

# ‘They thought I wasn’t good enough for social work practice’: The views of students who failed their practice learning opportunities

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**Abstract:** The few studies of why social work students fail their practice learning opportunity (PLOs) have been undertaken through the lens of practice educators, lecturers and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with no input from students. Using qualitative interviews; this research explores the reasons for failure from the perspective of the students. The findings identified a number of interrelated issues such as previous work experiences, family history and personal circumstances as the rationale for what led those interviewed into social work. Issues such as ill health, personal problems and lack of clarity around assessment criteria as well as perceived lack of support from HEIs were identified as some of the factors that led students to fail their practice learning experiences. Recommendations from those interviewed included the suggestion that HEIs should, at the recruitment stage, provide clear information about the implications of failing practice learning opportunities and clarify what type of support for is available for those who fail. The students interviewed also echo the desire expressed by the HEIs and practice educators for clearer assessment criteria/frameworks and a more supportive process for all parties.

**Keywords:** placement failure; marginal students; placement breakdown; failing students; student perspectives

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## Introduction

During their training, social work students in England were, from 2003 until recently expected to undertake 200 days placement within (at least) two different practice learning settings (DoH, 2002) to enable them to acquire and demonstrate the essential skills, knowledge and values needed to practice as social workers (DoH, 2002).

For the majority of social work students the experience gained during their practice learning opportunities (PLO) represents an invaluable learning curve which often positively impacts on their future career choices in terms of helping them to decide which setting might be the best for them to work in once qualified. However, for a minority of them, the PLO might become synonymous with distress, anger and often impotence (Parker, 2010). Although most students successfully complete their PLO, figures suggest that about 2 to 3 per cent of students fail (GSCC, 2010). Parker (2010) highlights the distress caused not only to students but also to families, employers, and service users when this happens. He also draws our attention to recent public inquiries and the need therefore for rigorous assessments as a way of safeguarding service users. Furness and Gilligan (2004, p.469) take this further by indicating

that certain behaviours and characteristics should proscribe individuals from holding a professional qualification in social work and/or working in the field of social care.

Although it is acknowledged that practice learning experiences have a central role in the training of social worker (Parker, 2007; 2010) it has been acknowledged that this area is under-researched and under theorised (Finch, 2010; Parker, 2010; Furness and Gilligan, 2004; Parker, 2007; Basnett and Sheffield, 2010). Previous papers in this area have been undertaken from the perspective of practice educators or HEIs (Furness 2012; Finch, 2010). Furness, (2012) for example, looked at the gender characteristics of those who fail social work education through interviewing practice educators. Basnett and Sheffield (2010), and Finch (2010) explored issues of stress and the emotional impact of failing students from practice educators and HEIs perspectives. Most of the studies in this area indicate that amongst PEs, there appears to be a lack of general clarity regarding what is 'good enough' practice that students should demonstrate either at an intermediate or qualifying level. Moreover, the process of dealing with marginalised and

failing students appears to be made even more complicated by the high level of stress, anxiety and feelings of loss that PEs experience (Furness and Gilligan, 2004; Roberts, 1996; Basnett and Sheffield, 2010; Finch, 2010). This lack of clarity, alongside the feelings of isolation and anger that both students and practice educators experience when dealing with marginal or failing students (Shapton, 2006; Finch, 2010), certainly impacts on the assessment process. There appears to be an increase in the attention given to this area; as indicated by this special themed edition dedicated to looking at the issues raised by failing students in practice learning. This would suggest that HEIs and practice educators have begun to explore the issues that arise when 'things go wrong' more deeply (Parker, 2007; 2010). Yet studies looking at the reasons why students fail from students perspectives are very limited. Until recently Parker's study on what 'is known about disrupted, marginal or failing placements' theorising the 'perceptions and experiences of students in England, who have been through the process' (2010: 40) appeared to have been the only study that has looked at the reasons why students fail from students' perspective.

It is within this context that this study is undertaken. The rationale for undertaking this study for one of the authors came through observations made during Practice Assessment Panel Meetings where over time it became apparent that those students likely to fail their PLO assessments were those with no prior social work or office experiences. The other author felt that psychological and emotional issues associated with learning may have an impact on the final outcome of the assessment. Although we initially came from two different assumed perspectives, what drew us together was a shared interest in examining the reasons why students fail their practice learning opportunities. More broadly, although existing research has shared some light on the reasons why students fail their practice learning opportunities, most of the studies as stated previously have done so from social work practitioners and social work educators' perspectives rather than from the perspectives of students. With this in mind, we were interested in exploring the perspectives of the students who had failed or had a refer decision, and to identify if these decisions had any bearing on how the PLO's are structured, what implications this might have for practice, and what lessons could be learned. What follows is a discussion of the ethical and methodological approaches employed.

## **Ethical clearance**

The study sample was drawn from across a number of HEI providers of social work degree programmes including the institution in which we were both working at the time the study was conducted. Ethical clearance for the study was sought through the institution in which we worked as lecturers. The procedure employed for ethics was guided by the Framework for Research Ethics (ESRC, 2010), The Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (DOH, 2005) and the British Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (BASW, 2012: 10 & 11).

In addition to working within the above ethical frameworks, a number of researchers have highlighted the potential tensions of managing the dual roles as insider-researchers (Darra, 2008; Mercer, 2007; Drake, 2010). In this area we found Mercer's (2007) work on the different power positions occupied by the insider-researcher and Darra's (2008) work on 'Emotion work and the ethics of novice insider research' useful when considering the potential ethical implications for our work. As insider-researchers our powerful role as lecturers and assessors were considered and shared with prospective participants. Further, the different participating groups presented their own challenges in terms of the different power relationship involved in working with them. For example, we shared what Mercer (2007, p.4) referred to as the "intimate' insider research' relationship with those approached from our own institution and felt this might compromise participation. To our surprise we found that was not the case, as those who were contacted were able to either give a firm indication of willingness to either take part or to say no to participation. This was the case with those selected through our contacts from other institutions. Although it was initially assumed that those with whom we shared a 'less intimate' insider-researcher' relationship (Mercer, 2007) would be more willing to share their stories with us some of those contacted refused participation, which was respected.

Additionally, the research topic is sensitive; its main focus was to explore students' 'lived' experiences of failing. In considering ethics we were cautious not to draw the research participants from those who were going through an appeal process at the time of writing for a number of reasons. We felt this would either cause distress or additional stress to students. It was therefore decided to take a situational ethical decision by not including this group of students in the study. This meant valuable data from those going through an appeal process was excluded from the study.

In ensuring ethics, those who participated in the study were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose and the procedure for data collection. We also included information about participants' rights to participate, issues relating to risks and inconveniences, confidentiality, data treatment and storage procedure and the participants the right to withdraw from the research. A consent form was also given to the participants to sign if they agreed to be interviewed. We were particularly concerned that asking the research participants to recall stressful and emotive experiences of failing or having a deferred decision would cause some distress for them. We therefore included information on where to seek counseling support should the need arise. We drew from Robson (2002) in ensuring confidentiality and anonymity through the use of pseudonyms to protect the identity of those taking part

McLaughlin (2003) and Dickson-Swift et al. (2008) highlight the emotional tensions experienced by researchers; as insider-researchers, although we did not initially consider our own emotional responses to the topic when we initially set out to undertake the study, it was emotionally difficult when some of people we contacted said no to participation. We also experienced feelings of guilt for using the students' experiences as a way of developing our academic capital. This resonates with Darra's (2008) work; she draws our attention to the feeling of guilt that insider-researchers experience by sharing her personal emotional struggles when researching the career progression of diploma and graduate midwives. Drawing from her own experience she recounts the feelings of guilt about using her research participants largely as a means to an end. She recalled 'I interviewed ex-students following informed consent to participate in a real study; but its primary purpose was my research training' (Darra, 2008, p.255). Like Darra, we felt that although the purpose of our study was to find out the students experiences of failing there was a sense of guilt for using this to develop our academic capital through publication. Yet without the students' narratives it was felt that valuable data about the students' experiences of failing would be lost.

For our work, aside from our own emotional responses to the feelings of rejection and guilt, it was at times difficult to listen to students narratives about what we as lecturers and assessors took for granted. In this area we found Dickson-Swift et al.'s (2008) work on understanding and managing emotions in qualitative research useful. It is within this context that ethical issues were considered and mediated. What follows is a discussion of the methodology employed for the work.

## Methodology

The study is situated in the qualitative phenomenology research tradition. Patton (2002) suggests that the phenomenological approach to qualitative research emphasises how individuals make sense of their own world and how these definitions are shared with others. According to Rose et al. (1995: 1124), 'the purpose of phenomenological inquiry is to explicate the structure or essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon'. There are various approaches within the phenomenological tradition, different perspectives also exist within the different approaches. For example, Husserl's descriptive phenomenology focuses on people's lived experiences, the essences and meanings of how people view these lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Within the Husserlian paradigm, the concept of 'bracketing' or the epoche principle requires the researcher to withhold pre-existing personal experiences, preconceptions or their beliefs in order to transcend everyday understanding of what is being studied. This process is undertaken in order to prevent personal biases (Flood, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). In contrast, Heideggerian phenomenology is interested in understanding shared meaning. The Heideggerian approach recognises the importance of the researcher's past experiences (Dowling, 2004; McConnell-Henry et al., 2011). Gadamer (2004) suggests that one's preconceptions or prejudices are part of their understanding and suggests that as a researcher you should 'have courage to make use of your own understanding' (274). We opted for Heidegger's phenomenology because like Heidegger we believed that truth could not be established by separating oneself from what is known. For example the fact that our background as social work lecturers and our knowledge of practice learning led us to this study supports our arguments not to 'bracket' what we already know. It was felt that it would be relevant to bring our knowledge about practice learning to the study rather than taking an objective position by bracketing what is known as per the practice of Husserlian phenomenology. Our assumed premise was that the lived experiences and meaning attached to failing a Practice Learning Opportunity is subjective and unique to those experiencing it. We felt that the uniqueness of these experiences would be more suitable to qualitative methodology rather than quantitative research tradition, which is more interested in quantification. The decision to use this methodology stemmed from our ontological and epistemological stance in the belief that multiple realities exist and that knowledge can only be sought from those who have experienced it.

## Method of data collection

Data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews. Robson (1993: 228) describes an interview as being 'a kind of conversation, a conversation with a purpose'. Similarly, the semi-structured interview technique is described as flexible and well suited for exploration of perceptions and opinions (Patton, 2002).

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight social work students who had either failed or have had a refer decision on their practice learning opportunities, (previously known as placements). A Semi-structured interview schedule was designed not only to elicit responses from the research participants but also to allow participants to share their perspectives about failing their practice learning opportunity (Patton, 2002). We chose semi-structured interviews because it allowed the opportunity to change the order of the questions asked as well as the context within which the questions were asked. This also allowed those who took part to answer more on their own terms as well as allow the space within which to deal with any arising strong emotions. This technique enabled us to probe when necessary as well as encouraging the research participants to talk freely (Roulston, 2010).

Drawing from Robson (2002), we adopted a more conversational interview style. This approach was adopted to address some of the power imbalance between the research participants and us. We particularly did not want the research participants to feel they were under any form of 'examination' or 'scrutiny' for either having had a failed or a deferred decision on their assessment. Rather, we wanted to create an atmosphere of trust and comfort to enable the research participants to feel safe and less vulnerable in sharing their experiences and or narratives about what led them to fail. To achieve this, the research participants were given the option of where they would like the interviews to be conducted. Although most opted to have the interview conducted in a private room at the institution where we both work, one chose to have the interview conducted in his car. Most of the interviews lasted for about an hour; with participants permission the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. This was undertaken to ensure that accuracy was achieved.

The interview schedule focused on the following:

- what led the research participants into Social Work;
- reasons for failing practice learning;

- clarity around assessment criteria;
- emotional responses to failing;
- the role of Higher Education Institution (HEI) in support for those failing their practice learning;
- the way forward from the students perspective.

## Data analysis

Data collection and analysis was carried out simultaneously. The interview data was analysed drawing from Ricoeur's (1971 cited by Flood 2010) three-stage approach to data analysis. This consists of the following; naive reading, structural analysis, and comprehensive understanding.

### Overview of analysis process

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#### *Naive reading*

Read interview transcript through several times to grasp meanings

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#### *Structural analysis*

Identify themes from the text which conveyed essential meaning of participants lived experiences of the Practice Learning Opportunity, why they failed, emotional responses to failing; role of HEI, clarity around assessments. condensed responses into sub themes and sub meanings

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#### *Comprehensive understanding*

Summarised themes and reflected on the themes in relation to the research question and the context of the study; re read the whole text to identify shared meaning and shared perspectives from the research participants

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## Findings

### What led the research participants into social work

The research participants gave different reasons for coming into social work. Most attributed this to family circumstances or previous work experiences. The following were some of the reasons given:

*It started with a few difficulties within family life. I lost my father and I also lost*



*older brother and I looked at my family network and thought about how I was going to support them (John)*

*My family was one of the first steps because I was brought up in a very difficult situation. My sister had children who were disabled so I felt that there was a need for disadvantaged people to be looked after (Margaret)*

*I was working with NACRO; I was one of their project workers. Most of the young people I was working with at the time didn't have a social worker, so it was my job to stop them re-offending (Mark)*

## **Reasons for failing practice learning**

Almost all the research participants attributed reasons for failing to lack of experience and high expectations from Practice Educators, the working environment and lack of support in managing difficult cases. The following were some of the comments made:

*I was in a voluntary setting which was second year, I didn't have a lot of statutory experience there, you know, like when we do initial assessments, core assessments, LAC procedures and things like that. So when I got into my third year placement, which was statutory, that's when the problems started because there is a huge gap. Once I got there the placement assessor and other people there, look at you as a final year student, more or less a social worker, so they think you should know certain things (Katie)*

*they gave me cases that were abandoned you know maybe 2 or 3 years ago. I didn't get much support from my colleagues. Every time I sat at my desk my colleagues would come and approach me and say 'What cases have you got? Oh that one!' and just walk away so I couldn't really understand or figure out what they were saying (John)*

*The service users and the supervisors were always arguing in the office there. Sometimes it was very frustrating... two weeks into the placement she [Practice Educator] left for her holidays and then left the whole job for the support worker to handle (Margaret)*

## Clarity around assessment criteria

Almost all of those interviewed indicated that they were unclear about the criteria used for the assessments. Some of the students indicated they felt unsupported in understanding what was required. The following were some of the comments made:

*It wasn't clear to me at all because I had not been on placement before; I had no idea about what was really going on. I knew nothing about these key roles so I was just on my own, just reading to find out if I could understand the key roles and it wasn't very clear to me at that point. Then how to use the theories – it wasn't clear (Margaret)*

*She told me I had to use the key roles and the key values. I never reflected... I had to use one key role and one key value which I had to struggle to do for myself... (Abigail)*

In addition to the lack of clarity around assessments expressed by those interviewed, in the following quote Mary describes how she felt her Practice Educator was also unclear about the criteria used for assessments:

*Really it wasn't very clear to me .... she was assessing me on theory, that was her main concern, she said I wasn't doing well, but she didn't put it to me the way she should have because I felt she wasn't very good in that area (Mary)*

## The emotional impact of failing

Participants expressed strong emotions and feelings when describing their emotional responses to either failing or having a referred decision on their Practice Learning Opportunities as described in the following quotes:

*I felt like dying. I felt horrible. It was Christmas and it was the worst Christmas I've ever had. I was not eating and I had a medical issue as well so that complicated things for me.... I felt horrible ...' I've got a little boy who knows I go to college; he knows I work hard... now I had to tell him 'You know what? Mummy's not going to be a social worker (Abigail)*

*I was disappointed, I was sad. It made me sick, there were a lot of things... emotionally I was drained (Georgina).*

*I felt very useless and I felt that I was no good for the job because all the other students were successful and I wasn't. I started asking myself a lot of questions, I didn't understand (Mark)*

### **The role of the Higher Education Institution in supporting those failing their practice learning**

All the participants described feeling unsupported by their various institutions during the time they were informed that they had not successfully completed their practice learning opportunities. The following quotes describe some of the feelings and views expressed.

*The worst thing is if you really need someone, you have to send an email and book an appointment and they tell you when they will be available and able to come out so it's not helping us as students (Mark).*

Although most of those interviewed felt that the structure of HEI does not support them however this quote by John suggests that tutors are supportive although they might not have the power to change things:

*There is only one person I'd like to say thanks to – my tutor. He was good. Sometimes he didn't know what to do. It seems he didn't have that power (John)*

### **The way forward from students' perspective**

The need for support from HEI's and clarity about assessment came time and time again. This quote by Margaret highlights the point:

*Students should be made aware of what is going to happen. If they are not pulling their weight or if there are some areas for development, they should say it outright and then try to change it. That's what I feel. They shouldn't let it all go on silently and then when it's over say you've failed.*

Matthew appeared more philosophical when stressing the need for support as expressed in this quote:

*Social Work is not an easy course. Someone has to be there all the time to support*

*you. This is where students sometimes make mistakes and fail. Of course we gain the knowledge and the skills but then again, we feel that someone has to be there all the time if you need any help or support (Matthew)*

The need for additional support for students whose first language was not English was further emphasised in this quote by Karen:

*I think they should have more sympathy or empathy because that student failed (...). Also because English is my second language, I am in a foreign country so I have these problems as well and I have health issues so they should be more sympathetic or offer me counselling or another support, but I didn't get anything I feel like. (Karen)*

## **Discussion**

The study supported the findings from others that have explored the reasons why students fail the PLO (Finch, 2010; Parker, 2008, 2010; Furness and Gilligan, 2004; Basnett and Sheffield, 2010). Like other studies, which explored the emotional impact, associated with failing PLO's, almost all the research participants expressed strong emotions and strong feelings about failing their PLO (Finch, 2010; Parker, 2010; Basnett and Sheffield, 2010). Similar to Parker's (2010) findings participants discussed how this has both affected them and their families. The study also supports others that have explored the reasons why people go into social work (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification Team, 2008).

Of particular significance in this study was that almost all of our research participants had English as a second language. Those interviewed indicated that family circumstances and previous work experiences were the key factors that led them into social work. Equally although those interviewed showed some awareness of what the practice learning assessment entailed they almost all indicated that they were unclear about the criteria used for assessment. Additionally, some of the research participants felt they were unable to cope with high expectations as well as adjusting to the transition from having a voluntary sector placement to statutory sector placement. Although we had initially assumed that those with previous social work experience were more likely to succeed, the study did not find a clear link between having a prior practice experience with passing the practice learning experience.

Sharland and Taylor (2006: 515) contend that

...as a process of knowledge production, research synthesis should allow us to develop new conceptualisations rather than summation of primary results. Concepts and theorised explanation may not only inform our understanding of empirical findings, but also be generated through synthesis itself.

Drawing from this, the following section draws from the theoretical insights of Bourdieu's (1990) concept of capital and habitus to examine how the *field* of practice learning in social work education is structured and whether this has any bearing on those failing to complete the Practice Learning Opportunities (PLO). To set the context, the notions of field, capital and habitus are briefly explained

## **Synthesis and theorisation of findings**

The concept of the field, capital and habitus are interrelated and interdependent. Bourdieu (1984: 101) suggests that it is the interaction between the habitus, capital and the field that generate the 'logic of practice'.

### **Field**

The concept of the *field* can be determined as a number of settings where social practice takes place. Bourdieu conceptualised *field* as an arena where social relationships are characterised by different interests and power relationships (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Houston, 2002). He contends that social actors operating in the *field* invest their practice in the field to acquire forms of 'capital' associated with the field (Bourdieu, 1990).

### **Capital**

Bourdieu (1990) distinguishes between four forms of capital: cultural, social, economic and symbolic capital. Cultural capital includes forms of knowledge, experiences, language and narratives whereas social capital refers to networks, relationships and affiliations. The concept of economic

capital relates to financial resources whilst symbolic capital encompasses a combination of all the different forms of capital.

## Habitus

According to Bourdieu (1990) it is through the workings of habitus that practice is linked with capital and field. Bourdieu (1990: 52) defines habitus as a 'system of structured, structuring dispositions'. The habitus is structured by our past and present circumstances (Maton, 2008). It is 'structuring' because it also shaped by our present and future practice (Maton, 2008). He suggests the habitus is a

system of dispositions to a certain practice, is an objective basis for regular modes of behaviour, and thus for the regularity of modes of practice, and if practices can be predicted... this is because the effect of the habitus is that agents who are equipped with it will behave in a certain circumstances (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.77)

Initially gained through primary socialisation, habitus is not static but is continually 're-structured' by our encounters with the outside world. It is within this context that the study findings are analysed.

## Practice learning opportunities in social work education

Practice Learning, constructed as a *field* in the context of this study, plays a central role in the education and training of social work students. Most social work students spend at least a year in the academy developing knowledge and understanding of models and theories of social work practice, social work values and ethics, law and policy before undertaking any practice-based work or what is referred to as the practice learning opportunity (PLO). The practice learning opportunity is therefore structured to enable students to integrate the knowledge, skills and values they have acquired in the academy into practice. It is also structured to assist students to develop professional social work practice skills in working with service users and carers as well as with other professionals. During their time in the practice learning setting students are assigned to a Practice Educator who

will have the overall responsibility for supporting the students' learning and professional development as well as assessing their fitness to practice (DoH, 2002; GSCC, 2005). The assessment of student's fitness to practice is currently undertaken within The National Occupational Standards for Social Work (TOPSS, 2002) and the GSCC Code of Practice (2002). Although most students successfully complete their practice learning opportunities, as indicated previously, some do fail or have a refer decision. Those who fail may not be given the opportunity to continue with their social work training. However those who have had a referred decision are given the opportunity to retake the placement or undertake additional practice days in order to have an opportunity to successfully complete their PLO.

The notion of *habitus* when applied to social work education can be configured as the teaching and learning provided to equip students with the necessary knowledge, values and practice skills needed to work with service users and carers in the field. It can also be conceptualised as the professional practice knowledge, which enables students to have a sense of the 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990; Maton, 2008). Through this process, students acquire the necessary capital needed to practice in the field. These include the practice skills and knowledge of working with service users and carers, as well as working and networking with other professionals. As well as developing their pedagogic habitus they can also exchange this capital for an academic qualification that would enable them to practice as social workers. Bourdieu (1990) suggest the habitus is a product of history; according to Nash (1999, p.176) the habitus '*discloses the traces of its origins in practice*'. Apart from the pedagogic habitus gained through the teaching and learning in the academy and practice, students also bring with them a habitus shaped through social background, previous work experiences and or previous education. Some of these would be an advantage. Particular to our study, the finding suggests that those entering social work programmes with English as a first language fared better than those without. Those who failed or had a referred decision had English as a second language. This would suggest that those entering social work programmes with English as a first language had the advantage of entering the field with 'the know how' or what Bourdieu refers to as the 'feel of the game' than those without. This means navigating the way within an environment where English was the first language was easier for those with English as a first language than those without. As a form of *capital*, Thomson (2008, p.69) notes that

players who begin with a particular form of capital are advantaged at the onset

because the field depends on, as well as produces more of, that capital. Such lucky players are able to use their capital advantage to accumulate more and advance further (be more successful) than others.

Aside from language, it would appear from our study findings that some students, and in some cases, practice educators appear to be unclear about what is required in the field. There are clear implications for practice as the whole purpose of the initial first year is aimed at developing students' *pedagogic habitus* by way of equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge and values or the *capital* needed in order to succeed in the *field*. The timing provides the opportunity to address the issues raised. For example the Social Work Reform Board (2011) has recommended a 30-day skills development as preparation before students embark on Practice Learning Opportunities as part of the reforms of social work education. There is therefore the opportunity for HEI's and Practice Educators to reconsider how we meet the needs of students entering social work programmes with English as a second language and how we meet the needs of those deemed as failing in order to ensure that students are more effectively prepared before embarking on their PLO.

The findings of this study highlight how stressful and emotionally challenging the PLO experience might be, especially when concerns arise during the PLO experience. This is consistent with a similar study undertaken by Parker (2010) in which – although focusing predominantly on the power imbalance intrinsic in the entire process – students experienced very strong emotions and also 'expressed a sense of powerlessness and lack of control or fear of reprisal' (Parker 2010: 995). More recently, the Finch (2010) and Basnett and Sheffield (2010) studies highlighted how Practice Educators, when confronted with marginal or failing students, experienced equally stressful and overwhelming emotions. More consideration should therefore be given to the role played by the emotional experience of practice learning. This echoes the findings of recent studies which have highlighted the crucial role played by social and emotional competence in the ability of social work students to cope with the stress and demands of the training (Barlow and Hall, 2007; Kinman and Grant, 2011).



## Conclusion

The issues identified would suggest that although there is a need to ensure rigorous assessment in safeguarding service users as well as raising professional standards, there is also the need to ensure that those in training are prepared for and supported in their practice learning experiences. HEI's do have a responsibility in also hearing the views of those who fail as well as those who support them in order to implement systems to ensure that students are well equipped with the necessary *capital* needed to survive in the *field*.

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