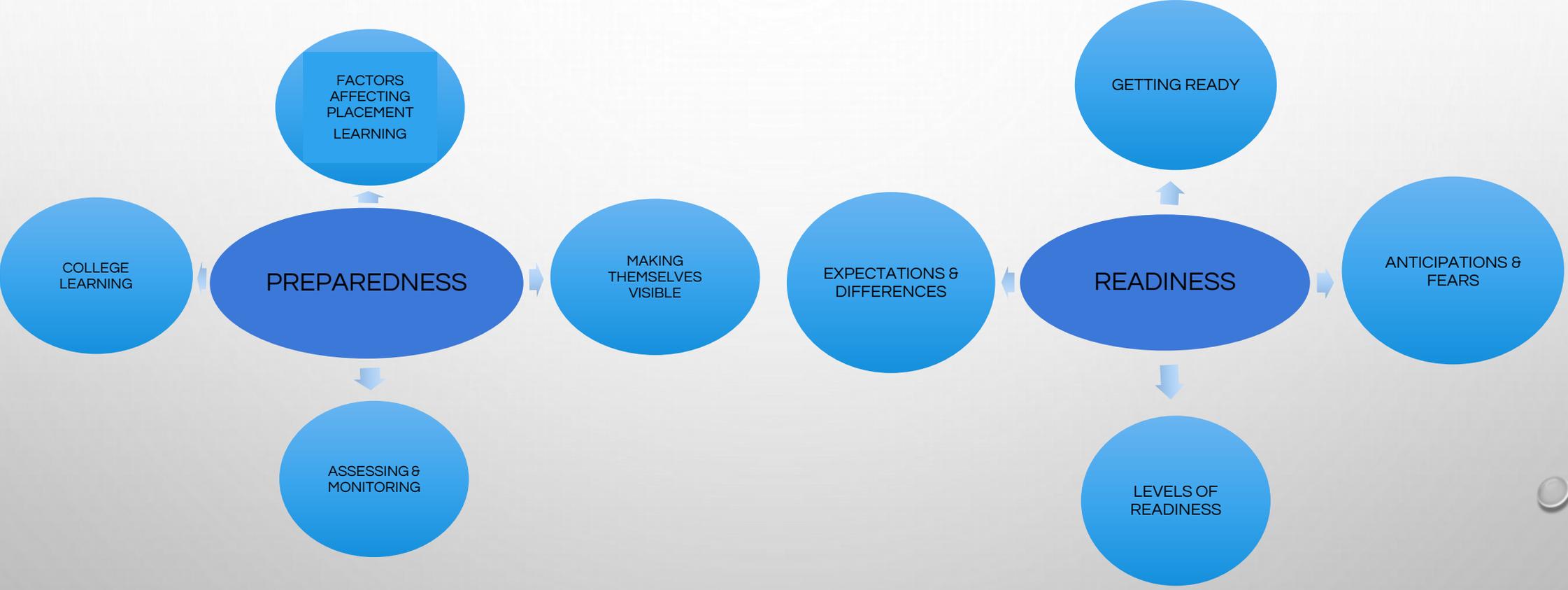
RESEARCH DESIGN

- AN INTERPRETIVIST APPROACH USED AS IT "IMPLIES A DIRECT CONCERN WITH EXPERIENCE AS IT IS 'LIVED' OR 'FELT' OR 'UNDERGONE'" (SHERMAN & WEBB, 1988, P.7).
- ETHICAL APPROVAL RECEIVED FROM COLLEGE ETHICS COMMITTEE
- INDIVIDUAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED WITH 17 (40% OF CLASS) SOCIAL CARE STUDENTS TOWARDS THE END OF THEIR FINAL ACADEMIC YEAR IN COLLEGE.
- VOLUNTEER SAMPLE – STUDENTS WERE GIVEN A SHORT PRESENTATION ABOUT THE AIMS OF THE RESEARCH, AN INFORMATION SHEET AND ASKED TO CONTACT THE RESEARCHERS IF THEY WERE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING

SAMPLE DETAILS

- 13 FEMALE AND 4 MALE – CLASS GROUP 33 FEMALE AND 9 MALE
- AGE RANGE 20 – 49 YEARS
- AVERAGE AGE 24.7 YEARS (SD – 7.4)
 - 1 STUDENT HAD COMPLETED A DEGREE
 - 3 HAD STARTED BUT NOT COMPLETED ANOTHER DEGREE
 - 5 HAD COMPLETED FURTHER EDUCATION TRAINING
 - 9 HAD COME DIRECTLY FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL

KEY FINDINGS



LEARNING ON PLACEMENT

Balance between student 'doing' and 'watching doing,' needed at times for the protection of student and clients



VISIBILITY
Doing



INVISIBILITY
Observing
Shadowing



Organisation policies and structures for student

Supervisor (practice teacher)

Type of agency

Level of student

LEARNING ON PLACEMENT – GOOD EXPERIENCES

As regards to getting you thinking about the likes of theory it was a different kettle of fish. I would say it was excellent. That really got me thinking you know, and observation skills went up 100% as to how I perceived people. It was completely different to other placements. A lot more thought went into how you, you'd have a little incident and say why did that occur? Why? What happened there? Because....and it was purely down to the supervisor, pushing and pushing and pushing

I was given a lot of responsibility. Like I was allowed to fill in like the programme records and I was allowed plan groups and set up my own groups and there was a lot of responsibility. I was treated as a staff member and I was valued as a staff member. I didn't feel like I was being taken advantage of or ignored. Like they appreciated everything that I did do and I thought it was really rewarding.

LEARNING ON PLACEMENT – GOOD EXPERIENCES

When I was in second year placement I had an amazing supervisor who was really supportive. I felt very valued.

She would always seek out my opinion on stuff; she would always see what I wanted to be involved in. She was constantly aware of me and her role in maximising my learning even though obviously as a student that's my role too. But she was very, very active and that so I felt that I was given good responsibility and I felt that I was trusted as well with taking on tasks and pushed a little bit as well which I think was important because I wouldn't be the most confident always in my work.

In third year you were more so pushed because this is what you'll be doing this time next year. : So you need to show initiative. You need to show you're capable. [...]. There were certain things like say they wouldn't have people who weren't in their final year going to team meetings.

LEARNING ON PLACEMENT – DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES

Trying to get into the team, the belonging. That was tough 'cos they weren't bothered with showing me anything. Not even introducing me to people. I think there was such a turnover and amount of CE scheme workers that I was just another body. Plus there was three students at the one time.

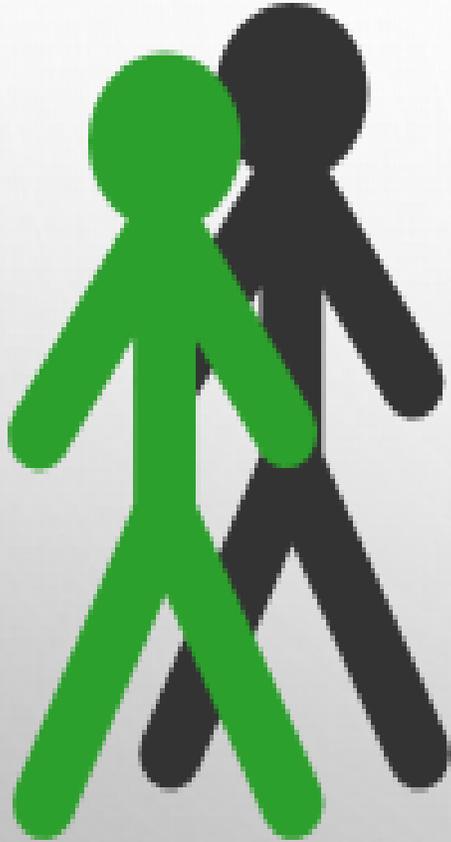
The work they do is fab but like there was a couple of fights and you saw knives and you're so worried then if somebody does give you a hug of a needle prick. [...] It was low threshold so it wasn't safe. And the majority were men. And you had to be so careful 'cos you weren't just taking in drugs and homelessness. You were taking in mental illness. You were taking in everybody 'cos they took in everybody.

LEARNING ON PLACEMENT – DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES

I think they were like 'final year student, she should know what it's all about, this is it' but then eventually when things did kind of go a bit sour they were like 'Well, she's never done residential really.' Pretty much treating me like a staff member, like 'she's ready to go' And then when they realised I wasn't they actually said 'Well you're not doing too bad for someone who hasn't done this before.'

I felt, first of all my supervisor wasn't active at all in my learning, I think not only was she not that interested I don't think she was even aware of her role.

INVISIBLE STUDENTS MADE THEMSELVES VISIBLE



I think I went in there a little bit shy, trying to force myself to be in there and not really wanted but I just had to get over it and say, look I am here to learn and I have to do this. That's what I want to do, because there is no point me going out to practice now and saying I don't know how to do this or work on my own without supervision. Everyone needs a certain amount of supervision but you need to be able to work on your own. I just learned quite quickly I needed to do that.

INVISIBLE STUDENTS MADE THEMSELVES VISIBLE

It was only when I got a little upset one day that they took note and realised 'Why isn't she, why is she acting like that' and I guess I did get left behind in all the chaos. But I guess things changed from then because people actually asked me how I was doing where as before that I was just like 'Right, see you later, that's fine.' There was no 'How are you finding things?' it was like you were left to it and then eventually it sort of dawned on them that I was struggling.

I suppose the main thing was that I didn't know if I was doing what I was supposed to be doing so I kind of used and went into the lounge area just interacting with clients, it was like either I'm doing this or sitting in the office. Like some of the time I was sitting in the office by myself, just sitting there doing nothing.

COLLEGE LEARNING

- *“Making theory into practice seemed to be important in third year as well; which is something I finally got around to in third year because I found like it still wasn’t clicking in first and second year. but then in third year it came together.”*
- *“So for me, I went into the place questioning everything. I think college taught me that, I had to question it.”*
- *“Learning to reflect and that meant in third year I actually did do the reflective journal. and it is the best thing I ever did ‘cos not only did it help me in my professional role it’s a nice thing to have.”*

INVISIBLE LEARNING FROM MONITORING

- RECOGNISING GOOD PRACTICE – EMULATING IT AND LEARNING FROM IT

The good staff, issues, doesn't matter what it was, it will always be brought to the staff meeting and it will come out and it wouldn't be like, why did you put in this sanction or whatever. They were like, yeah, actually you are right.

We're not following that policy and we'll go back and we'll fix that, which was good, because it did fix it and then everyone was happier. They knew where they stood, which was just basically a communication that works

I hope I have a supervisor like the one I had this year because I've seen her working with people and she, just say like every two weeks, she'd bring them in for like an hour and sit them down and go through everything. She was so helpful.

INVISIBLE LEARNING FROM MONITORING

- RECOGNISING GOOD PRACTICE – EMULATING IT AND LEARNING FROM IT
 - I was really heartened because they interacted so well together even with the managers, nothing bad was ever said because they were in constant communication with each other. Like even over the smallest change in one of the girl's programmes or even just checking on something that they'd done themselves they'd always say 'Such-and-such said this to me and I answered her like that, do you think that's okay?' [...] Yeah, like even when they had an argument once or twice it was really like constructive and really mature and I found that really refreshing and I found that really, like so much to learn just to watch that style

INVISIBLE LEARNING FROM MONITORING

RECOGNISING BAD PRACTICE - THE POOR PRACTITIONER THEY DON'T WANT TO BECOME

And I think there's so many social care workers out there who are kind of, a bit maybe lazy. There are ones that are bad and you're able to continue and that's something I'm so afraid of now [...] that I would become the social care worker who's kind of complacent.

It was this woman who everyone thinks is just lovely and she is alright with the men.. But saying to one fella that came in one day 'what string of a gobshite are you look at the state of you' And he's a heroin user and I'm thinking he's sleeping rough in some house somewhere. And I'm thinking that's the last thing he needs.

INVISIBLE LEARNING FROM MONITORING

- RECOGNISING BAD PRACTICE - THE POOR PRACTITIONER THEY DON'T WANT TO BECOME

I don't think they would have been supportive of each other. I think there is differences and cliques in placement, which I think they need to hammer out in there to be honest because it is pointless having groups that don't get on in that kind of area and nothing is going to work then with the young people. I know that there was plenty of support for me but I don't think there was enough support for some of the staff in there.

Like the staff team that was really poor didn't communicate with each other. I was sitting in a staff meeting and one lad was sitting there like a twelve year old, having a sulk and they were like, what's wrong with you, do you not agree with that point? 'No never mind', he said. Like he couldn't even voice an opinion why he didn't agree with it, like a little child. Why? Tell them why you don't agree with it and something might come out of it, rather than sitting there having a little sulk.

ASSESSING THE SYSTEM

I thought it was interesting to see how much paperwork was involved. I was kind of taken back by it. I read something somewhere that they should be 30/70, in terms of 30% paperwork and 70% with the clients, but depending on what was going on it was completely reversed. It was nearly frightening for me. It's like, who is looking after these kids, and they are just left in front of the TV. And the TV is not being paid to look after them.

There's stuff I found ridiculous like if a woman receives a home on social housing and then she has to give up that residency because it's not safe the council take that as she's saying "screw you, I don't want your house" so they're right back down to the bottom of the list. So stuff like that which was just really shitty and especially because domestic violence is so connected with homelessness.

ASSESSING THE SYSTEM

Staff had left to cover different houses so when some of the other agencies closed they were sent here so it wasn't necessarily a choice that they wanted to come here, so there was a few people coming in and it just seemed like the team never gelled. So there was no follow through. So say if something was said like, a small matter like food for the pantry, 'No you can't have that onion.' 'Well such and such gives me the onion.' It's like there's no follow through, it's very up in the air, like everyone means well but without the direction the staff don't know where they're going and the young people don't know where they're going.

People with the best intentions and they just, it's not that they made the wrong decision, it just didn't suit that particular family. Something else could have been done or even looking at the options that are out there and they're not always that flexible as well.

EXPECTATIONS AND DIFFERENCES

In placement I think maybe there was a lot more support and encouragement; whereas when you would be in the workforce obviously there would be support there if you need it but you won't be encouraged to do anything, you have to do everything yourself. But obviously you would expect that yourself. So there will definitely be a difference and definitely the responsibility like. If you are going to have sole responsibility for the cases that you are working on and report writing and stuff.

Well there will be a lot more responsibility anyhow, a lot more accountability for actions. If you make a decision you have to properly justify that decision, which is something that is a bit daunting to be honest. But I suppose I can see why, because in there everyone is very hesitant to do this, that or the other and why like? You know it's the best thing for the client, just do it.

It's your job on the line if you make a serious mistake so there's a lot more accountability when you're actually working.

FEARS

I'm apprehensive about going to start work in a place where I don't get on with the staff or I don't feel part of a team.

I suppose I'm a bit scared as well of the fact that when I am entering social care professional sphere properly that's when I become an actual worker and that's when I judged as a worker and judged on the style that I've formed. I like to think that I'm okay, that I'm good but what if you're not? And I think there's so many social care workers out there who are kind of, a bit maybe, lazy, there are ones that are bad and you're able to continue and that's something I'm so afraid of, that I would become that social care worker who's kind of complacent or burnt out

FEARS

How okay is it to ask ten questions. Do you ask five and figure it out yourself 'cos you've to appear competent because you're getting paid and you told them you were?

I think working in an unsafe environment, because even if, just say, you're working in residential care it can be good for so long and then you can have one new kid come in and everything changes and I wouldn't want to leave a job because of a kid who has challenging behaviour. But I'm just worried about being safe,

VISIBLE STUDENT IDENTITY VS INVISIBLE PRACTITIONER IDENTITY

- STUDENT IDENTITY AS A QUESTIONER AND CHALLENGER OF POLICY EVIDENT
- PERMISSION AND SUPPORT TO QUESTION AND EVALUATE BY BEING A STUDENT
- FEARS THAT THIS IS NOT PART OF THE PRACTITIONER IDENTITY – COMPLIANCE

- *“Can I ask as many questions or give my opinion as much because I’m actually going to be paid by these people. So can I be as free?”*

READINESS

FINAL YEAR -
I NEED TO GET
READY

I AM READY

I DON'T KNOW
EVERYTHING BUT
WILL LEARN IT

I AM READY FOR
SOME THINGS

GETTING READY FOR PRACTICE

Need to learn as much as possible

- *“I felt a little bit of impatience to learn as much as possible. It was like pack everything in. It was bizarre as it went along it was when you have finished this placement you need to be ready to go and get a job”.*

Show initiative and take on work

- *“If you are going out into the big bad world you have to take onus on yourself to go out and be responsible. You can’t be told by people to do things. You are third year now, you have to do this. You have to know yourself. [...] You have to up your game”.*

GETTING READY FOR PRACTICE

Act in a professional manner

- *"I wanted to appear as responsible as I could so even answering the phone and talking to say social workers or something I wouldn't tell them I was a student. Unless I had to and after a while I kind of found they would ask me questions about clients and I'm like I know that, I've been working with her for a while".*

Be accountable for own practice

- *"Of course [I felt accountable] because in two months time I could be an actual social care worker".*

READY FOR THE NEXT STEP

I do feel like I'm ready, I just want to go and get in there and start working. I'm excited as well because it's going to be different. [...] I like being challenged and thrown in the deep end.

Just kind of being able to use the skills because you're kind of restricted as a student.

I'm looking forward to having people that I can key work and be responsible for helping them [...]
Last year in placement I just kept thinking that I want to key work this person because I have ideas for them that I think would work.

THERE IS ALWAYS MORE TO BE LEARNED

I'm not worried that I'm not completely ready because I have to go and learn these things and I won't learn them until I'm actually in there and around people, doing it so I'm not too worried about it. I always think though there is room for more learning from me, because obviously I don't know everything.

Obviously there are some things I am going to be ridiculously naive about. But hopefully, I will just learn from mistakes that I make as well. I feel like I am ready to a certain degree, but you are never really fully ready are you. You are always learning different stuff going through that stage, but I am definitely nearly there.

I do kind of. Wherever you go to work it is probably so broad. Each organisation is going to be run differently and you are going to need new skills and when you work with new people

CONDITIONAL READINESS

- *"I'm not that assertive as a person, which I need to develop".*
- *"I'm mature but I still don't have the background for some of the areas".*
- *"I'd be all over an internship because I'm not ready. I'd be like please support me in any ways you'd like to".*
- *"I think it is really important for me to find the right organisation. So if I feel comfortable that I have a nice or an approachable manager or supervisor who offers supervision and it is a policy, then I am more likely to stay with that organisation".*
- *"Abusive behaviour doesn't faze me anymore. I don't think I have learned enough about paperwork. I don't think I understand it. I am learning all these new things like SENs and missing from care reports and everything else".*

LESSONS FOR EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

1. STUDENTS SAID THERE WAS ALWAYS LEARNING TO BE GAINED FROM PLACEMENT EVEN IF IT WAS NOT AS STRUCTURED AS THEY LIKED.
2. THERE IS LEARNING FOR STUDENTS ON PLACEMENT THAT IS NOT ALWAYS EVIDENCED.
3. THEORY PRACTICE LINK IS NOT OBVIOUS FOR MOST STUDENTS UNTIL THEIR FINAL YEAR.
4. ALTHOUGH SOME APPRECIATED THAT DUE TO THE NATURE OF THE WORK THERE WAS ALWAYS SOMETHING TO BE LEARNED THERE WAS A SENSE OF HAVING TO BE READY FOR PRACTICE AT THE END OF THEIR FINAL YEAR.
5. IMPORTANCE FOR TUTORS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS' VARYING LEVEL OF READINESS.
6. IMPORTANCE FOR EMPLOYERS TO APPRECIATE THE FEARS OF NEW PRACTITIONERS.