

**Examining the Contribution of Social Work Education
to the
Digital Professionalism of Students
for
Practice in the Connected Age**

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ABSTRACT

Social work education is the gateway through which the protected title of social worker is secured. Given the professional status of social work there is an expectation that on qualification, students of social work will be practice prepared. This phenomenographic study considers preparedness in the connected age, through examining the contribution of social work education to the digital development of students, from the student point of view. Digital development, as related to professionalism, is set within the context of the digital shift, given the impact of digitalisation on people, on societies and on the social world.

The professional requirements for social work education and practice include reference to technologies and technological skills. However, the world, in a technological sense has, and continues to move on. Thus, this study examines variation in students' experiences of digital development, with the view to informing curriculum design, content and delivery, in future terms. To begin to address the lack of clarity in social work about what professionalism in the digital age might realistically include, the terms 'digital' and 'professional' are conflated throughout this work to emphasise the relational nature of the two.

Data generation involved semi-structured interviews, with 11 social work students at a single university in England, at the point of qualification; a time when students will have had the opportunity to engage with curriculum content in its fullest. Interview material was analysed using an iterative method that is in keeping with the phenomenographic approach. The findings evidence four qualitatively different conceptions of what digital development involved for this student group. Even though digital development was seen to occur, student descriptions show this development to have been largely limited and partly unrealised, due to the incidental nature of digital learning experienced throughout the duration of the course.

If social work education in England is to prepare students adequately for the realities of 21st century practice, due consideration needs to be given to digitalisation, to the emerging nature of 21st century social need, and to how students are being equipped to respond to this. An exploration of how digitisation is explicitly reflected within curriculum design, content and delivery should form part of this, because as the findings of this study suggest, in situations where this has not occurred, it is long overdue.

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Amanda M L (nee Taylor) Taylor-Beswick

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Context Collapse: what happens when online activity is undifferentiated from offline activity. The etiquette and rules in each space are different; and need to be seen as such to avoid context collapse.

Digitalisation: the integration of new digital technologies into the social world; a 21st century issue that is causing significant changes to the nature of sociality, social assemblages, social order. A phase in human history being referred to as the Fourth Industrial revolution, or 4IR.

Digital Capability: sometimes referred to as digital literacy, media literacy or information literacy – generally understood as the ability to use modern technologies to find, evaluate, create, curate and communicate information online.

Digital by Default: a phrase used to describe a UK Government initiative, designed to ensure that all public and essential services are ‘digital by default’ by the year 2020. The impacts of this are already being felt by those without access or those who do not have the digital capabilities required to navigate the online.

Digital Development: in this study, development that is digital in nature and linked to becoming a social work professional; learning about and acquiring the digital knowledge, digital values and digital skills essential to practice 21st century social work.

Digital Literacy: the ability to create, curate, communicate and evaluate information online. Sometimes called information literacy or media literacy.

Digital Professionalism: a term used to describe the act of being professional when carrying out the functions of a profession in the digital age. For social work this, whilst not officially defined, currently involves the interpretation and translation of the professional standards and codes of conduct, to guide appropriateness and practice in the connected age.

E-Professionalism: a term still in use, to describe professional behaviours and practices of the electronic age.

Incidental Learning: learning that takes place as a result of some other activity or some other event. A by-product of another activity; by chance, non-intentional or unintended learning.

Informal Learning: learning outside of the formal classroom or a learning event; that is known to occur, and at times relied upon. In the US standards for social work it is described and recognised as the implicit curricula.

Media Literacy: a broader definition that builds on the definition of digital literacy, which includes the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create medias in various forms.

Networked Publics: the way that the internet has changed the social nature of human connection in the world; the way publics are connected and now connect.

Phenomenography: a research approach, with origins in educational research. Developed to reveal and describe (*graphy*) a finite number of conceptions of the ways of experiencing a phenomenon, from the experiencers point of view. Often used for the purposes of progressing pedagogical knowledge and approaches.

Practice Prepared: a state of competence achieved through a programme of learning designed to equip students to execute the functions of a profession.

Practice Readiness: a term used to describe a student's readiness to practice, sometimes referred to as preparedness for practice, or practice prepared.

Professionalism: a shared way of being and practising, aligned to the norms, requirements and functions of a professional grouping.

Professionalisation: a term used to describe the process whereby an occupational group becomes a profession. The term is also used to describe the process through which a student of a profession develops professionalism or becomes a professional.

Professional Socialisation: a socialising process, similar to professionalisation, through which a student of a profession becomes familiar with the capabilities, characteristics and values unique to that profession.

Replicability: the amount of times information can repeatedly be shared online.

Scalability: refers to the scale to which information can be shared and the sharing reach possible due to the functionality of online spaces.

Searchability: a function of the world wide web that has changed how people access and have access to information, people and things.

1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background, rationale and research aims

This thesis is set within a time that sees social robots, predictive risk modelling and the automation of social care practices come even closer into view (Eubanks, 2017; Noble, 2018; Zuboff, 2019). Thus, it is concerned with matters such as those brought to our attention by Crisp, who explains how social work education:

Can't assume that what has been appropriate in the past will be so in future decades... bold decisions may be required to maintain the relevance of social work qualifications in coming decades, to ensure graduates in the 2020s will be equipped with the capacity to adapt their skills and knowledge for practising in the 2060s (2019b, p.254).

Whilst qualifying programmes in England have historically been the subject of much review, there is no simple fix when it comes to the future because the future is becoming increasingly difficult to predict (Keen, 2018). Digitalisation, or 'progressive virtualisation' as Westera (2013, p.6) calls it, continues to alter the social world; an issue that will require social work professionals to be 'equipped with the capacity to adapt' to the new and unfamiliar issues that are likely to emerge (Crisp, 2019b, p.254). However, before any 'bold decisions' about qualifying programmes are made, an understanding of how social work education has and is responding to the digital shift must be secured.

This study, the first of its kind, examines the contribution of social work education to the digital professionalism of students, and it examines this phenomenon from the student point of view. It aims to provide social work educators with original insights into this unexamined area, through the generation of data gathered to reveal qualitative variation in students' experiences of digital development throughout the

duration of their course. To understand how, through engagement with social work education, learning about professionalism of a digital nature was facilitated and or how conceptions of digital professionalism were formed. It is grounded in Gibson's idea of a future that is 'now' (1999, np) and concerns that 'if we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow' (Dewey, 1944, p.167).

Terms of reference relating to the phenomenon of interest are introduced in the 'Defining Terms' and 'Professional Requirements' sections of this work, directly below (Chapter 1.2, p.2-5; Chapter 1.3 p.6-10). These discussions reflect the relationship between 'digital professionalism' and 'digital development' and why the latter was the focus of the analysis. They also highlight the complexities of examining phenomena associated with digitalisation, in social work, at this time. It is also important to make clear, that whilst social media features heavily in the data and in the narrative surrounding digitalisation, digital professionalism involves a number of aspects, as the findings of this study will show.

Gaining a perspective on experiences of digital development, from social work students as recipients of social work education, involved 'listening to and learning directly from them' (Hessenauer and Zastrow, 2013, p.20), through the creation of a space where they could share their experiences and their points of view. The approach taken was aimed at addressing a gap in the literature pertaining to what 'students identify as important to learn in social work education for future employment' (Hessenauer and Zastrow, 2013, p.21), here relating to the digital. Furthermore, to better understand the relationship between social work education, technologies and digitalisation, given the rapidity and impacts of the current digital shift (Fang et al., 2014; Sage and Sage, 2016; Taylor, 2017).

1.2 Defining terms

Before moving on, it is important to contextualise the use of the term ‘digital professionalism’, over and in place of the term ‘e-professionalism’, in this work. The decision to do so was influenced by Denzin’s work on interpretative method, which discusses the need for a preliminary and ‘deconstructive reading of a phenomenon’ of interest, prior to study design. A process that includes ‘a critical analysis of how the phenomenon has been studied and how it is presented and analyzed in existing research and theoretical literature’ (2002, p.353). The following explanation is a summarised version of that work. It reflects the struggle to marry the content of the professional requirements, with the realities of the educational context and the socio-technical orientation of the world; the latter of which was gaining significant momentum at the time when this study was carried out. Relating to this was the problem of defining the phenomenon under investigation. As noted by Balick (2014) in his seminal text *The Psychodynamics of Social Networking*, ‘the notion of defining... is changing’, terms, theories and trends of this century can, and often do ‘disappear as quickly as they appeared’ (p.xv). Whilst accepting the precarity of definitions in the modern world, the use of the term ‘digital professionalism’ was settled upon, due to how helpful this was thought to be for describing this new layer of professionalism in social work. The term digital development is also used, due to how it was thought to capture, as close as is possible, the dynamic relationship between students, technologies, their educational experiences and the regulatory expectations - as this appears - ‘for now’.

The fact that there continues to be a lack of consensus about a common language to describe literacy development in the modern world, highlights the ongoing difficulties with establishing an all-encompassing term (Davies, 2018). There are a number of iterations in the UK alone (Department for Education, 2013; House of

Commons Science and Technology Select Committee, 2016; House of Lords Select Committee, 2017; National Literacy Trust, 2018). However, it is perhaps that of the European Parliament definition, established after a significant amount of external lobbying, which comes close to describing literacies in the modern world. Article 8 of the Audio-Visual Media Services Directives explains how:

Media literacy should not be limited to learning about tools and technologies but should aim to equip individuals with the critical thinking skills required to exercise judgement, analyse complex realities, recognise the difference between opinions and facts and resist all forms of hate speech (European Association for Viewers Interests (EVAI), 2017).

This definition illustrates the issues with professional requirements that focus predominantly on technological skills (a point that will be returned to), without addressing, in any detail, the nuances of the digital age; nuances that have formed part of our personal and professional experiences of technologies for a significant amount of time. The question is, how much have any of us fully recognised or consciously engaged with the complexities and implications of this rapidly changing digital shift? It is this, in relation to social work, that is the crux of this work.

To further explain, the term e-professionalism is and has been, used across several professional groupings (Cain and Romanelli, 2009; Kaczmarczyk et al., 2013; Duke et al., 2017), including that of social work (Kirwan, 2012; Megele, 2015; Sage and Sage, 2016; Beaumont et al., 2017; McAuliffe and Nipperess, 2017). It originally emerged in response to forms of technological change that saw older or traditional practices and media converge or be replaced with the new (Press, 1995; Straubhaar et al., 2013). The prefix 'e' (electronic) came to represent these earlier changes; for example, e-mail (communicating), e-commerce (trading), e-banking (financial transactions) and so on and so forth (Naughton, 2012). The decision to build on

previous thinking, and to use ‘digital professionalism’ as an alternative in this work acknowledges the way in which technologies have evolved. The term ‘digital’ has come to signify the current technological shift (Schwab, 2017). The reordering of the world, as a result of digitalisation, is forcing professional groupings to reconsider their characteristics and their form; requiring them to review whether they are fit for purpose, fit for this world, fit for this period in time (Susskind and Susskind, 2015).

However, as Bahr et al., in an examination of professionalism in medical education in the digital age point out, ‘scholars in this area agree on many points, but there currently is a lack of common and cohesive characterization of digital professionalism’ (2017, p.65) and this, I too believe, as they go on to suggest, is more than just a matter of semantics. Their work supports the fundamental argument underpinning this work, that there is a need to better understand and address the impacts of more recent technological innovation for social work; in relation to both education and practices in the field. Calls for research that questions how ‘social work education prepares graduates for practice in a world that is increasingly dominated by technology’ (McAuliffe and Nipperess, 2017, p.133) continue to be made (Zgoda and Shane, 2018) and provide further evidence that the rationale for this study was not misplaced.

To further situate the use of the term digital professionalism in this work, knowledge is drawn from and reference is made to its use across human service professional groupings; those that have already moved to describe practice requirements and professional behaviours in the connected age. Interpretations vary and are context and discipline specific. For example, within the medical profession digital professionalism has been linked to ‘proficiency, reputation and responsibility’ (Ellaway et al., 2015, p.844), whilst in nursing it is related to ‘competence and values’ (Jones et

al., 2016, p.1639). Whereas the field of physiotherapy takes a more pragmatic approach, urging practitioners to ‘reconceptualize how existing standards apply online’ (Gagnon and Sabus, 2015, p.409).

1.3 Professional requirements

At the time of study design social work in England had not formally or overtly conflated the term digital with the term professional within the requirements for education and practice. It is however worth pausing to point out that during this time social work education in England was in a state of flux; calls for an overhaul of social work education were again being made (Wilson and Kelly 2010a). Indeed, it could be argued that for a protracted period of time this had been the case, due to what Taylor and Bogo describe as an ongoing tension, placed at the feet of educators:

To manage the modernist perspective of seeking to demonstrate attainment of measurable outcomes and the postmodernist perspective of seeking to innovate and be responsive to changing developments (2014, p.1415).

It was tensions of this kind that contributed to the commissioning of two independent reviews of social work education in England. These reviews, in very different ways and albeit with very different tones, identified a number of problems with the education of social work students. One such problem was the raft of requirements governing social work education in England. Each report acknowledges the difficulties that a circumstance such as this poses when trying to establish a consistent response to what are complex and often competing regulatory and societal demands (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014). Interestingly, neither report paid any attention to the digital shift, which is surprising given the currency of the subject matter and the increasingly complex impact this is having upon the social world, social need

and therefore social work. Regardless of this and these reports, the business of educating social workers continued.

For the purposes of clarity, it is the requirements of the regulating bodies, the Quality Assurances Association (QAA) and the Health Care Professionals Council (HCPC), that will be referred to throughout this work. It is these requirements that education providers are accountable to and these same requirements that students are expected to demonstrate to be able to register with the regulator on completion of their course. The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), utilised widely in social work education as a framework for assessing practice readiness, will not be referred to. At present, the PCF does not hold the same regulatory prominence in the governing and monitoring of an educational offer nor does it preside over the HCPC standards in instances where there are practice concerns (The College of Social Work, 2012). Whilst the British Association of Social Work (BASW), the independent professional association for social work in the UK, are the current ‘guardians’ of the PCF (BASW, 2018, np), it is yet to be made clear whether the new regulator for social work in England will adopt this capabilities framework, as it stands.

The HCPC, in The Standards for Education and Training, outline that the standards they set are:

The threshold standards we consider necessary to protect members of the public. They set out what a student must know, understand and be able to do by the time they have completed their training, so that they are able to apply to register (2012, p.3).

As mentioned, even though the requirements in place at the time of study design had not conflated the term digital with the term professional, they had within them a number of

technology related, or digitally relatable expectations (QAA, 2008; HCPC, 2012; HCPC, 2014). Firstly, the Benchmark Statements, which describe how:

The implications of modern information and communications technology (ICT) for both the provision and receipt of services (QAA, 2008 p. 9),

must be made clear to students engaged with social work education. Also, that:

Approaches to support blended learning should include the use of ICT to access data, literature and resources, as well as engagement with technologies to support communication and reflection and sharing of learning across academic and practice learning settings (QAA, 2008, p.15);

and that on qualification:

Graduates in social work should be able to use ICT methods and techniques to support their learning and their practice. In particular, they should demonstrate the ability to use ICT effectively for professional communication, data storage and retrieval and information searching. Use ICT in working with people who use services. Integrate appropriate use of ICT to enhance skills in problem-solving; have a critical understanding of the social impact of ICT, including an awareness of the impact of the 'digital divide (QAA, 2008, p14-15).

In addition to the Benchmark Statements listed above are the requirements set out by the professional regulator within the Standards of Proficiency (HCPC, 2012) and the Standards for Education and Training (HCPC, 2014). The Standards of Proficiency as mentioned, 'set out what a student must know, understand and be able to do by the time they have completed their training, so that they are able to apply to register' (HCPC, 2012, p.3). Specific to this study, that they should 'be able to demonstrate a level of skill in the use of information technology appropriate to their practice' (HCPC, 2012, p.13). Alongside this are the Standards for Education and Training that require courses to provide resources such as 'information technology (IT), virtual learning environments and other specialist programmes (HCPC, 2014, p.23). The regulator states that these 'learning resources, including IT facilities, must be appropriate to the

curriculum and must be readily available to students and staff' (p.25) and that the 'curriculum must remain relevant to current practice' reflecting 'developments in a profession's research base and advances in technology' (HCPC, 2014, p.37).

It was the QAA (2008) and the HCPC (2012; 2014) requirements, since updated (QAA, 2016; HCPC, 2017a; HCPC, 2017b), that will have informed the educational experience that this study examines (Appendix 1). The content of these requirements, whilst not fully reflective of definitions of literacies in the digital age (JISC, 2014a), will have been designed to equip students with the knowledge and capabilities deemed to be relevant for learning and for practice in the field. Even though references to the digital within the professional requirements are limited, it was assumed that the students participating in this study will have had experiences of a digital kind. This assumption relates to the regulatory expectation that social work curriculum must reflect the realities of the social world (HCPC, 2014). Also, due to how university systems had already been digitalised (e.g. UCAS; Course Enrolment), learning environments involved exposure to digital tools (e.g. Virtual Learning Spaces; Online Library; Attendance Scan; Timetabling Apps) and because practice placement experiences were increasingly becoming digitally infused (e.g. Case Recording Systems; Audio Video Call Systems; Mobile Text Communications).

Despite the dominance of the term 'Information Communication Technologies' (ICTs) within the professional requirements (QAA, 2008; HCPC, 2012; HCPC, 2014), it was also envisaged that study participants would be able to make connections between the phenomenon under examination, 'digital development', as linked to becoming digitally professional, and their educational experiences. In addition to the infrastructure and processes in higher education that require students to engage with a range of new and emerging digital type technologies and digital tools, were the 2014

UK statistics for internet usage that showed a steady and significant rise in the percentage of the population engaged with the digital (ONS, 2014). It was assumed that social work students will have formed part of that population and would therefore be in possession of knowledge relating to the digital shift. Therefore, the term digital development is employed throughout this study to contextualise the experience of becoming a digital professional. Also, given that development is the aim of the socialising process through which students emerge, and because of the significance of the digital in the social world. A world that Livingstone accurately describes as being ‘inextricably linked with interactive, networked, remixable and ubiquitous media’ (2016, np).

1.4 Situating preparedness

Regardless of the content of the professional requirements or debating definitions, it is important, given how 21st century technological change is shaping the world and people’s experience of it, that social work students are equipped for, and, understand practice in a digitally saturated world. Furthermore, as academics with a responsibility for educating the profession for that world, that we reflect regularly on the educational experiences that we craft, in this respect (SWTF, 2009). Propositions such as these, as already mentioned, are not new to the profession (Glastonbury and LaMendola, 1992; LaMendola, 2010; Perron et al., 2010; McAuliffe and Nipperess, 2017) but ones that appear to have gone largely unheeded, or at the very least been misunderstood (Rafferty, 2014 in Westwood, 2014). As acknowledged by Croisdale-Appleby, in his ‘Re-Visioning Social Work Education: An Independent Review’ the world continues to move on, or as he explains it ‘is changing so quickly and the pace of that change is increasing’ (2014, p.4). Integral to this is technological change which is being

experienced, individually and collectively, in extraordinary ways. Social work as a profession is not immune to this.

Students enter into social work education having been assessed as possessing the attributes necessary for engagement with a programme of learning, set to expose them to the knowledge, skills and values of the profession (Moriarty, et al., 2011; HCPC, 2014). The professional training of social work students has traditionally involved a suite of incremental learning activities, classroom and practice-based experiences and assessments, designed to assist students to acquire and subsequently demonstrate practice proficiency. This facilitated learning trajectory in social work, known collectively as ‘professional socialisation’ (Miller, 2013, p.368) has, like digitalisation, been largely overlooked (Valutis et al., 2011; Fook et al., 2007; Miller, 2010; Wilson, 2013). As a process, professional socialisation can be likened to theories of child development, that explain socialisation as intrinsically linked to how a specific community imparts to new members the norms, values and beliefs of a group, for membership of it (Gorsuch et al., 1972). Valutis et al., (2011) and in more recent times Leigh (2014) and Webb (2017), associate the term with professional identity, practice readiness and the mechanisms through which beliefs about ‘becoming’ and being a social worker are formed (Fook et al., 2007, p.5).

Irrespective of the frequent amendments made to the requirements for social work education in England (Wiles, 2017) there remains an expectation that students will be socialised through an educational experience that renders them practice prepared (Moriarty, et al., 2010). Informed by Benchmark Statements (QAA,2008), the Standards of Proficiency (HCPC, 2012) and the Standards for Education and Training (HCPC, 2014), social work education is tasked with constructing a context within which

professionalism can be achieved. Curriculum design, content and delivery of programme providers is periodically reviewed; evaluations of appropriateness and robustness are inextricably linked to the idea of practice preparedness (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996; HCPC, 2014), or practice readiness as it is sometimes known (Grant, et al., 2017). Despite this, scepticism about the overall effectiveness of social work education in England remains; concerns that, as mentioned, in more recent times generated two independent reviews, aimed at reporting on its overall efficacy (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014). Each review, to be revisited throughout this work, served only to widen opinion about the best way of preparing students for practice; with the findings reigniting debates about what it would take for students to feel ‘properly prepared’ (Frost, et al., 2012, p.329). Even though research indicates ‘that there are no simple truths about what constitutes readiness to practice’ (Pithouse and Scourfield, 2002, p.8), the expectation is that readiness will be facilitated and that it will subsequently occur (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014).

Set within a backdrop of austerity, social change and soaring social need (Hood and Waters, 2017) studies such as this create an opportunity to add to ‘the little... [that is] known about the professional socialisation of social workers’ (Miller, 2013, p.368). Inseparable from this is the relationship between an educator's preparedness (SWTF, 2009) (a point that will be returned to later) and the preparedness of students; an issue of particular relevance when considering the conditions within which professionalism is more likely to be achieved (Leigh, 2017b). References to preparedness in this work are rooted in social work education and the learning experiences through which student capabilities are both acquired and assessed.

As noted, there remains a longstanding debate about ‘the extent to which professional qualifying programmes prepare students to make the transition into the workplace... [and] limited consensus about how to measure this reliably and objectively’ (Moriarty et al., 2011, p.1340). Questionable therefore is the expectation (Narey, 2014) that ‘preparedness’ (Grant et al., 2017, p.488) within the education context transfers easily and naturally into the workplace. Indeed, the work of Le Maistre and Paré (2004) shows how ‘the often difficult transition between the two’ (p.44) can lead to a reduction in practitioner confidence and in turn, practice effectiveness (Boud and Solomon, 2001; Moore and Morton, 2017). Effectiveness in this study relates to the preparedness of students to practice in a digitally saturated world, one in which almost everyone and everything is ‘connected’ (Scardilli, 2014, p.1).

1.5 Social work online

Until more recently the act of being online or connecting online was mainly an autonomous choice. Increasingly however, individual autonomy is being eroded, through mediating technologies, automation and the complete replacement of services that at one time would only have been possible face to face (Ford, 2017). The changes, mentioned in brief, form part of the UK’s digital ‘shift’, a process that will, by the year 2020, see all essential government services ‘digital by default’ (Government Digital Service, 2016, np). Given that the infrastructure for internet access across the UK is described as ‘poor’ (Ofcom, 2014, p.2) and that the digital literacy of the general populace is said to be in ‘crisis’ (HoCSTC, 2016, p.3), it is safe to assume that the transition to online services will be, for a significant number, difficult to achieve. Indeed, the robustly researched film ‘I Daniel Blake’ (Lavery, 2016) illustrates how those already marginalised are likely to be further disenfranchised due to limited internet access and a lack of digital skills. Therefore, describing digitalisation as a mere

shift is disproportionate to the actual and potential impacts of it. The people most affected and the circumstances they find themselves within, will inevitably require and seek support from organisations and practitioners, providing further rationale for why social workers need to ensure that they are digitally minded and digitally equipped. These organisations and indeed practitioners will, at the very least, need to be able to demonstrate the abilities necessary ‘to participate in a range of critical and creative practices that involve understanding, sharing and creating meaning with different kinds of technology’ (Hague, 2010, p.3).

A very basic web search reveals the presence, visibility and connectedness of social work online. However, as yet, this inhabitancy does not consistently mirror what is regarded as professionalism offline (BASW, 2013; HCPC, 2017a). A notable rise in the number of qualified practitioners being called to account by the professional regulator for their conduct online evidences this (McGregor, 2011; Stevenson, 2014; Schraer, 2015). These wrongdoings have included the sharing of opinions in, what seemed to be perceived as, private online spaces (Attrill, 2015). These circumstances raise questions about professionalism, and why this core professional characteristic was not, on these occasions, translated into the online. Moreover, they indicate a concerning lack of understanding of the nuances of technologies and the abilities needed in the protection of service-users from unnecessary harm directly related to the digital age. Furthermore, and more importantly, they suggest a persisting disconnect between professional socialisation and the idea of practice preparedness, in a digital respect (Rafferty, 1997; Rafferty, 2014 in Westwood, 2014).

Social work has historically been at odds or has had as Baker et al. describe it, a ‘turbulent’ relationship (2014, p.468) with the role of machines, in what are intrinsically

human services (Rafferty, 1997; Hill and Shaw, 2011; Mattison, 2012). Negative perceptions of technologies in practice and an accompanying resistance, are a direct result of the misemployment of tools originally intended to complement and support the work (Sapey, 1997; Baker et al., 2014). This technocratic deployment of technologies has hindered the development of the attitudes necessary for practitioners to explore the potential opportunities that technologies present (Peckover et al., 2008). More recently and in addition to this, is the rapidity of digitalisation, which introduces another dimension to the complex coupling of social work and technologies. Of concern, is how familiar social issues such as sexual abuse, bullying, racism, addiction and stalking, increasingly manifest in more challenging forms when new social media type technologies are involved. This again brings into sharp focus the need for the profession to re-evaluate its capacity to respond to practice issues of the digital age. As Baker et al. (2014) posit, the time has come for social work to ‘overcome its historical reluctance to embrace ICT if it is to remain relevant in the era of the network society’ (p.467). Responding in this context relates to this idea of preparedness and how the profession is attending to the digital knowledge gaps that clearly exist (Taylor, 2017).

1.6 Facilitating preparedness

As outlined in brief, the preparedness of the profession is the primary occupation of social work education. Whilst acknowledging that ‘it is impossible to impart every piece of knowledge students need to become an effective practitioner’ (Aye Loya and Klemm, 2016, p.518), the expectation that students will be adequately prepared for practice presides (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014). In the main, as noted, this expectation is guided by the QAA for higher education and the HCPC, in respect of curriculum design, content and delivery (QAA, 2008; HCPC, 2012; HCPC, 2014). Despite recent changes to the regulatory requirements for social work education and

practice (QAA, 2016; HCPC, 2017a; HCPC, 2017b) there remains a distinct lack of clarity about what constitutes digital professionalism in the connected age. Therefore, the preparedness of the profession to address, manage and contain social need, in what is being referred to as the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' or 4IR (Schwab, 2017, p.3), requires further thought. Central to this is a critical understanding of the subtleties of the digital shift and what this means for the social world and therefore the social in social work (LaMendola, 1987 & 2010). The preparedness of social work education and social work educators to develop this kind of thinking and the associated skills, is fundamental to this (Fang et al., 2014).

Technologies are often embedded into higher education and institutional practices with an uncritical acceptance of pedagogic value and learning gain (Livingstone, 2004; Lea and Jones, 2011; Hitchcock and Young, 2016). It is therefore unsurprising that educators have struggled to embrace the affordances of new technologies and the digital shift (Ofsted, 2009). Indeed, it was experiences of this nature that led to the authoring of a book (Appendix 2.) for an educational developer who had created a visual model of digital pedagogy, aimed at appraising technology deployment within the further education domain. Writing all six chapters of *The Learning Wheel: A Model of Digital Pedagogy* (Kellsey and Taylor, 2016), midway through this study, provided me with a more focussed opportunity to further consider educator preparedness, aligned with the development of technology-infused learning experiences for students, as part of this shift. A review of the learning landscape confirmed a suspected disconnect between the educational methods in use and those required for participatory citizenship and meaningful employment opportunities in the connected world. Furthermore, it highlighted the speed at which the digital shift is taking place and the need for educationalists to re-examine how, or indeed if, the

educational experiences they craft prepare learners adequately for life and work in a digitally saturated world.

Social work education and its responsibility to educate the profession, is part of this. Hence examining students' experiences of digital development seemed like the most authentic way of considering what the professional regulators loosely define should occur, with what is reported to have been experienced by this student group. It was my belief that understanding this would in turn help to reveal what might need to occur if social work is to respond authoritatively to the challenges of 21st century social need; given both the complexity of need and the speed at which new and unfamiliar needs are transpiring. This phenomenographic study was realised with all of the above in mind.

1.7 Examining Preparedness

Unlike phenomenology, phenomenography does not seek to 'study the phenomenon per se', instead the researcher aims to 'investigate how (a group of) people experience... the phenomenon' (Larsson and Holmström, 2007, p.62). The unit of analysis in phenomenographic research 'is a way of experiencing something and the object of the research is variation in ways of experiencing something' (Marton and Booth, 1997, p.111). In an educational context, as explained by Andretta:

Phenomenography, focuses on how students relate to what they are taught and how they make use of knowledge they already possess. Learning, from this perspective, encapsulates the experience of the learner-world relationship which reflects people's interpretation of significant aspects of the learning process (2007, p.154).

In keeping with this relational research approach, this study was designed to identify qualitative variation in students' experiences of digital development, and to understand

how these experiences aligned with the idea of preparedness for practice in the connected age. It is set within the context of social work education, as the conduit through which practice readiness is assumed to be achieved. Attention is paid to 21st century change, the speed of said change and in particular, the way in which the digital shift is reshaping sociality (LaMendola, 2010; Fuchs, 2017) and thereafter social need.

The participants, 11 finalists, enrolled on a social work programme at a single university in England, were invited to reflect upon their professional education, in an attempt to produce data that would reveal the kinds of digital development that had been experienced and qualitative differences in the way it had been experienced (Marton, 1981). Within the context of this study, curriculum content equates to everything and everyone a student is exposed to throughout the duration of their training; socialising influences, synthesised in a way that should maximise the opportunity for professionalism to occur (Latour, 2005). Therefore, this study seeks to reveal variation in:

1. *Social work students' experiences of digital development, throughout the duration of their professional training*
- and
2. *How digital development was perceived to have been facilitated, or how conceptions of digital professionalism were formed*

from the student point of view.

As noted, an assumption was made, based on the content of the professional requirements at the point of design (QAA, 2008; HCPC, 2012; HCPC, 2014) and given that the study was carried out in, what could be regarded as, a digitally saturated learning environment (Coe Regan and Freddolino, 2008; Boardman, 2013), that exposure to and learning about technologies in some form would have occurred. The

degree to which social work students are exposed to new technologies or to information about the impacts of these technologies on the social world, relating to the notion of preparedness for practice, is not reported within the literature. The findings therefore provide an original contribution to knowledge, by reporting variation in experiences of digital development, through engagement with social work education, for a group of students preparing to practice in the digital age. They will be of value to what Taylor and Bogo refer to as a 'scant' literature base, one that has involved itself in a critical analysis of social work education in England (2014, p.1403). Here, however, this work is undertaken, even more importantly, from the student point of view.

The following section provides an outline of each of the thesis chapters.

1.8 Thesis outline

Chapter 1 has introduced this research study, offering insights into why this work is relevant and why particularly now. It situates social work within the context of digitalisation and raises questions about the profession's capacity to respond to 21st century social need, especially when the requirements for social work education and practice could be viewed as lagging behind. Comment was made about the role of social work education, as the socialising system through which students' progress, whilst acknowledging the debates about its robustness that continue to rage. The idea of practice preparedness was introduced, as a means to considering what, in the digital age, this might involve.

Chapter 2 begins with a prologue, an overview of an existential journey that contextualises a struggle with the notion of preparedness. Following on a story of social work is told, from the perspective of an insider researcher, with an interest in the digital shift. The construct of story is used due to the various people that have claimed a stake in telling the story of social work and because this has not overly involved social work itself. The point that once professionally prepared, social work and newly qualified social work students can use new technologies to retell its story, is made. It looks back, through the literature, as a means to going forward so that social works history with technologies can be contextualised in line with the current digital shift.

Chapter 3 provides the rationale for why phenomenography was the most appropriate approach for examining the contribution social work education makes to the digital professionalism of social work students, in preparation for practice in the connected age. It provides an overview of the methodology, the methods and the maps used in the execution of this study, to elucidate meanings. These were analysed using the highly iterative phenomenographic approach to data, in an attempt to inform the professional standards and pedagogic approaches employed to facilitate preparedness for social work practice in a digital world. The unit of analysis in this study is students' conceptions or accounts of digital development. The focus of the analysis is an examination of qualitative variation in the ways students describe it to have been experienced. The methods and the maps used to gather data and the meanings students attributed to their experiences are explained and the challenges are acknowledged.

Chapter 4, in keeping with the phenomenographic approach, outlines the findings of this study. It provides a lens through which to consider students' experiences of digital development in social work education, from the students' point of view. Whilst phenomenographic analysis focusses on the collective experience, context is offered through a brief analysis of the

experiences that foregrounded the experiences that students ‘brought to the course’. This approach was aimed at offering a backdrop to the interpretation of the data. Staying as faithful as is possible to the student voice was important throughout. The analysis is structured, as per the phenomenographic approach, into categories of description and an outcome space. A discussion of the findings is woven into the fabric of the analysis, in an attempt to provide a more coherent picture of what was found and the significance of this in these complex and fast moving digital times. Informed by the findings, and in absence of evidence about how development of a digital nature is being accommodated across social work education in England, a framework for digital development in social work education is presented.

Chapter 5 concludes this thesis, with a summary of the study, recommendations about the way forward and suggestions for future research. An epilogue is included for the purposes of highlighting how the use of new social type technologies can support research impact, through knowledge exchange, when this exchange is in the open and in real time.

2 CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT & LITERATURE

PROLOGUE

This brief inclusion is a snapshot of the socialising experiences that led me to become a social work practitioner, an educator and more recently an insider researcher. It forms part of the articulation of my positionality in relation to this study and acknowledges that:

‘Every inquiry is guided beforehand by what is sought’

(Heidegger, 1962, p. 24).

Positioning preparedness

Spending the formative years of my life in the ‘Troubled Northern Ireland’ (Kapur and Campbell, 2005), a socialising experience peppered with conflict, left me with a less than normative view of difference. Difference, in that context, was used divisively, leading to a form of ‘othering’ (McManus, 2017, p.412) that posed a risk to anyone brave enough to present a challenge. Conformity prevailed over choice and choice came in two forms. It was my inability to choose, my refusal to conform and my search for coequality that eventually led me to a career in social work.

I began my professional training with what, I quickly learnt, were fairly idealistic expectations about the idea of ‘becoming’ a practitioner (Scanlon, 2011, p.13). I imagined myself, as the literature seemed to suggest, somehow surfacing from this socialising experience a fait accompli... or as Agllias explains ‘prepared’ (2010, p.345). However, on qualification, feelings of preparedness somewhat eluded me. I soon discovered that these feelings were not unique to me, that in fact they were felt in varying degrees across the graduate population (Wilson and Kelly, 2010a; Munro, 2011). To understand this further I involved myself with the development of practice-based education. The more involved I became, the more my interest in professional socialisation of students in readiness for practice, linked to this idea of preparedness, grew.

The limitations of my practice role to effect change in this area led me to social work education. The socialising experience that followed reunited me with the notion of preparedness, in the form of what is known within the echelons of higher education as ‘imposter syndrome’ (Hutchins, 2015, p.3). Despite the discomfort felt, this experience helped me to become familiar with what it means to be or to become within higher education and to appreciate the nuances of professional socialisation more specifically. More recently, ‘Actor Network Theory’ (Latour, 2005) gave me the analytical lens through which to examine my

experiences. I became acutely aware of the significance of context, and of material things when considering influences within social work education and social work practice, that contribute to or hinder the functioning of an organisation (Leigh, 2014; Leigh, 2017b), a network (Latour, 2005) or a system. One such influence that stood out as significant was digitalisation and it is this that I have set out to better understand.

Like Northern Ireland and similar to my experiences of being a practitioner, an educator and indeed a student, the profession of social work has been troubled by conflict, internal and external, linked to perceptions of 'preparedness' (Agllias, 2010, p.345; Yu et al., 2016, p.415). Attempts to hold and manage the manifestations of social need often lead to social work being damned when it does and damned when it does not (Dingwall et al., 1983). The voice of the profession has historically been discredited, by mass media who, more often than not, dominate the discourse (Warner, 2014). New technologies however pose a threat to this dominance, in that they make available mediums through which social work can tell its story and tell it from within (Stanfield and Beddoe, 2016). Significant however and central to this study, is the preparedness of the profession to respond. Therefore, preparedness is once again to the forefront of my mind and this time it is linked to digitalisation and what this might mean for social work education and social work practice, in the connected age. This study is evidence of my evolving preparedness, a commitment to the preparedness of the students with whom I engage and a contribution to the preparedness of the profession as a whole.

2.1 The story of social work; as told from within

Social work has historically grappled to define, and at times to justify, what it is and what it does (Bartlett, 1958; Higgins et al., 2014; Higgins, 2015), which is hardly surprising given the complexity of the lived experience and therefore the task. The story of social work has largely been told from outside of the profession, in the form of ‘media constructed discourse’ (Westwood, 2012, p.138) often fabricated to evoke the types of panic (Cohen, 1972; Dempsey et al., 2001) that agitate and disrupt (Hall et al., 1978). An ‘uneasy relationship’ is how Stanfield and Beddoe describe social work’s relationship with the mass media (2016, p.284). There is therefore a sizeable gulf between the actuality of social work and how it is perceived (Ferguson, 2007); a void that is set to continue unless the essence of the role is articulated in accessible, relatable and digestible terms. Calls for clarity of purpose typically follow profound or tragic events (Ferguson, 2017), so called practice failings that now include errors of the digital kind (Dempsey et al., 2001; Schraer, 2015; Stevenson, 2014; McNicoll, 2016; Stevenson, 2016a; Stevenson, 2016b).

Relevant to this are significant changes to the format of information and more particularly information exchange. The facilities for creating and sharing information in the 21st century offer a more democratic means of redressing the narrative imbalance that exists. Web 2.0 ‘offers opportunities for the social work profession to move away from the constraints of traditional media’ where the ‘voice of social work has often felt muted or absent’ (Stanfield and Beddoe, 2016, p.284). The shift away from a predominantly ‘paper-based society’ to a ‘technology-based internet society’ (Susskind and Susskind, 2015, p.2) provides the profession with a tangible opportunity to tell its story and to tell it from within.

Anecdotal evidence however, drawn from observations on social media platforms such as Twitter, indicate that this has yet to occur (Ballantyne, 2018). Indeed, to date there has been an inordinate amount of inept online exchanges, or ‘spats’ as Leigh (2017a, np) describes them, leading to wide reaching disagreements, which have been instrumental in fuelling both professional dissent and public mistrust. Coinciding with this is the aforementioned rise in the number of qualified practitioners being called to account by the professional regulator, for their conduct online (McGregor, 2011; Stevenson, 2014; Schraer, 2015); behaviours that served to compound rather than to address the lack of confidence in the profession that is said to exist (Lord Laming, 2003; DCSF, 2009).

Particularly useful to thinking about why this has occurred and how it might be redressed, is the work of Marwick and boyd (2010) who use the term ‘context collapse’ to explain how ‘multiple audiences... [in the online can] flatten into one’ (p.122). They discuss, that when within the undifferentiated space, that it can be ‘difficult for people to use the same techniques’ they would, to successfully communicate and navigate relationality offline and evidence how ‘self-censorship’ can therefore be employed to mediate interactions online (Marwick and boyd, 2010, p.124; Reamer, 2017; Boddy and Dominelli, 2017). Whilst the use of self (Varley, 1968; Howe, 2008), relationships (Reynolds and Reynolds, 1942; Boehm, 1958) and effective communication (Hearn, 1958; Koprowska, 2008) are not new to social work, the digital errors described above show how this knowledge and associated skills are not routinely applied when practitioners present online. This lack of translation is leading to instances where the privacy and ethical considerations central to professional practice are being misconstrued, disregarded or on some occasions, completely overlooked (Turner, 2016). These gaps in professional application reflect how as a society, we have ‘become

critically dependant on a technology that is poorly understood’ (Naughton, 2012, p.10). Equally, how as end users we have yet to fully recognise or ‘reason... risk and responsibility’ when active online (Busby et al., 2015, p.5).

All of the above highlights the dangers of assuming that personal usage of new technologies is synonymous with usage in the professional sphere. Therefore, before the profession of social work moves on to fully exploit the affordances of new technologies, it is important to ascertain why digital knowledge gaps across the profession exist (Taylor, 2017) and to consider the implications if this is allowed to persist. Without this type of reflexive pause it is likely that the profession will continue to ‘unwittingly transgress whilst using... [digital technologies], thereby extending social work’s traditionally unfavourable relationship with the media’ and more importantly with the public it serves (Turner, 2016, p.315).

The reputation of any profession is constructed and reconstructed through what is communicated about it, by whom and via which means. Social work like any other professional grouping is ‘an organised group that is constantly interacting with the society which creates its matrix’ (Greenwood, 1957, p.45). In current terms, information, perceptions or stories reach a much wider audience, at a much greater speed due to the connectivity of the populace, through media designed for communicating in the digital age (Berger and Milkman, 2013; Goel et al., 2015; Klous and Wielaard, 2016). In the main however and as already mentioned ‘social workers... have not told their... stories’ (Burnard, 2016, p.2). Therefore, the story of social work, from the profession’s perspective, is waiting to be told or retold.

Until that time, it relies upon descriptions such as this from the International Federation for Social Work (IFSW) who explain social work as a ‘practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people’, informed by the ‘principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities that are central to social work’. All of which are ‘underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, in a manner that ‘engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing’ (IFSW, 2014, np). Insofar as this rich description provides an overview of the context and the task, it does not mirror the perceptions, opinions or at times the experiences of the general populace for whom the profession exists.

Yet this was not always the case, as noted by Bartlett (1970) and Ferguson (2011), whose work includes reference to the respect and value that social workers were once accorded for the work that they did, a view substantiated more recently by Leigh (2017b) who reminds us of a ‘time (in the 1900s) when social workers in Britain were considered by members of the public as inspirational practitioners’ (p.1). Much however has changed, with the failings of some evoking ‘repudiation and vilification’ (Leigh, 2017b, p.3) of others and on occasion, the profession as a whole. The picture however is a complicated one, located within the social and economic issues of each particular period in time and the means that social work has at its disposal to respond. Thus, digitalisation can be thought of as both a problem and a solution for social work in this current period of time.

Uncertain and fluid best describe the practice landscape, that is the places and spaces in which the work occurs, because as the essence of social structures change so

too do the characteristics of social need (Lin, 2002). Payne has consistently called for the profession to take a more ‘social constructionist’ approach to thinking about what it is and what it does, contextualised within ideas of ‘social change and social need’ given how each define and ‘redefine’ the other (2006, p.2). Situated between the people and the state, social work is a fluid construct, not solely the problem nor the solution, but the medium through which inequity of experience is considered and where possible redressed. The possibility of stability in social work, or indeed social life, is a delusion that perpetuates anxiety and fear, because it is within the most unstable of places and spaces, during the most vulnerable of times, that social work and people have cause to engage. It would be reasonable to describe the current state of online spaces as unstable places, particularly given the frequency with which risks unfold (O’Brien, 2018).

Digitalisation, like every other industrial revolution before it (Freeman and Louca, 2001) adds another layer to this. In addition to the ways that pre-existing social issues are manifesting in unfamiliar forms, are the ‘unintended consequences’ of internet use (Burbules, 2018, p.9); a range of circumstances of which individuals, groups or communities have been known to fall foul when active or present online. The likelihood and the ramifications of this are difficult to predict. Nonetheless, as noted above:

Social work is inevitably defined by the social contexts in which it is practised and therefore requires practitioners who are able to respond to these ever-changing social contexts with knowledge, skills and professional integrity (McNay et al., 2012, p.89).

It is for this reason that social work students increasingly require opportunities to critique the current and emergent nature of 21st century social need, so that they can feel better prepared to engage with individuals, groups and communities as they each

become even more submerged in new technologies and the issues that these create (LaMendola, 2010).

Again, this brings into sharp focus the significance of social work education and its role in educating students for their future, because it is students who will ultimately take the story of social work forward and, as educators, it is we who bear the responsibility of equipping 'students with a strong sense of confidence and competence, as well as the flexibility to grow, change and learn as their roles and tasks are constantly redefined' (Dempsey et al., 2001, p.632). A strong sense of agency is necessary if future practitioners are to shape professional practices and to ensure that those practices are ethical, current and appropriate to their time.

The following section of this chapter discusses how social work became a profession, the tensions this has caused and the mechanisms through which professionalisation is brought about.

2.2 Professional socialisation; a means to what end

The professionalisation of social work in England stems back to the early 1900s, a time that saw the establishment of the Joint University Council for Social Studies (JUCSS) set up to ‘coordinate and develop the work of Social Studies departments in Universities across Great Britain’ (Davis, 2008). It was thought that ‘if social work... [was] going to take its place, as surely it ought to, as one of the professions, it was necessary to organize a system of training for it’ (Muirhead, 1925 in Macadam, 1925, np). However, given the nature of social work, traditional notions of professionalism, such as ‘authority, prestige, dominance and power’ (Evetts, 2011, p.414), have not sat easily alongside the value base and therefore have been the subject of much debate (Fook et al., 2007).

The recent work of Thompson, captures the essence of these debates through a helpful critique of the ‘professionalization agenda’ (2016, p.xviii). He outlines the reasons why ‘anti-professionalism’ emerged and highlights the implications of social work rejecting professionalism in any form. Whilst acknowledging the relevance of previous debates, Thompson argues for ‘a new form of professionalism based on principles of partnership and empowerment rather than elitism’ (2016, p.xx). This alternative view of professionalism, ‘authentic professionalism’ (p.193) he explains simply... as ‘being committed to social work as a profession (in terms of professional knowledge, values, skills and accountability)’ (p.xxii). If the integrity of social work is to be maintained then the parameters of professionalism need to be regularly reframed, to ensure that as a profession social work is current, purposive, and of the time. Furthermore, that it is professionalising students to practice in ways appropriate to addressing practice needs (Beaumont et al., 2017). As Williams eloquently explains, for social work to ‘to lead in this century... [it] must be of this century’ (2016, in Robbins

et al., 2016, p.388) and in being of this century social work education must create socialising experiences that are fit for this century, fit for this time.

Professional socialisation is the process from which individuals new to a profession emerge, having acquired the characteristics, knowledge, values, beliefs and skills particular to a professional group. It involves an educational experience in which students are exposed to learning and experiences that provide them with opportunities to become professional and to evidence that they have acquired the necessary capabilities that render them practice prepared (Mishna et al., 2012). Whilst established in Medicine (Lindberg, 2009); Nursing (Stacey et. al 2016; Guay et al., 2016), Occupational Therapy (Sabari, 1985) and Teaching (Maloney, 2013), professional socialisation in social work is not well documented, nor according to Leigh (2014) particularly well understood. This point is evidenced in the work of Weiss et al. whose review of pertinent literature found little in the way of ‘solid conclusions regarding the role of social work education in the professional socialization process’ (2004, in Miller, 2010, p.925). Given the pressure on social work education to prepare students sufficiently for practice it is surprising, if not concerning, that reference to the socialising process is not much more present within the research or within academic debates (Barretti, 2004).

Whilst the QAA define ‘the minimum academic standards required at the point of qualification’ (2016, p.6), they make no direct reference to the term professional socialisation, or the pedagogic principles that inform socialisation in an education context. In fact, they leave it up to ‘individual higher education providers to decide how they use... [the] information’ they provide (QAA, 2008, p.2). More prescriptive are the requirements of the professional regulator, who set out ‘threshold standards... [those they] consider necessary to protecting members of the public’ (HCPC, 2012, p.2). The

regulatory body alludes to what are recognisable elements of professionalism in the ‘Standards of Proficiency’ (HCPC, 2012) and the ‘Standards for Education and Training’ (HCPC, 2014), but again the idea of professional socialisation, as the means to this end, is not explicitly addressed.

Implicit in the totality of the requirements is the need for social work education to create conditions in which professionalism can occur, but implicitness in regard to socialisation means that much is left to chance. Discreteness of this nature is not unique to England: social work education in the US has also suffered from a lack of clarity in this respect. That was until the Council for Social Work Education (CSWE) recognised that professional socialisation was not, within their standards, sufficiently addressed (Miller, 2013, p.368). However, the mere mention of professional socialisation alone is not enough. The fact is, as Miller explains, that:

The better developed the profession’s understanding of professional socialization becomes, the better prepared social work educators will be to facilitate the process for students and contribute intentionally to how that socialization evolves (2013, p.384).

Set within the context of digitalisation, social work education globally, like all other professional groupings (Susskind and Susskind, 2015) is at a juncture; one where it needs to consider not only professional socialisation, but the elements of it that would support development appropriate to practice in a digital world.

Integral to the development of professional practitioners is curriculum content, a vast body of knowledge, a range of people and an array of methods, shaped directly and indirectly by practice needs. The latter, practice need, relates to and involves people, places, spaces and things. As already mentioned, digitalisation, the term used to explain the integration of digital technologies into everyday life (Silverstone, 2016) is the most

recent thing to affect the social world and subsequently social work. Like each technological era before it, digitalisation is frequently described in polaric terms. Descriptions of this phenomenon oscillate between terms such as ‘affordance’ and ‘divide’ (Kitiyadisai, 2003, p.94), ‘potentials’ and ‘perversities’ (LaMendola, 2010, p.115), ‘optimistic’ and ‘pessimistic’ (Turner, 2016) or ‘potential’ and ‘peril’ (Schwab, 2017, p.2); until that is, integration has been achieved. The integration of new social type technologies into everyday life has been rapid, whereas in social work the same degree of assimilation has not yet occurred (Grebel and Steyaert, 1995; Perron et al., 2010). Indeed, the fusion of technologies of any kind into social work education and practice thereafter continues to be ‘troublesome’ (Meyer and Land, 2003, p.1).

If the Benchmark Statements mentioned above are to serve as an ‘external source of reference for... [academics designing professional programmes within] higher education institutions’ (QAA, 2008, p.2), then terms such as professional socialisation, that include reference to the digital, need to be made clear. This is also true for the standards set by the regulating body (HCPC, 2012) who in addition specify what is required of a practitioner on qualification, aligned to practice need. As noted, at the point of writing, the QAA for social work education had revised the Benchmarks Statements (QAA, 2016). However, within the updated content, references to digital do not fully reflect current descriptions of digital literacy or digital capabilities in use (Littlejohn et al., 2012; JISC, 2014a). Concerning therefore is the fact that this is the content to which social work education must now defer; and defer they do, according to Boddy and Dominelli (2017), who point out how academics rely on ‘dated codes of ethics’ to guide students’ understandings of the online world (p.173). In the absence of more accurate and specific guidance however there is little to leverage a move to improve.

The accurate interpretation of digitally relatable content within the Benchmark Statements (QAA, 2008; QAA, 2016) relies heavily on digitally minded academics, who possess equal amounts of digital knowledge and digital skill (Loughlin, 2017). Despite the steady rise in technology enhanced learning across social work education (for example: Ballantyne, 2008; Megele, 2014; Westwood, 2014; Hitchcock and Young, 2016) a sizable percentage of social work academics are ‘reticent to embrace’ the online world (Moore, 2008, p. 599). Comments such as, ‘I am a high-touch person, not a high-tech person’ and ‘I am a people person, not a tech person’ prevail (Robbins et al., 2016, p.391). Alongside the limitations of the Benchmark Statements and an unknowingness surrounding the digital literacies of educators (Larsen et al., 2008; Cooner, 2011) is the aforementioned rise in the number of practitioners being called to account for their behaviours and presence online. The reported incidents, deemed by the professional regulator to threaten and weaken public trust, are in themselves reason enough for social work education to review how it socialises students for practice in the connected age.

Aligned to this is the perception that social work students will enter the profession, post their initial training, fully equipped. This type of thinking is in part unrealistic, when practice itself is such a fluid entity. Indeed, ‘to expect that qualifying level training should fully prepare students for every practice situation they are likely to encounter post-qualification’ is idealistic (Wilson, 2013, p.604). It would be much more accurate to discuss initial social work training as foundational, a significant layer of an educational trajectory that continues, through a post-qualifying framework, based upon the idea of lifelong learning (Nissen et al., 2014). Embedding an ethos of this kind into the professional requirements would support educators to educate for the future and to consider practice preparedness in ongoing and future terms. Greenwood explains:

As is true of most social phenomena, the phenomenon of professionalism cannot be structured in clear-cut classes. Rather, we must think of occupations in a society as distributing themselves along a continuum (1957, p.45).

This is a view of professional socialisation that sees it as a means that does not and should not have ‘a natural end’. An approach of this kind would afford social work students with the opportunity to introject the concept of professional development as a continuum, avoiding perceptions of initial social work education as a sole qualifying event (Robinson, 1936). Practice failings, like the digital errors mentioned above, illuminate a flaw in the perception that students can be fully prepared for practice when the practice landscape continues to change.

Helpful to further realising digital development in social work education specifically, is a robust body of knowledge that urges educators across higher education more broadly to appraise the dominance of traditional teaching methods and, at the very least, consider those that better support learning and learners in the digital age (Sharpe and Beetham, 2010; Ferrari, 2012; Mohammadyari and Singh, 2015). The idea that ‘technology will not replace teachers but teachers who use technology will probably replace teachers who do not’ is not new (Clifford, 1987, p.9). This non-threatening, non-alarmist proposition from the late 1980s is useful for repositioning education, in an era that is right to question and challenge the role of the ‘expert’ (Susskind and Susskind, 2015, p.85). It encourages educators to rationalise the need for change and sits well with Gibson’s (1999) view of a, ‘future... [that] is now’ (np). It is this type of progressive thinking that is necessary if social work education is to socialise students sufficiently for life and for work in the digitalised world. As Coe Regan explains, ‘social work programs need to educate students for the future’ and accordingly ‘social work education will need to evolve to adapt to a new generation of students, faculty and technological advances’ (in Robbins et al., 2016, p.387-388).

Technological development is not new, nor will it end. Indeed, it has been central to the evolution and the many successes of the human race (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2012). The various ages and stages of what have largely been thought of as innovative advances, have not been without issue. Indeed, modernisation in its various forms has been met with a significant amount of resistance. The nature of innovation in the 21st century however appears to have taken on a radically different guise, in that it is said and can be seen to be shaping the lived experience in unprecedented ways (Juma, 2016). Again, social work and indeed higher education is not immune to this. The current trend to embed new technologies into higher education, regardless of the challenges of the past (Kreuger and Stretch, 2000), is principally helpful, given amongst other things the rapidity of the digital shift (Loughlin, 2017).

At the present time, within social work education, much appears to be left to chance. For example, current admissions arrangements, those that pay attention to digital literacies, amount to nothing more than a mere declaration, underwritten by the idea that ‘qualifications in IT are not required prior to entry’ onto a professional social work programme (Holmstrom, 2011, p.49). Holt and Rafferty previously argued against this type of approach to assessing literacy as part of admissions processes, stating that ‘experience of auditing student entry ICT skills through self-evaluation has shown that this is often unreliable and that there hasn’t been a good match between reported skill levels and those demonstrated in lab sessions... [and] that on occasions students have overestimated their skill base’ (2004, p.10).

What is also unclear is how digital knowledge, digital values and digital skills are formally facilitated, assessed, or, what form digital development takes within the socialising process that is a student’s learning journey. What is clear, is the limitedness

of the technology related content in the current professional requirements (QAA, 2008; HCPC, 2012; HCPC, 2014). Until information about current academic practices is made available, a possible extension of this study, it is difficult to fully forecast what is needed for preparedness to be facilitated in a manner that mirrors current and emerging practice needs. Assumptions made about the digital literacies of students at the point of entry into the profession and beyond, could possibly negate the learning potential available within the overall educational experience, pertaining to what is now emerging as a much more sophisticated skill set (JISC, 2014a). Therefore, instead of digital technologies being a force for good, in this circumstance, they could be creating unnecessary obstacles, based on assumptions and perceptions of abilities and skills, that are difficult to surmount (Abamu, 2017, np).

Associated with this are the digital capabilities and attitudes of educators, as mentioned above, and the impact that these can have in shaping student perceptions about the requirements of social work in the digital age. Currently, there is little if anything to suggest that the digital literacy of social work educators is formally developed, or subsequently assessed. Despite the fact that there is evidence to suggest that ‘social work educators have developed a number of examples of...blended learning approaches’ over the years (Cooner, 2011, p.315), literature spanning a thirty-year period shows this to be the exception rather than the rule (Rafferty, 1997). That being said, the work of Cooner in its own right is ground-breaking in this respect (2004; 2005; 2010; 2011; 2014). Regardless, over ten years later, it seems more relevant than ever to restate Holt and Rafferty because it appears that there remains a ‘need for social work teaching staff to consolidate their own ICT skills’ (2004, p.11), so that those of students can be addressed.

As technologies develop so to do the affordances and hindrances associated with them. The future of the social work profession (Susskind and Susskind, 2015) in the connected age rests upon the development of digitally informed standards and requirements, delivered by digitally equipped educators to students who will become digitally minded in terms of practice effectiveness. Comparing the central tenets of what is believed to be professional socialisation more generally, offers a lens through which to view digital socialisation more specifically. This involves an analysis of the complex system of ‘actants’ (Latour, 2005, p.55) that ideally coalesce to facilitate a socialising experience. This study aims to understand more about how these actants coalesce (Ballantyne, 2015) and what professional socialisation in the connected age might involve; so that we can be sure that digital professionalism to the degree required for practice effectiveness is possible to achieve.

The following section outlines, as far as the limits of this study permits, why social work needs to look back before going forward. It considers social work’s relationship with technologies and the calls for change, spanning a thirty-year period, that have been made.

2.3 Looking back; on going forward

As Schoech has written, within the important and timely piece ‘Human Services Technology, 1980 +: Retrospective and Perspective’, it is imperative to ‘explore where we have been in order to enhance our perspective of where we are going and what we must do to get there’ (2014, p.240). Important to situating this work therefore, is the need to understand how or if the relationship between social work education and technologies has kept pace with technological change, linked to a new and emerging form of sociality (Fuchs, 2017). As already noted in a previous publication, whilst:

The literature and policy in England concerning social work education and practice amounts to a vast body of knowledge... the same cannot be said of literature and policy pertaining to technologies in social work education and practice; where we find a knowledge base that is sporadic and sparse in comparison (Taylor, 2017, p.869).

Outlined within the literature that does exist are a range of ideas and pedagogic approaches aimed at developing social work education and supporting learning in an evolving world; methods and ways of thinking that complement and on occasion replace the more traditional formats used for preparing students for practice. For examples see: LaMendola, 1987; Hopkins and Colombi, 1996; Rafferty, 1996; Urdang, 1999; Ballantyne, 2008; Cooner and Hickman, 2008; Cooner, 2014; Fang et al., 2014; Taylor, 2014; Megele, 2014; Taylor, 2015b; Young, 2015; Hitchcock and Young, 2016; Sage and Sage, 2016; Turner, 2016; Taylor, 2017; Taylor, 2018; Westwood, 2014.

Nevertheless, as Perron et al. explain, even though the relationship between technologies and social work has ‘received some attention in social work literature and the curricula... the level of attention is not adequate given their ubiquity, growth and influence’ (2010, p.1). Significant therefore, considering that for well over thirty years a small population of technology engaged social work academics ‘have been arguing that

technology can improve... social work education' (Rafferty and Steyaert, 2009, p.589) is how little appears to have changed. This lack of change, reflected also in the professional requirements for social work in England, suggests that the relevance of technologies in social work education, messages from research and literature, have gone unheeded or have largely been unheard.

The anomalies that exist are incongruent with the work that has been done and the calls for change that continue to be made (McAuliffe and Nipperess, 2017). Moreover, they are inconsistent with and disconnected from the impacts of digitalisation in the social world. The question of why technological change in social work education appears not to align with technological innovation more broadly and how this has continued to be the case over a thirty-year period, remains. Rafferty, a female pioneer in the use of technologies in social work in England, believes this, in part, to be due to a 'disjointedness... [between social work education and] the [digital] skills that employers say they want' (2014, p.xi). Contributing to this is the way in which technologies have evolved and the time and confidence that educators have, in general, to make the shift away from the more traditional and familiar teaching methodologies to those required across social work education, if, that is, students are to be prepared for practice in the digital age (Goldingay and Boddy, 2016).

As a means to going forward it is important to look back and, looking back here begins with a small and steadfast group of social work academics, such as Schoech, mentioned above, who for over thirty years now, have recognised and paid close attention to 'the exponential growth of technology... [how it has] reshaped our society... [and how] it will continue to be a dynamic force in future generations' (Perron et al., 2010, p.3). Their championing of the ethical use of technologies in human services stems back to the early 80s and although membership of the group has

periodically changed, the purpose remains largely the same: ‘to promote the ethical and effective use of information technology for human betterment’ (husITa, 2018, np). This group of progressive thinkers first met together in the UK, at an international conference, entitled ‘A Technology to Support Humanity’ (Toole, 1987 in Ballantyne, 2017, np). It was as a result of the collaborations formed at this event that the ‘human services Information Technology association’ (husITa) was born.

In a recent publication celebrating husITa’s thirty-year anniversary, Ballantyne (2017) describes how in 1987 ‘several hundred delegates from 17 countries participated in over 100 human service technology presentations’ (p.1). What is striking in this account, is the similarities in the issues with technologies in social work now and the issues with technologies in social work back then. This is illustrated in an excerpt taken from the original conference programme, in which Toole explains how he and his colleagues were ‘convinced of the value of information technology for the future of human services’ and despite the fact ‘the majority... still look on the field as rather esoteric and distanced from the true nature of the caring professions’ they believed that it was the work of husITa ‘to convince... [how] inaction would result in resources being placed elsewhere – and their ill-informed applications of IT would result in systems which do not model human service value systems’ (1987, in Ballantyne, 2017, p.3). In a publication following the conference Toole (1989), along with fellow husITa founders LaMendola and Glastonbury, urged social work to take the role of the master and not the slave to new and emerging technologies. They discussed the importance of the profession in directing the future of ‘IT’ usage in the social world, by involving itself in the development of technologies as they relate to ‘human problems, human values, human ethics’ (p.4).

Issues of this nature are all too familiar to those of us with an interest in the ethical use of technologies in human services and social work education today, as we find ourselves in the position of having to convince the profession of the seriousness of this matter. An example of this can be seen in the recent work of Zgoda and Shane who almost restate the calls from the past, explaining that ‘to remain competitive and culturally competent... [social work education] must incorporate digital literacy and technological instruction to prepare students for work with clients and colleagues throughout their professional lives’ (2018, p.32). Comment such as this is sadly not new, indeed it forms a thread running through the literature pertaining to technologies and social work education.

As far back as 1998, Rafferty used the analogy of the tortoise and hare to describe how technological advancements in social work education continued to lag ‘behind... despite the work of innovators and enthusiasts’ (1998, p.11). Before this, in 1992 Glastonbury and LaMendola also made use of a similar metaphor to illustrate the state of technologies in the social world, in a chapter entitled ‘The Technological Hare and The Social Snail’ (1992, p.49). Cooner, in some of his earlier work, emphasised the need ‘for forward thinking’ in relation to curriculum development and design, due to the implications of being ‘unprepared’ or left behind (2004, p.742). Whilst a short time later Rafferty again, this time with Waldman, in a paper considering the levels of ‘coherence and dissonance between the education and training needs of social work practitioners’ stressed the ‘immediate need to move towards a deeper analysis of how e-practice differs from traditional practice’ (Rafferty and Waldman, 2006, p.1& p.20). In other work within the same year, these authors go on to discuss how ‘educators themselves may need to be made aware of the need to update and revise both the content and teaching and learning methods to support students in their development’ (Waldman and

Rafferty, 2006, p.145). Schoech, as noted, a founder member of husITa, in a paper reflecting on the past, present and the future of technologies in social work, talks about how the guidelines he ‘discovered for using digital technology in the human services in 1978 were similar to guidelines now’ and how ‘human services... continue to struggle to use IT to support service delivery’ (2014, p.240).

In addition to all of this and the original concerns outlined by Toole and colleagues, is the rapidity and scale of the current technological shift, that sees a rise in the use and on occasion, misuse of ‘big data’ (Fuchs, 2017, p.52) ‘artificial intelligence’ (Boyd and Holton, 2017, p.1) ‘automation’ (Eubanks, 2017, p.4) and ‘predictive risk modelling’ (Keddell, 2015, p.72). Developments that could potentially increase, rather than decrease, the risk of practice failures, if uncritical approaches to emerging innovation, the digitalisation of processes and the internet of things, remain common place. All of which should challenge the social work profession to think about what has changed since 1987 and more particularly what has been done to ‘clarify the competences needed for e-teachers in social work education’ (Larsen et al., 2008, p.631). In the absence of this knowledge it is hard to imagine how curriculum content can be said to prepare students for engagement with 21st century practice need. Students themselves are increasingly concerned about the ‘misconceptions regarding... [their] technological abilities’ and according to Abamu (2017) ‘have... [to a larger extent] no idea how to leverage them for academic and professional use’ (np).

With regards to social work students, social work education is, as already discussed, the medium through which practice preparedness occurs. Methods of facilitating practice preparedness, if practice is to be effective, must align with and be respondent to emergent practice need. Digitalisation continues to shape and change the fabric of the social world, meaning that students require opportunities to examine the

characteristics and form of this phenomenon, linked to practice methodologies aimed at addressing social need. As noted, students themselves are beginning to recognise this, as can be seen again in the work of social work academic Turner, a self-confessed ‘luddite’ (2015a, np) who, through embracing new social media technologies in social work education, found the benefits to outweigh the risks. Turner’s professional experiences and subsequent use of new technologies for teaching and learning have provided students with unique opportunities to examine, what she calls ‘this brave new world of digital space’ (2015b, np). As a result of Turner’s work students themselves were seen to call for ‘practice models and tools to be revisited and re-evaluated... [so that as practitioners they can be] properly equipped for the new digital world’ (2015b, np). Interestingly and linked to the idea of social work telling its story, is a comment made by another of Turner’s students who felt that ‘changing the image of social work needs to be done via social media, because this is where most people are getting their information from these days’ (2015b, np).

The mechanisms for change, as the work of Turner and aforementioned others shows, are educational experiences, designed and delivered in a manner that expose students to the nuances of new technologies and the intricacies of emerging need. As already noted, approaches of this kind require digitally minded educators, with equal amounts of digital skill, because without this, as Schembri says, social work education ‘risks becoming irrelevant and inaccessible’ (2008, p.119). Concerning therefore is the fact that ‘little has been written... about how [social work] educators can gain the competences’ (Cooner, 2011, p.312) necessary to teach this kind of material and to teach it in this way. Larsen et al. believe this is due to the way that ‘most of the attention... [in this area] has focused on the competences of students (2008, p.624).

The doctoral work of Tinucci, whilst not directly related to the digital, boldly takes the matter of educator preparedness on, and begins with the proposition that, 'being a competent social work practitioner is not a predictor of being a skilful and capable teacher'. She goes on to explain that 'too little attention is given to the preparation of social workers for teaching in the context of higher education' and how:

Social work educators should be able to recognize, differentiate and articulate their professional roles, responsibilities and identities as teachers distinct and substantively different, from their professional roles, responsibilities and identities as social work practitioners. They should be cognizant of and able to articulate their teaching philosophies and able to identify their theoretical orientation to teaching so that they are deliberate in choosing teaching methods (2017, p.1).

Whilst sweeping generalisations are unhelpful, Tinucci's analysis of the transition from practitioner to educator and reflections on her own experience of becoming a social work educator highlight the consequences of leaving matters of pedagogic preciseness to chance. More importantly, where this is needed, it:

Demonstrates that social work educators can and should become more intentional in understanding, developing and articulating their teaching philosophies so that they become more deliberate in choosing their pedagogical approaches' (Tinucci, 2017, p.10).

The idea of deliberateness is useful to thinking about how social work education can embrace the digital shift, particularly when the regulatory levers do not fully reflect the challenges social work faces in the digital age. In the absence of digitally orientated regulatory content the disconnect between educator preparedness, student preparedness and practice preparedness means that practice effectiveness, in the current digital climate, will continue to be left to chance. Whilst Croisdale-Appleby's review of social

work education makes no reference to digital knowledge or digital skills, it does recommend that:

All educational routes to qualification must demonstrate authentic pedagogical evidence that they will provide an in-depth knowledge of the fundamental conceptual frameworks for social work, to ensure that they equip students with the basis for a career in social work (2014, p.87).

No longer however, can what he refers to as ‘authentic pedagogical evidence’ exclude reference to digitalisation, nor the idea of ‘in-depth knowledge’ fail to acknowledge the digital shift.

Change in social work education often materialises as a result of significant practice incident, driven by misplaced perceptions that as a profession social work has the power and abilities to eliminate societal risk. Webb (2017) believes this to be due, in part, to an internalised expectation of ‘omnicompetence’ which he rightly outlines as unachievable and ‘impossible’ in a complex world (p.1). Thus, changes to social work education and practice require a realistic understanding of what is occurring within the practice milieu and a sensible view of what actually can be achieved.

The design of this study was influenced by how preparedness in social work education is conceptualised, anxieties about how preparedness can realistically be facilitated and an optimism about what, in relation to digital preparedness, through this research, can be learnt.

The following chapter discusses the methodology, the methods and the means used to generate data that would reveal students’ perspectives on their digital experiences in social work education. Insights that would allow for an examination of the contribution

of social work education to the digital professionalism of students in preparation for practice in the connected age.

3 CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY, METHODS: MAPS AND MEANINGS

3.1 Methodology

This chapter outlines phenomenography and its relevance as an approach through which to understand more about how social work education prepares social work students to practice in a world that increasingly includes digital aspects. It draws heavily on the work of phenomenographers, those who are well established in its application and those who have contributed substantially to its development as a research approach in the education field. It begins by outlining the philosophical stance which shaped the methodological decisions that were made. It provides further rationale for why this study is needed, and, for why it is needed now.

As noted in the prologue ‘every inquiry is guided beforehand by what is sought’ (Heidegger, 1962, p. 24). The purpose of a research study therefore determines the methodological choice. Given that the focus of this study is human experience an interpretative approach was the most appropriate approach through which to access relevant thought. In this study human experience relates to:

1. *Social work students’ experiences of digital development, throughout the duration of their professional training*
2. *How digital development was perceived to have been facilitated, or how conceptions of digital professionalism were formed*

as described by students, or from the student point of view. In contrast to positivists, interpretivists seek to better understand ‘the social life world’ (Crotty, 1998, p.67). They believe that phenomena can only be understood through accessing the meanings people attribute to it. The fact that meanings are subjective, suggests that they are also variable;

a point that underpins the phenomenographic approach. It is this variability that phenomenographers seek to reveal.

Through considering the elements relevant to preparing students for practice in a digitally saturated world (Chapter 2), it has become clear that this picture must change, and that an analysis of this issue must be pursued, because, as Penprase suggests:

Any effective 4IR [fourth industrial revolution] education strategy must also include in equal measure a deep consideration of the human condition, the ways in which new technologies and shifting economic power impact people of all socioeconomic levels and the threats that exist within a world that is increasingly interconnected, in a way that fosters deep intercultural understanding and an abiding respect for freedom and human rights (2018, p.219).

This qualitative study was therefore designed to contribute to this progression in social work and it aims to do so through examining social work students' accounts of their experiences of digital development and how these experiences then prepared them to engage with 21st century practice need. The participants, 11 social work students, were enrolled on professional programmes within a school of social work in a university in England and were nearing the point of qualification. It was assumed that digital development, or digital professionalism in some form, throughout the course of a student's professional learning journey, would have occurred. This assumption, as noted, was largely based on the responsibilities placed upon social work education, located within the professional standards, that refer to the development of capabilities (QAA, 2008 revised in 2016; HCPC, 2012, revised in 2017a; HCPC, 2014 revised in 2017b) relatable to broader and emerging descriptions of digital capabilities or skills of a digital kind (Littlejohn et al., 2012; JISC, 2014a). In addition to this, as outlined earlier, given how educational institutions and systems, for a significant amount of time now, have been engaged in embedding versions of the digital shift.

Despite the fact that social work education in England is regulated by standardised ‘sets’ of requirements, interpretation and delivery of them is, to a larger extent, left to individual education providers themselves (QAA, 2008; HCPC, 2012; HCPC, 2014). Concerns have been raised about the ‘plethora’ of standards to which social work education must adhere (Narey, 2014, p.9); an issue that undoubtedly contributes to the inconsistencies found across professional courses in terms of ‘content, quality and outcomes’ (Munro, 2011, p.97). Relating to this, as previously discussed, is the lack of clarity pertaining to digital development across the range of requirements governing social work education in England. Omissions that fail to reflect the impacts of new digital type technologies on people, on communities and on the social world (Mason, 1986; Castells, 1996; Wellman, 2006; LaLone and Tapia, 2016). Therefore, it was thought that the insights arising from this work had the potential to further inform, or if found necessary, to question or indeed challenge the sufficiency of regulatory requirements which underpin practices in social work education, in a digital respect.

The choice to employ the phenomenographic approach over methodologies such as phenomenology (Bergum, 1991) or grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) even though each seek to analyse human experience, was due to the fact that phenomenography was designed ‘to answer questions about thinking and learning, especially for educational research’ (Marton, 1986, p.28). Furthermore, relating to digital professionalism, as discussed in Chapter 1.2, because of its potential to reveal meanings, ‘when the phenomenon is something that is hard to define precisely, complex, or [one] that might have variable meaning in various contexts’ (Cossham, 2017, p.21). In addition, and significant to this work, because of how it has been found to generate ‘information relevant to the development of a teaching strategy that can enhance the quality of students’ learning experience’ (Barattucci and Bocciolesi, 2018,

p.22), particularly when the research approach involves, as it does here, listening to students themselves.

Ontologically, phenomenography is ‘non-dualistic’ (Reed, 2006), built upon the idea that:

There is not a real world ‘out there’ and a subjective world ‘in here’. The world [as experienced] is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her; it is constituted as an internal relation between them (Marton and Booth, 1997 in Akerlind, 2005a, p.323).

Thus, ‘the object (the phenomenon under investigation)’ digital development and ‘the research subjects (the people experiencing the phenomenon)’ social work students, ‘are not viewed or treated separately’ (Yates et al., 2012, p.96). It is a subject-object relationship as depicted in the work of Kettunen (2017, p.30) below that is to be understood.

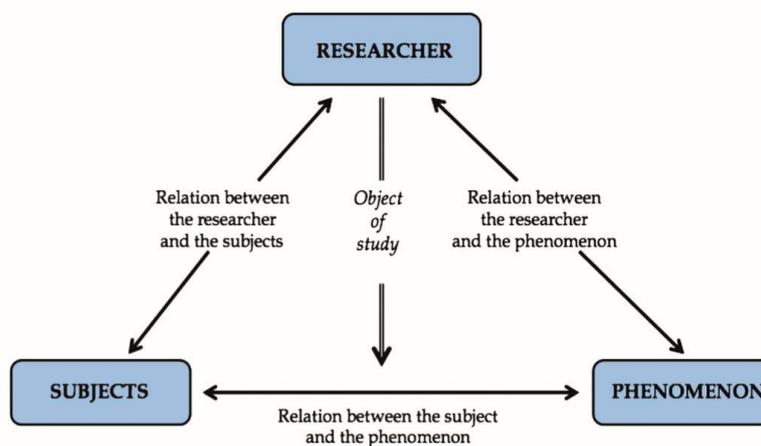


Figure.1: Focus of Phenomenographic Research (Based on Bowden, 2005).

The real world in this study involves interactions between social work students and their programme of learning; a socialising process, which was assumed, given the content of the professional requirements and educational environment, to have included digital aspects.

Phenomenography is recognised as a distinct qualitative research approach, situated within the interpretivist paradigm (O'donoghue, 2006) and 'has much in common with the assumptions underlying other qualitative research traditions and thus draws on their practices' (Akerlind, 2005b, p.330). However, despite its similarities to other traditions as Svensson remarks, phenomenography must 'be given its own specific theoretical foundation and cannot be "reduced" to phenomenology or any other established school of thought' (2006, p.163). It was developed and has been in use, since the early 1970s (Marton and Saljo, 1976; Marton, 1981; Marton, 1986) and like most other methodologies, has experienced an appropriate and proportionate amount of scrutiny as a research approach (Saljo, 1996; Alsop and Tompsett, 2006; Saljo, 2006; Sin, 2010; Akerlind, 2012; Cossham, 2017).

One of the main differences between phenomenography and other qualitative research approaches is that 'the data collected is... treated collectively for the purposes of analysis, such that the focus is on the variations in understanding across the whole sample, rather than on the characteristics of individuals' responses' (Tight, 2016, p.320). Tight, in a review of its application, explains how epistemologically:

Phenomenographers operate with the underlying assumption that, for any given phenomenon of interest, there are only a limited number of ways of perceiving, understanding, or experiencing it (2016, p.320).

As a result, 'the outcome [and aim] of a phenomenographic study is a finite set of qualitatively different categories of description... Each of these categories is a description of a "conception" of the phenomenon' (Davey, 2014, p.1). It is argued amongst some phenomenographers that categories of description should be hierarchical (Marton, 1981; Marton, 1994; Yates et al., 2012), however what appears to be more important and valued within the literature, is that they are relational (Marton and Pang,

2008; Pang and Ki, 2016); that is they show how each links to the other, in a way that can inform a pedagogic approach (Webb, 1997).

Therefore, unlike, for example phenomenology (with its emphasis on individual experience and the essence of things), phenomenography ‘involves the interpretation of descriptions of experiences of a phenomenon’ (Forster, 2016, p.353) to capture variation in the way it is experienced (Akerlind, 2005a; Akerlind, 2017). More specifically, it is used to generate data about ‘how... [subjects of a study], depending on their experiences, perceive, understand, learn and conceptualize aspects of the real world’ (Barattucci and Bocciolesi, 2018, p.22). Hence phenomenography is employed in studies, such as this, that seek to reveal qualitative differences in a collective experience, rather than to understand individual experiences or the nature of a phenomenon itself (Akerlind, 2012).

The main critiques of phenomenography are concerned with ‘validity’ (Sin, 2010, p.308), ‘replicability’ (Kelly, 2003, np) and in more recent times to how variation is understood and subsequently explored (Akerlind, 2017). Commentary that stands out as being particularly significant, asks if phenomenography is ‘complete and finalised with no further development necessary?’ or if it is ‘relatively insignificant in the future development of the tradition, as it has been transcended by variation theory?’ (Rovio-Johansson and Ingerman, 2016, p.265). Akerlind, a prominent thinker in the field, responds authoritatively to the questions asked, both by describing how ‘variation theory grew out of phenomenography’ and how ‘they share a common theoretical framework and underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions’; that ‘the two approaches ask different, though related, research questions’ and even more importantly that ‘the conduct of variation theory research... is largely dependent upon first conducting a phenomenographic investigation to clarify the constituent parts of the

object of research for the variation theory study' (2017, p.9). In a comprehensive examination of quality within the phenomenographic approach, Sin (2010) captures the importance of critique of this kind, explaining how 'readers within an academic community have to be convinced of the quality in a piece of research when they evaluate it against criteria for quality that have been developed through contributions and agreements within that community over time' (p.306).

When however, considering challenges to the approach, it is helpful to return to Marton and Booth's earlier justification, which argues that to understand phenomenography, one must recognise that:

It is not a method in itself, although there are methodical elements associated with it, nor is it a theory of experience, although there are theoretical elements to be derived from it. Phenomenography is rather a way or an approach to identifying, formulating and tackling certain sorts of research questions (1997, p.111),

originally within the educational context, but increasingly within other disciplines too (Entwistle, 1997; Tight, 2016). Therefore, acknowledging that phenomenography derives 'from a strongly empirical rather than theoretical or philosophical basis' (Akerlind, 2005a, p.321) and was established to reveal and report on critical aspects of the collective experience, is fundamental to its application as a research approach. Thus, it is this thinking that forms the basis of its use here.

Given the messages drawn from literature pertaining to technologies and social work (Chapter 2.3), those that clearly evidence a disconnect between the professional requirements, the teaching methodologies employed, and practice readiness, interviewing social work academics was considered to be counterproductive to answering the research question and to progressing this body of knowledge... at this

stage. Seeking ‘a teacher-centred understanding... [because of how] attention is focused on what they, as the teacher, are doing in any teaching learning situation’ had the potential to undermine understanding what might be ‘happening for the students...’ which, as Akerlind’s work shows, is more often than not ‘taken-for-granted and not explicitly attended to’ (2008, p.633). Unsurprising, but worth pointing out, is that in adopting ‘a student-centred understanding, academics’ attention is focused on what the students are experiencing in any teaching learning situation and the potential impact of teachers’ actions upon student experience’ (Akerlind, 2008, p.634).

The phenomenographic approach therefore provides ‘a logical argument for why a student-centred understanding of teaching is more likely to lead to better learning on the part of students, because teachers are taking their students’ role in learning into account’ (Akerlind, 2008, p.634). In phenomenographic terms this is discussed as the second-order perspective, which is different from the first-order perspective where ‘we orient ourselves towards the world and make statements about it’ (Marton, 1981, p.178). In the second [order] perspective ‘we orient ourselves towards people’s ideas about the world (or their experience of it) and we make statements about people’s ideas about the world (or about their experience of it)’ (Marton, 1981, p.178). Therefore, ‘first-order perspective, represented by traditional evaluation and psychometrics, is observational and describes learning ‘from the outside’... whereas the second-order perspective is experiential and describes learning from the learner’s perspective or ‘from the inside’ and this is the emphasis and essence of a phenomenographic account (Morgan et al., 1982, p.10). Or as Yates et al. (2012) simply explain, ‘the second-order perspective enables researchers to describe particular aspects of the world from the participant’s point of view’ (p.36). The aim of this study is to identify what was experienced, in relation to digital development, and variation in how it was reported to have been

experienced, from the students' point of view (second-order perspective) (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000).

Within the interpretivist paradigm, 'positionality' (Rands and Gansemer-Topf, 2016, p.14) is addressed through the recognition and acknowledgement of any presumptions held; awareness of this kind should thereafter be maintained throughout the duration of the research process (Berger, 2015). Having an appreciation of the fact, as Arbnor and Bjerke explain, that:

Every human being as a human being - including creators of knowledge - carries around certain ultimate presumptions. These presumptions are normally quite unconscious and very difficult to change, at least in the short run. Our ultimate presumptions will have a bearing both on how we look at problems and on how we look at existing and available sets of techniques and at knowledge in general (1997, p.7)

is therefore key to the interpretative approach. The presumptions held in relation to this work form, what Somekh and Lewin describe as, a 'red thread', running through it (2011, p.337). They stem from anxieties of a professional nature, about the impossibility of practice preparedness; a totalitarian ideal (Woody, 1940) that places the emphasis on social work education to achieve what, in a literal sense, is impossible to achieve. This is not to say that students cannot be adequately prepared for practice, but to note that the rhetoric and expectations surrounding this often result in contradictory observations that on the one hand describe social work education as 'inadequate', whilst on the other bear witness to the fact that the professional standards do not 'remotely provide adequate guidance to universities about the skills and professional knowledge required of graduate social workers' (Narey, 2014, p.5-7). The danger however, at a time when the requirements for preparedness in social work in England are under

review (HCPC, 2017b), is another iteration of professional standards, created without an understanding of what constitutes professionalism in a digital respect.

Phenomenography was therefore believed to be the most appropriate methodology through which to better understand, or at the very least to get a grasp on the nature of preparedness for practice in the 21st century; practice in the digital age, practice that includes digital aspects.

The following section outlines the methods employed in the generation of data for this work.

3.2 Methods

Thomas describes research method as ‘a way of doing something’... not ‘rigidly or formally’ but something that is ‘done in a considered, thought-through way’ (2009, p.158). The following subsections and sections of this chapter report on the methods employed and the rationale for employing them, in a manner that evidences both thoughtfulness and rigour. It begins by outlining considerations in relation to participant recruitment and pays attention to Reed’s assertion that ‘a critical question relating to phenomenographic studies is who to interview about their experiences of a phenomenon’ (2006, p.6).

3.2.1 Sampling

Whilst much has been written about the phenomenographic approach, less attention has been paid to the sampling processes involved. What has been written evidences differences in opinion relating to sampling methods and sample size (Trem, 2017). For example, in relation to sample size, Trigwell (2006) suggests a number somewhere between ten and thirty to be appropriate, Larsson and Holmstrom (2007) cite twenty and Dahlgren (1995) makes reference to ten; whereas at the other end of the scale Thomson (2016) found four, in relation to his area of study, to be a sufficient amount. Reed (2006) however, focuses less on volume and more on ensuring ‘as much variation as possible’ across the sample group (p.7). Akerlind agrees that ‘maximum variation’ across the targeted population should be integral to decision making when participants are being proactively sought (2007, p.242). However, she also notes that it is common for phenomenographers, due to the extensive nature of phenomenographic analysis, ‘to aim for the minimum sample that can be expected to show the range of variation that would be present in the population as a whole’ (Akerlind, 2007, p.242). Bowden, whilst also vague in relation to sample size, makes a similar point, one that balances the ‘need

to interview enough people' with the need for variation in experience, but not at the cost of making the volume of data unmanageable (2005, p.17).

Trem (2017), in a comprehensive review of phenomenographic sampling, draws on the work of Mann (2009) to highlight the 'importance of there being a shared experience... [within a population] on which to reflect' and on the work of Reed (2006) to conclude that 'research subjects are... [or should be] selected for their relationship with the specific aspect of the world that is being studied' (p.9). In summary, the lack of consistency in relation to sampling found across the literature evidences the significance of thinking about volume and variation in tandem, because it is hard to imagine how, without a reasonable number of participants, variation across a sample could reliably be achieved (Sandberg, 1997, p.206). Indeed, in keeping with the view of Sin (2010), Yates et al. (2012) believe that it is a combination of things, when thought about together, that are 'likely to uncover the variation' in phenomenographic work (2012, p.10). Sin identifies these as relating to 'the nature of the research question, the quality of the data and the intended application of the findings' (2010, p.313). It was thinking of this nature that guided the sampling decisions in this work.

As established within the methodology (Chapter 3.1), social work students were considered to be the most appropriate participants to inform this study. This decision was made due to their actual, or first-hand experiences of social work education, as the professional socialising system (Esau and Keet, 2014). More specifically, final year students, because it is these students who will have had the opportunity to experience the educational offering in its fullest and therefore will have formed conceptions of it, that they might be willing to share. It is often the case that:

Students of disciplines such as medicine, nursing and social work are recruited to studies in which questions of epistemology or pedagogy of the discipline are

being addressed. Because the nature of the research questions in these studies makes student participation essential, they cannot be conducted with other groups of participants (Ferguson et al., 2004, p.57).

Rudestam and Newton describe participants of this nature as ‘experiential experts’ due to their exposure to, or involvement with the phenomenon of interest (2014, p.107).

Purposive sampling such as this, is common in phenomenographic work (Roberts, 2003; Akerlind, 2005a; Green, 2005; Christiansen, 2011) because of the need for ‘a non-random sample...’ (Boon et al., 2007, p.210), that is ‘influenced by the specific phenomenon... being explored’ (Yates et al., 2012, p.102). Further, Maykut and Morehouse explain how purposive sampling:

Increases the likelihood that variability common in any social phenomenon will be represented in the data, in contrast to random sampling which tries to achieve variation through the use of random selection and large sample size (1994, p.45).

It was fortuitous that the timeframe for participant recruitment and data collection of the study fell within the final semester for final year social work students. Having access to these students, through a number of scheduled learning events, helped to reduce any potential inconvenience (Kara, 2012) that might arise for those choosing to participate. In keeping with the sampling approach (Palinkas et al., 2015) students were invited to the study through a short presentation at a school recall event aimed at the finalist group. It was at this event that the rationale for the research was presented and a call for participants made. To ensure that the full complement of students had been alerted to the opportunity to participate, that each had access to relevant information, all had time to process the implications of involvement and also to maximise the likelihood of variation across the target population, the session was followed up with an electronic mail drop. Included in the circular was a copy of the research presentation, the ‘Information Sheet’ (Appendix 3.), ‘Consent Form’

(Appendix 4.), 'Research Interview Mapping Tool' (Appendix 6.) and instructions reiterating how students could opt in and latterly opt out, should they so choose.

Out of a possible 120 students, 11 students came forward and declared an interest in this work; this was thought to be an encouraging response given the little that was known about how students had been introduced or exposed to the subject matter. The participant group consisted of 7 females and 4 males; a percentage largely representative of the gender mix in a social work student population more broadly; with the age range following a similar pattern, in that ages between 23 and 52 are reflected within the sample (Skills for Care, 2016). Whilst the number of participants borders on what is thought by phenomenographers to be enough, comparing the demographics of the sample to statistical data relating to the student population across England at that time provided reassurances regarding variation (Skills for Care, 2016).

As a means to further reviewing variation at the recruitment stage, a simple Likert type scale was included within the statement of consent (Appendix 4.), this time relating more closely to the student's perceptions of the phenomenon of interest, as opposed to variation in the demographics of the group (Penn-Edwards, 2011). Participants were asked to circle one of the following categories, the one that best described how they felt about technologies:

LIKE

DISLIKE

NEITHER LIKE NOR DISLIKE

NOT SURE',

4 students marked 'Like', 3 students marked 'Dislike', 2 marked 'Neither Like Nor Dislike' and 2 marked 'Not Sure' (Appendix 4.). Although data generation at the recruitment phase cannot be said to fully reflect variation in the data set relating to the

phenomenon of interest (Bruce et al., 2004), Sin believes that collating and documenting a range of ‘participant characteristics... allows readers to judge the validity of the data at a later stage’ (2010, p.313). Considering the point made earlier, about a phenomenon that is ‘hard to define’ (Cossham, 2017, p.21), I would also argue, where this is the case, variation at the recruitment phase requires greater attention, because of how it can reduce issues with variation across the sample later in the work.

3.2.2 Ethical Considerations

In addition to the methodological considerations outlined above (Chapter 3.1), ethical factors were identified and addressed. Permissions were sought and secured through written correspondence with the Head of School at that time and the research approval process underwritten and convened by the university Ethics Committee. Given that ethical approval was granted (Appendix 5.) issues of appropriateness and proportionality that ‘guide... decision-making’ (Hermeren, 2012, p.373) in relation to participant involvement, were judged to be sufficiently addressed. Due to a period of sabbatical leave, involvement with potential participants, outside of a more general awareness of my contribution to the business of the school, was limited. Regardless of this, there was an ethical obligation ‘to become aware of potential issues and use strategies to reduce participant risk and vulnerability’ (Ferguson et al., 2004, p.56).

Paying attention to risk and vulnerability was achieved through viewing participation in the study, as much as is possible, from the perspective of the participant (Roberts and Allen, 2013). An exercise that included a recognition of the fact, that, even though my social media profile was designed to model appropriate professional behaviours and presence in the online, it may too have had a bearing on how students perceived my knowledge, in relation to theirs, within this space. Reflexivity of this nature provided a valuable lens through which to consider notions of ‘voluntariness’

and perceptions of influence and power that were likely to exist (Ferguson et al., 2004, p.60). Evidence of these early reflections can be found within the content of the information and consent documentation (Appendix 3.; Appendix 4.), both of which offer explanations, reassurances and protections about the research space (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009).

3.2.3 Data Collection

Like with other qualitative research approaches, data collection in phenomenography often involves a form of semi-structured interview. Interviews in phenomenographic terms, generally:

Focus on the way in which interviewees understand the chosen concept and this focus is maintained throughout the interview. Interviewees are encouraged to express their qualitative understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The researcher may ask interviewees to clarify what they have said and ask them to explain their meaning further (Bowden 2000, p.9-10).

Considerations, in relation to data generation, therefore again included thinking about the student participants, this time within the context of the interview space; in terms of how they might feel and how they might therefore respond. Such an approach is in keeping with the suggestions of Richardson, who when examining the phenomenographic research interview, advises that ‘what is needed is a reflexive approach that takes into account the social relationship between researchers and their informants and the constructed nature of the research interview’ (1999, p.70). Despite the fact that students volunteered to participate in this study, acknowledging how, as an ‘insider-researcher’, ‘identities overlap and interact’ (Kara, 2012, p.11) and that ‘what is right for researcher might not be right for the participant’ (Thomas, 2009, p.147), further informed the construction of the research interviews and the tone of the research space. An awareness of the potential impacts of my presence in and on the work

(Ashworth and Lucas, 2000), whilst acknowledging that it is impossible, unrealistic and possibly unhelpful to completely bracket my experiences, shaped and reshaped decision making and thinking throughout (Denzin, 2002). Viewing the students as collaborators, not as ‘repositories of experiential information’ (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004, p.7) formed part of this.

As previously outlined, at the point of design there was a level of unknowingness, outside of my own teaching and learning practices, about how digital development was being facilitated or how, through teaching and learning strategies, digital professionalism was being attended to or achieved. A ‘specific design feature of the questions in phenomenographic interviews is that they should direct the interviewees towards the phenomenon’ (Bruce et al., 2004, p.146). I was acutely aware that students entering the research space may not be overly familiar with the idea of digital as it relates to professionalism. An issue that led me to further consider how I could capture conceptions of digital development, as linked to digital professionalism, related to the students themselves. The work of Meyer and Land (2005), was helpful to anticipating how students might feel when presented with, what might be, unfamiliar or new concepts. Threshold concept, an educational theory used within the teaching context, is:

A basic idea that in certain disciplines there are ‘conceptual gateways’ or ‘portals’ that lead to a previously inaccessible and initially perhaps ‘troublesome’, way of thinking about something. A new way of understanding, interpreting, or viewing something may thus emerge – a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even worldview (p.373).

In anticipation of students viewing the content of the interview as troublesome, ‘knowledge that is conceptually difficult, counter-intuitive, or even “alien” (Perkins,

1999 in Kiley and Wisker, 2009, p.432), methods that would elicit data sensitively were sought.

Whilst not to confuse the research space with the learning space, even though learning by the very nature of an educational research interview is likely to occur (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Dortins, 2002), the significance of reflection was drawn upon because of the familiarity of this method to the student group. From the outset of their professional training, social work students are introduced to the centrality of reflection in their professional lives and therefore the importance of developing their reflective capacity and reflective skills (Schon, 1983; Papell and Skolnik, 1992). Reflective activities are simultaneously cognitive and practical, with some encouraging the charting or recording of an experience, to support the analysis of thoughts associated with it (Hawkins and Shoet, 1989; Moon, 2013).

There are a number of reflective activities used in social work education to provide students with opportunities to learn about the self, and to understand how the self learns (Luft, 1970; Kolb, 1984). Methods and models employed to assist students become familiar with the need to reflect on experience, because of how reflection influences the development of professional practice skills (Rutter and Brown, 2015; Knott and Scragg, 2016). To date however, only one of these (created after this study began) encourages reflection relating to social work and digitalisation (Cooner et al., 2016). It was the absence of a digitally oriented reflective tool that led me to seek methods outside of those typically used in social work education, as a means to orienting students to this work.

The following section of this chapter outlines the rationale for and creation of an interview method aimed at opening up thinking of a digital kind.

3.3 Maps

In qualitative research the semi-structured interview tends to involve a series of carefully crafted questions, poised to extract experience (Coe et al., 2017). Whereas in phenomenography, the semi-structured interview is often seen to include both interactive and non-directive methods (MacMillan, 2014) aimed at reflecting the context from which the data is sought (Dall'Alba, 2004). As acknowledged by Reed, 'a typical phenomenographic study would first have people perform a task or engage in some activity...Thereafter they would report on it and describe how they had gone about this task or activity' (2006, p.5). An example of this is seen in the earliest phenomenographic study on record, where a class of 30 students were asked to read an article linked to their area of study. The researchers, in an attempt to reveal variation in approaches to learning, then asked the same students to explain how they had gone about the reading task (Marton, 1975). In more recent work, Turner and Noble (2015) made use of the arts in a study that sought 'to describe the conceptions of the experience of early childhood educators with the impact of regulation on their pedagogy and practices' (p.1). They, as I have and will show here, saw the value in employing methods that would serve as:

A "spark" to commence the semi-structured interview process and equally, provide an anchor for reference points for both participant and interviewer throughout that process (Turner and Noble, 2015, p.1).

This view is shared by Walsh, who too found significance in including 'some predetermined leading experiences and leading prompts... to focus the interview appropriately for the aims of the study in question' (2000, p.19).

As already noted, having been socialised in a reflective environment, social work students are familiar with both the thinking about and the mapping of experience. Therefore, previous use and knowledge of the 'Visitor and Resident' tool, originally

posited by White and Le Cornu (2011) as a method for mapping a student’s presence and engagement online in higher education, led to an exploration of the possibility of its use as an introductory interview task. Although not originally designed as a research approach, it was clear to see how it could be used to contextualise the phenomenon of interest for study participants; to trigger, or “spark” thoughts and begin the data collection process.

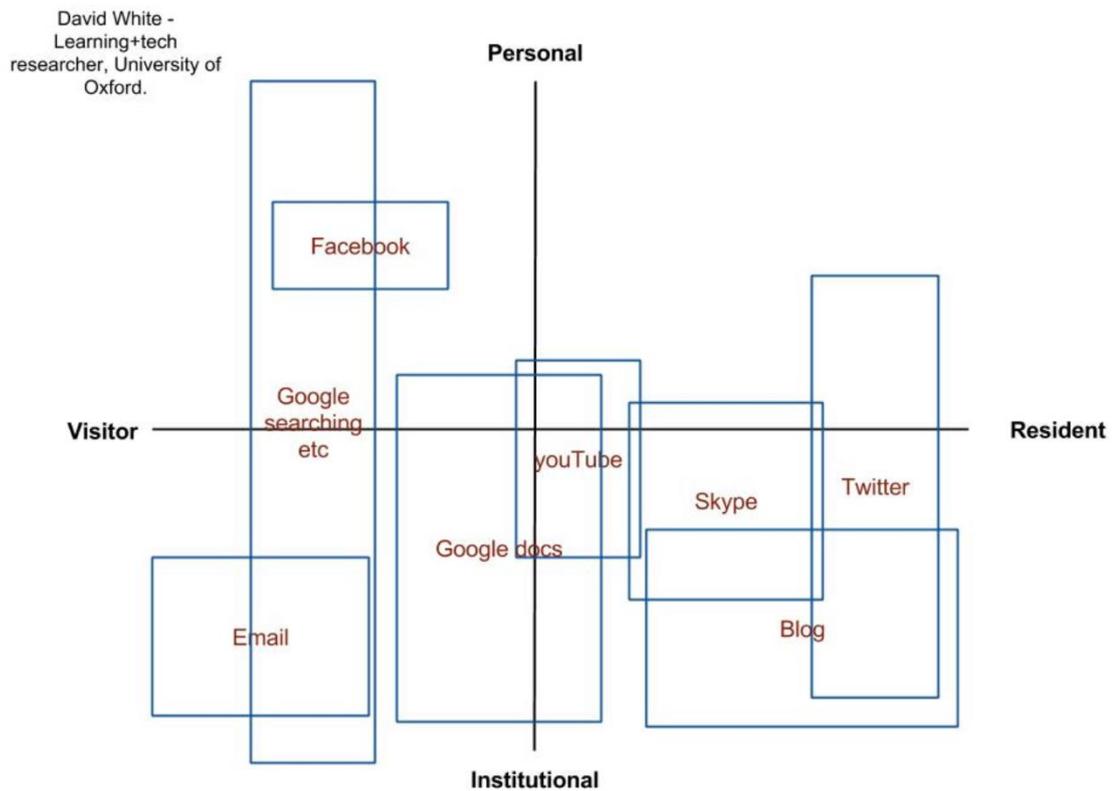


Figure 2: Example Visitor and Resident Map (JISC, 2014b).

As illustrated, the horizontal axis of the mapping device pertains to the identification of technologies in use, with the vertical situated to consider use in terms of place and space. Even though the mapping tool is published under a Creative Commons Attribution licence, meaning that it can be edited, modified and reproduced to meet a particular need, dialogue with the lead author of the tool was actively sought. White, when asked about the appropriateness of the tool as a research method, explained that to his knowledge the tool had not been used for this purpose but that he too could see and

was interested to learn more about its application in this work (2015, np). A copy of the mapping tool was provided to student participants in advance of the research interviews, accompanied with a weblink leading to White and Le Cornu's (2011) work (Appendix 6.).

Once within the interview space, after the interview purpose, structure and ethical considerations had been revisited, students were formally introduced to the mapping tool. Marton and Booth describe how it is important for 'the phenomenon that the [person] is being asked to handle is... brought to awareness by the interviewer in an open and concrete form' (1997 in Reed, 2006, p.5). Thus, a brief explanation of the terms digitalisation, visitor and resident, as related to social work and the research context was provided; along with a review of ideas about space and place, contextualised in line with professionalism and boundaries taught in relation to professional life. Following this, each student was provided with an example of a completed visitor and resident map (Figure 2.) and when understandings of the mapping process were established, time was provided to engage in the mapping activity.

In keeping with the phenomenographic approach 'the phenomenon of interest... [was then] explored, jointly between the interviewer and interviewee' (Sin, 2010, p.312). Exploratory, 'probing' type questions (Rands and Gansemer-Topf, 2016, p.11) were employed cautiously, not to lead but as a way of ensuring that the content of the maps was sufficiently reviewed. Phenomenographers Ashworth and Lucas report that 'the key criteria for judging an interview are whether or not it gives access to the participant's lifeworld' (2000, p.304). The reflective mapping exercise proved to be purposeful, in that it provided access to perceptions of digital engagement and presence online; associated with the broader experience of digital development. Furthermore, it formed a starting point from which to shape the remainder of the interview, a place from

which to build on the initial data gathered about ‘the collective experiences’ of this student group (Leadbetter and Bell, 2018, p.469).

Whilst phenomenography seeks to describe the collective experience and does not focus specifically on individual experience (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000), for the purposes of context it is significant to note that when asked “*have you mapped, or reflected on your use of digital technologies prior to today*” all but one of the students replied “*no*”; with some adding comment such as “*never before have I thought about this stuff*”, “*well no, I have but not this consciously. Well I think I have*”, “*I’m just sitting here thinking that maybe I should have*” and “*it’s just occurred to me that it was wrong to tell us to stay off Facebook at the start of the course*”. Students’ lack of engagement with this topic is unsurprising, given research commissioned by NHS Digital in 2016, two years after this study began, found social workers across England to ‘receive no specific training on digital’ (NHS Digital, 2018, np). The relevance of these particular responses and the significance of this data links back to the work of Turner and Noble (2015) who evidence how the use of an introductory interview task generates meanings and terms of reference that can, where necessary, be returned to again and again within the interview space. Also, that of Richardson (1999) and Bowden (2000) who refer to how initial data generation of this kind can serve to guide the remainder of the interview; as it did here, relating to the interview questions and how they were asked.

What also emerged, whilst reviewing the content of participants’ mapping, was a distinct disconnect between some of what had been recorded and how those experiences were latterly described. For example, a number of students had made little or no reference to the digital tools and online spaces essential for course participation. Open-ended questions were therefore posed to explore why students may have omitted this information or why it was absent in their initial reflections. In response to the question

“how would you describe, or where would you map the digital tools that you use for the purposes of studying?” were replies such as:

“Oh, Blackboard, I actually forgot about Blackboard, I need to add it”

“Ah, I didn't think about the things I use for searching for my dissertation”

“It's only lately that I knew that I should use the discovery thing [a university information search tool], I'd have liked to have been told about doing this before now, I always use Google and now I'm nearly finished my course – I think I've really missed out”

“I don't really go on there [the virtual learning space], like just when I really need to. No-one really does”

*“They [academic staff] make assumptions that we can use these things you know, then when we say we can't they give us an online link that's supposed to show us how to *laughs*”.*

What is interesting about these responses is that access to a significant amount of course content and engagement is only possible via the virtual learning space (VLS); for example, course admin, course resources, course communications and the course submission space are predominately organised and operationalised from within this online platform. Thus, the initial exclusion of these activities from the reflective map seemed to indicate that digital activity and engagement of a digital kind had not come immediately to mind for these participants. Also, that on occasion, they were not viewed as necessarily linked to digital development, or in fact viewed as supportive of it.

A similar example relates to engagement with the social media platform Twitter. Several students had situated Twitter above the personal axis. In reply to the question *“do you follow any of the academic team on Twitter?”* one student explained:

Participant: *“oh yes, *laughs* you and some others”*

Researcher: *“would that mean your Twitter presence is solely personal, like you've marked it here?”*

Participant: *“well yes it's still me and just mine, *Pauses*... “Erm no hang on - no it wouldn't, it wouldn't... it's both, do you know what I mean? You'll be able to see random silly stuff I post - that could leave an impression”. *Pauses*... “I need to think about this a bit more, don't I?”*

Here again, as can be seen, more pointed reflective questioning, on usage and presence online led to realisations of a digital kind; raising further questions about why thinking of this nature had not readily come to mind across the student group.

Relating to this is a summary composed from a collection of field notes, made after all interviews had taken place. Sin (2010) describes how ‘a careful researcher should mitigate losing touch with the original interview contexts by reflecting on the interviews shortly afterward’, a time she explains when ‘mental and written notes of relevant contextual features of the interviews’ can be accurately made (p.314). The points below evidence the results of the reflective process carried out to capture features of the interviews thought to be important at that time:

- All students grasped the idea and relevance of mapping usage and presence online; even though a significant amount of this presence was initially omitted or located within the personal axis
- Previous technological or digital exposure and development varied across the group; with exposure and development relating to interests, trends, employment, the technologies available at that time and on occasion socio-economic background and parental attitudes to emergent technologies
- There was no apparent correlation between formal education, age, technological awareness or skill development; most students described themselves as *“self-taught”*

- All but one of the students could not recall reflecting consciously or formally on their use of technologies or their presence online prior to the introductory activity
- None recalled being introduced to, or reading any of the available professional guidance relating to the use of digital technologies or presence and practices online
- All students needed additional prompts (mainly through a review of their personal smartphone apps) to assist them to identify digital tools used or in use and presence online, particularly in relation to the bridge between personal and professional boundaries
- None of the students could recall the use of the term digital professionalism, or other related technological terms being used throughout the course of their professional training; most were able to guess what these terms might mean.

Regardless of the possible meanings that could be attributed to this early analysis it is important to highlight that each of the participants engaged enthusiastically and responded positively to the reflective exercise, as can be seen in some of the spontaneous comments offered about it:

“I wish we’d have had this in first year”

“If I’d had this in my other degree I maybe wouldn’t have got into a bit of bother with something I posted on Facebook”

“If it’s ok with you I might take this [the interview mapping tool] to my new workplace, I don’t think they know about this stuff there either”.

Again, it was deemed to be unhelpful, due to the risk of imposing meanings on the data, to draw conclusions at this stage of the analysis.

The semi-structured interview, each of approximately 45 minutes in duration, continued directly on from the reflective mapping activity, with the introductory task paving the way for how questions were asked. As the work of Entwistle shows:

It is essential that the questions are posed in a way which allows the students to account for their actions within their own frame of reference, rather than one imposed by the researcher (1997, p.132).

On this occasion, the use of the reflective tool offered a structure through which the students could think explicitly and deeply about their use of digital technologies and their presence online, within the context of their learning experiences. Furthermore, it provided valuable insights that helped to frame the remainder of the interviews, particularly because of how student responses confirmed that digital professionalism was not a term they were overly familiar with, nor did it appear to exist within the immediate consciousness of the student group. Interview questions were therefore reframed to reflect this; and began with inviting students to discuss digital or technology exposure prior to this current educational experience. The purpose of this approach was to further orientate students to the subject matter and to provide them with time to become more familiar with being in the research space.

Booth uses terms such as open and deep interview when describing phenomenographic interviews, explaining that when:

the interview is open means that while a structure might be planned in advance, to approach the phenomenon in question from various interesting perspectives, the interviewer is prepared to follow unexpected lines of reasoning that can lead to fruitful new reflections. That the interview is deep means that particular lines of discussion are followed until they are exhausted and the two parties have come to a state of mutual understanding (1997, p.138).

Even though a number of headings had been drafted in advance, as Marton points out 'different interviews may follow somewhat different courses' (1988, p.154). Therefore,

alongside the need to keep the interview 'deep' and focussed was the need, as mentioned above, to allow it to be 'as open-ended as possible... [because] the dimensions [participants] choose are an important source of data because of how they [can] reveal an aspect of the individual's relevance structure' (Marton, 1988, p.154). Approaching the interviews in this way was aimed at enabling study participants to move towards a state of, what Marton and Booth (1997) call, 'meta-awareness' (p.129), where 'tacit or implicit knowledge of social phenomena... [is] rendered explicit' and linked to previous 'socialization or learning experiences' (Richardson, 1999, p.69). Summarising student conceptions within the interview space helped to check that meanings had been interpreted correctly (Sandberg, 2000).

Once all the interviews were completed, the digital recordings were transcribed, the analysis that followed employed the iterative approach advocated by Bruce et al. (2004) to uncover meanings, accounts of experiences of digital development, from across this student group.

The following section discusses the approach taken to analysing the data generated for this work.

3.4 Meanings

In phenomenography, data analysis, the method of making sense of the meanings that participants attribute to experience, follows a number of paths. Bruce (1998) captures the essence of the principal positions taken in relation to this process, explaining how there are two main views on 'data analysis amongst phenomenographers. In the first, analysis is seen as a construction process; in the second, it is seen as a discovery process'. She goes on to point out the problem with adopting either of these approaches in isolation of the other, is that those who are committed to 'the former view are in danger of imposing a logical framework on their data; and those with the latter are in danger of bypassing the analytical process' (p.28). Her solution offers a much more integrated and detailed approach to data analysis, the method adopted in this work; a process of discovery and construction, which involved:

Becoming familiar with the transcripts; determining the qualitatively differing meanings associated with the varying experiences of... [the phenomenon]; determining how people's awareness of... [the phenomenon] was being structured in order for the meaning to be experienced; creating the categories of description; and identifying the relationships between the categories in order to develop an outcome space (Bruce, 1998, p.28).

Following on from a primary familiarisation gained from transcribing the interview recordings, familiarisation involved re-listening to the interview recordings and the reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts. It is important to again note that the outcomes of a phenomenographic study derive from variation found across the interview transcripts (Sin, 2010). During this reading and re-reading, or immersion in the transcripts, a significant amount of annotations were made. Similarities, in the form of verbatim quotations, were grouped and regrouped and collected under broad themes, or 'pools of meanings' (Marton, 1986) as they emerged. This collective variation of quotes then formed the data set; which was interrogated until the categories of

description became clear. This sorting and resorting of the categories of description was complex and took a significant amount of time (Prosser, 2000; Akerlind, 2005a). At this stage of the analysis, there is, as Ashworth and Lucas (2000) acknowledge, a temptation to move ‘too quickly from the data to an attempt to structure the data’ (p.298). As Marton reminds, it is through this highly iterative process that the ‘pools of meanings’ emerge (1986, p.43), categories of description are stabilised and a departure away from the individual to the collective experience is clearly made.

Integral to forming the categories of description was the analysis of the relationships between them; it was this approach that therefore paved the way for the construction of an outcome space (Akerlind, 2005a). The resulting outcome space is presented to show the relationship between the categories of description, which can be, but are not always, hierarchical. Or as Marton and Booth explain, ‘the outcome space is the complex of categories of description comprising distinct groupings of aspects of the phenomenon and the relationship between them’ (1997, p.125).

Alongside the analytical process advocated by Bruce (1998), and outlined above, making sense of the data also involved the use of a reflective journal, completed after each individual interview, to capture initial thoughts arising from what was mapped and what was heard (Chapter 3.3). This reflexive approach was maintained throughout the transcribing of the interviews and data analysis; doubling up as both an analytical tool and as a ‘bracketing’ strategy (Mohd-Ali et al., 2016, p.190); a medium for staying as close and true to the student’s descriptions of their experiences as possible (Bowden, 2000). Akerlind (2012) explains the need to ‘constantly adjust thinking in light of reflection’ (p.117), thinking that is similar to that of Bruce (1998) who urges caution in terms of drawing conclusions, or defining categories of description too soon.

To support reflexivity and validity, transcripts were also shared at different points throughout the analytical process, with the supervisory team as a way of comparing interpretations of the data in relation to categories of description and the overall outcome space (Sandberg, 2000). Feedback was also actively sought through submission to academic conferences, seminars and a peer reviewed publication (Appendices 9-16). Given the embryonic nature of the subject matter, comments from within and indeed outside of my direct 'Community of Practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1999, p.21), largely made up of social work educators, were more exploratory than directional; with most making subjective reference to the significance of digitalisation, in relation to digital capabilities, organisational systems and the readiness of students for practice in the absence of this type of learning gain.

At different times throughout the analytical process the Benchmark Statements and the Professional Requirements in place at the time of study design were revisited (QAA, 2008; HCPC, 2012; HCPC, 2014). Maintaining a focus on the requirements, because of their role in shaping the curriculum and subsequently a student's experience of it, provided a context in which accounts of experiences could be further understood. Regardless however, of what the requirements state, or how the course was designed or delivered, it was the student's recounted experience of it that was the focus here. Variation in and the relations between described experiences of digital development, linked to professionalism and preparation for practice in the digital age. All of which, again, was based upon the assumption that given the content of the professional requirements and the context of a digitally infused learning environment, that technologies and technological engagement would have formed aspects of the students' world, at that time.

Given the digital focus of this work, it is significant to include reference to the decision to abandon the use of the digital platform NVivo, post transcribing the interview recordings. Even though this data-analysis software is popular across the research populace (Hoover and Koerber, 2009), the decision made was influenced by experiencing the platform as a restrictive context in which to listen, to collate and to make sense of the collective experiences of the student participants. Listening to the audio recordings and annotating the physical transcripts, in hardcopy format, felt more conducive to 'being with' the data. Furthermore, this more manual or physical form of analysis proved helpful to reducing the possibility of, as cautioned by Ashworth and Lucas (2000, p.298), moving 'too quickly' through the highly iterative process associated with phenomenographic analysis, in which, as cited above the 'pools of meanings' emerge (Marton, 1986, p.43). Whilst not in complete agreement with the thoughts of Roberts and Wilson (2002) who explain that 'it is the creative and interpretive stages of qualitative data analysis, requiring human reflection and understanding... that are most difficult to reconcile with the application of ICT (np)', this experience highlights how researchers should not feel pressure to succumb to technological advances, that analytical choices should be made to ensure, as much as is ever possible, that the voices of research participants can be heard (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008).

The following chapter outlines the data analysis and the findings of this work. A discussion linked to the analysis and findings is purposively woven throughout, to provide a more coherent picture of what was found.

4 CHAPTER 4 – DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Contextualising the findings

As the phenomenographers Marton and Booth explain:

In order to make sense of how people handle problems, situations, the world, we have to understand the way in which they experience the problems, the situations, the world that they are handling (1997, p.111).

The following chapter outlines the analysis and reports the findings of this phenomenographic study, a project designed to examine, or ‘make sense of’ an aspect of the world that social work students were assumed to have been ‘handling’. It sought to reveal qualitative variation in described experiences of digital development, the aspect being handled, to understand how social work education contributes to this layer of a student’s learning, in preparation for practice in the digital world. It was not aimed at getting to the essence of the phenomenon itself, but to report on the phenomenon as described to have been experienced, from the students’ point of view (Akerlind, 2005a). Thus, it offers insights into how learning to be digitally professional occurred and how therefore conceptions of digital professionalism were facilitated and formed. A discussion linked to the findings is purposively woven throughout this chapter of the work, to provide a more coherent picture of what was found and to situate these findings in relation to relevant literature, to student learning and development, linked to preparation for practice in the field.

Given the sample size, 11 social work students and the location of one sole educational site, generalisations cannot and, in keeping with the phenomenographic approach, were not expected to be made (Saljo, 1988; Sin, 2010). Nonetheless, the findings provide a significant starting point from which to consider how social work

education, the professional requirements and students' experiences coalesce and how therefore digital development is and can be, brought about. They could also serve as comparative data for studies of a similar kind. The significance of student-centred phenomenographic research, in relation to building programmes of learning that pay attention to and accommodate variation in experience, came further into focus throughout the analytical process.

The units of analysis in this study are conceptions or accounts of digital development; the focus, an examination of qualitative variation in the ways students describe it to have been experienced. Again, in brief, relating to the analytical process that was carried out: accounts of experiences were grouped and regrouped into pools of meaning and from within these categories of description were identified, stabilised and settled upon (Akerlind, 2005b). Throughout what was an extensively iterative process, relationships between the categories of description were examined and re-examined, until a 'logically consistent' outcome space was formed (Ashwin, 2005, p.634). From within the pools of meaning four qualitative differences in the ways that digital development was described to have been experienced were identified. Categories were found to be more relational than hierarchically inclusive, but more importantly they are presented to reflect, as closely as possible, the world as it appeared to this student group.

The work of Ashworth and Lucas (2000) provided a useful challenge whilst analysing the data. Insofar as they accept the impossibility of 'presuppositionlessness' they urge phenomenographers, when working with the transcripts to 'bracket anything that would lead us from the student experience' (p.297). Furthermore, they confront the need for phenomenographers to actively listen, to empathise and to involve themselves

in 'imaginative engagement with the world that is being described by the student' (p.299). In doing so 'conceptualisations faithful to individuals' conceptualisations' of the phenomenon (Kelly, 2002, np) are more likely to be heard. Analysis of this kind assists phenomenographers to avoid 'taken-for-granted' assumptions about what will arise as a focus of awareness for participants; in this case, the student group (p.299).

In phenomenographic research there is a requirement to be 'as explicit as possible' (Francis, 1996, p.44) when deciding what to report. Kara (2015) discusses the need for researchers to acknowledge 'the limitations of their writing' because of how it is impossible 'to tell everything that needs to be told' (p.128). Whilst ultimately it is the collective experience that will be reported upon, it felt important when presenting the findings that 'the individual's unique experience... [was] not lost' (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000, p.304). Because as Ashworth and Lucas go on to propose:

The individual profile is a necessary background against which the meanings of quotations will be viewed. As such, it provides a necessary counter-weight to any tendency to attribute meaning out of context' (2000, p.304).

It was thinking of this kind, alongside the idea of 'faithfulness' (Reed, 2006, p.3) that, in part, informed what is reported and how it is reported in this work. Even though early into the analytical process student profiles were constructed, they are not shared in this format here. At this point in the work presenting verbatim quotations of recounted experiences was thought to be sufficient to providing an authentic backdrop for communicating what was found within the data generated in the completion of this work.

As a starting point for presenting the findings, it is significant to note that although digital development was experienced, in different ways and to different degrees across the student group, descriptions of these experiences show development

to have been largely limited and partly unrealised, due to the incidental nature of digital learning described throughout the duration of the course (Entwistle, 1997). Even though development was seen to occur, some participants, at times, had more to say about what had not, rather than what had occurred, for example:

'When I came on this course no one told us much, if anything at all, about technologies. There was no formal training'

'There are far too many assumptions made about what we know [with reference to digital technologies] and what we can do with all this stuff'

'No, none at all [referring to formal teaching and instruction] and that meant you didn't really know how to use them [technologies] properly'.

Furthermore, concerns were raised about what they felt the implications of this lack of instruction and learning meant for them, for practice and for future student groups:

'It really would have helped to have known how to keep yourself safe and then in practice we can keep other people safe'

"People aren't equipped, [discussion about digital skills] and we need it [digital knowledge] to support our learning. Most of this can be done at home too. There should be homework tasks using social media and things and an assessment too"

'Actually, I think I read on the news yesterday there's 60,000 individuals viewing images of young children. In fact, if I was asked about examples of abuse I wouldn't think about the online stuff – oh my gosh! These are important issues, aren't they?'

'Well actually there are safeguarding issues too [discussing bullying online]. Not every single social worker is going to face that in their career but if we don't know about it then that's quite a big problem- right? If it's [digital knowledge] going to help some children in the future. I feel it's very interesting as well, but I don't know a lot on it and I don't think other people do either, so we need this on the curriculum'

"I think there needs to be more input in teaching about the ethical use of technologies and of social media. On my placement some practitioners would

use Facebook to almost spy on service users and families which I didn't think was ethical or ethically sound practice. I wondered legally where you would stand with that and that was common practice within that team and LA. It brought up all kinds of stuff for me and I didn't really know who to ask or what to do about it. I really wanted to report them, but then to who would I do that? Maybe they are allowed to do this kinda stuff?"

It is also important to bear in mind that regardless of how this course was designed or how it was delivered, it is how it was experienced by this group of students that is the focus here. Student feedback about courses of study is a contested area (Uttl et al., 2017). Whilst evaluations are, more often than not, subjective in nature they have meaning to students and therefore are of value to us. As Blair posits:

Feedback from students is not an exact science – it is drawn from the specific experiences of individual students. Such data can be messy to gather and difficult to interpret but that does not mean it should not be valued. The 'easy' response to feedback from students is to find the errors in it. The difficult response to feedback from students is to realise that what they are giving voice to is of genuine concern to them and that this matters (2017, np).

Despite comments such as those cited above, it was illuminating to find how learning to 'become' a professional more broadly had, in part served to support digital development, again to different degrees and through different means, across the student group. However, students do report their awareness of this development and realisations about what this might mean to emerge for the first time, or be more fully realised, within the interview space (Chapter 3.3). Comments such as those below illustrate this:

"No idea, [when responding to questions about why new technologies had been adopted whilst engaged with social work education] you can text and call and email and stuff, but it is just to keep up with society I suppose. Keep up with trends. I don't use them. I can just say I've got it. So, if people on my course ask if I've got Twitter I say yeah but just don't ask me to tweet anything"

“I’d not thought about it [when asked about technology usage/ presence online] until now...I probably will have a little bit more of a think about it now, after this, about how I use different things. I’m going to go back again and have a look at it all and sort it out because I’ve seen that it can be used for jobs and people can see you on there. It might ruin my career. You see I didn’t see that there was any difference between being careful in real life and careful on what we say online until now”

“You know what I’m thinking, just reflecting on it now, I’ve probably got some of this [when discussing changes made to behaviours and presence online] since I’ve started uni - most of it in fact. I hadn’t really thought about it till now. I only changed my name about a year and half ago, because people could search and find me easily. Maybe I’m realising my own transition from being a support worker to a social worker, a professional - don’t know if that makes sense?”

“I don’t really know [referring to why adjustments had been made to presence online] - no one really told us. I think I must just be applying being a social worker across everything”.

The nature of these initial conceptions demonstrates how, within the active research interview, ‘the interview and its participants are constantly developing’ (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.14). They also serve to explain the disconnect, noted during the introductory task, between what had been mapped and what students latterly described (Chapter 3.3). Moreover, they contextualise one of the main issues that arose in the early stages of the analysis, that there appeared to be much less formal instruction and digital content within this course of learning than what was assumed might have been the case. They also highlight the relevance of Bogo and Wayne’s (2013) argument for making the implicit much more explicit within social work education when a phenomenon or concept is new and emerging or difficult to grasp (Fang et al., 2014).

To offer further context and in moving towards the presentation of the categories of description, it is also appropriate to describe what students themselves regarded as being important in terms of what they ‘brought to the course’ in a digital or

technological respect. Whilst this is not a category of description and cannot be viewed as such, because of how the recounted experiences precede the one being explored, the content is relevant to thinking about how a student's broader educational experiences can influence their engagement with other, including this, educational experience.

In relation to this Miller's (2010) work is relevant, due to how it sought to clarify for social work education what professional socialisation might involve. Miller discusses the importance of ascertaining and paying attention to what precedes a social work student's engagement with their professional training because of how the totality of 'one's education plays a vital role in how socialization evolves over time' (2010, p.925). Another reason why, post the introductory task, questions about experiences of technology exposure, previous to engagement with social work education, were asked. Because again as Miller points out learning begins 'prior to formal training and continues after one's formal training' has ended (Miller, 2010, p.929) and will therefore have a bearing on how learning is engaged with and how professionalism is achieved.

When asked about previous digital or technology exposure, learning or interests, some students included references to how pre-existing technology knowledge, whilst gleaned from a range of sources, was significant to their abilities or difficulties with navigating digital technologies and digital spaces, whilst engaged with the course. The following comments outline the variation in experience that was brought to the course:

"You see my interest in computing came when I was 14 yrs. old, with dial up connections and all of that. When I was at school I didn't have any formal education in computing or anything like that. Everything that I've learned about computing I've learned myself through trial and error. At home my parents realised how interested I was in computing and they probably realised it would have benefits for my education. I did lots of gaming and then I went to A-levels and I had to do more research on internet explorer and things like that. I think we did a bit, not much, word processing too. I think what I know is just down to

me learning to get around a computer myself. I then went into formal university education and I did my nursing. Back then you didn't have things Twitter and Pinterest or Blackboard. I didn't have any formal teaching or formal training on my nurse training either about all this stuff"

"The first time I went to university I got more involved in having to use it [technologies]. Initially it was quite challenging but obviously because I had a good understanding of computing and stuff I soon got around it. I knew some stuff when I started this course, not really enough, but some"

"I had help to understand computers at home, that helped me when I got here. It was easy - just a different system. I had Blackboard at a uni before here and that was fine too. I've never had a problem and it helped using it at college and now it's the same system here so that helps. Because I've been exposed to it is always pretty much up to date with it. I've always had the latest things. I didn't know about Twitter and things though"

The above conceptions involve parenting, educational benefits, peer group influences and the technology trends of the time.

"So, I could use the frontend systems, a bit like what are in practice now. I found that all a doddle. Navigating Blackboard was ok – it was just another system to get my head around. Lots of systems repeat the same sort of principles, so that should be a case of being shown and then using it. But if I'd never been shown in my previous jobs I would be struggling - so your mapping thing might be a good way for students to find the gaps and fill these gaps"

Whereas for this student it was an employment experience that was explained as having a bearing on engagement with the technologies used on the course. However, the following two student conceptions describe how engagement was made possible as a result of being "self-taught".

"I started using Microsoft when it came out, it was work and home based and all self-taught. I've developed from there. Since beginning here I just used trial and error and friends at home. At the beginning it was harder. I still struggle with referencing and things and I'm at the end, like I'm about to finish my course"

"I'm self-taught. Everything I know is self-taught. I have never had any formal training, well I have had some data base training through previous work. It's

not helped me a great deal here but then that's why you struggle to navigate around. I'm nearly at the end of my professional training I'm still self-taught, everything I know is self-taught".

Acknowledging prior learning and development forms part of the regulatory requirements, for social work education. There is an expectation that education providers will assess whether or not candidates applying to their courses are 'suitable to study a professional social work programme' (p.4). Indeed, this condition was carried through from the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB), as noted within another fairly recent 'Review of Social Work Education in England' that explains how it was introduced 'to strengthen the calibre of entrants to social work education and training' with the intention of ensuring that 'potential applicants to programmes possessed the necessary intellectual and personal qualities needed to be an effective social worker' (in HCPC, 2016, p.30). The comments above, whilst not directly relatable to the current requirements of the professional body for entry onto a programme of learning, give a flavour of the experiences that students bring to their professional training in a technological sense.

Apart from the work of Holt and Rafferty (2004) mentioned earlier (Chapter 2.2, p.37-38 check), that found problems with student self-assessment of skills on entry into social work education, it is unclear how digital capabilities are being addressed for admission onto programmes of learning, in light of the digital shift. Although again, both Croisdale-Appleby (2014) and Narey (2014) in their respective reviews of social work education, whilst paying little attention to digitalisation, are deeply sceptical about the robustness of entry requirements and the processes in place for assessing suitability more broadly. Irrespective of what we do or do not know, these early findings again

suggest that there is work to be done; the findings of this study go on to illuminate and make suggestions about what that might be.

The following section presents the categories of description. A discussion is woven throughout to synthesise the findings with and within relevant literature, to contextualise and explain what was found.

4.2 Categories of description

Before presenting the categories of description, it is worth mentioning that ‘there is value in learning of all kinds’ (Eaton, 2010, p.6) and that this work intends to be as ‘faithful’ as is possible to the student voice (Reed, 2006). Relating to this intention is the use of the term ‘incidental’, employed purposively to help situate conceptions of experiences collated from across the group. Albeit closely connected with the idea of informal learning, learning that ‘is assumed to take place within formal educational institutions but outside the formal curricula’ (Peeters et al., 2014, p.182), the idea of incidental learning was felt to align more closely with the experiences described. Kerka outlines incidental learning as learning that is ‘unintentional or unplanned’ (2000, p.1), and Marsick and Watkins, as a ‘by-product of some other activity’ (1990, p.12), or ‘occurring by chance’ (Marsick et al., 2009, p.572). Marsick et al. also point out how:

Incidental learning, while occurring by chance, can be highly beneficial when one moves the accidental learning opportunity closer into the informal learning realm through conscious attention, reflection, and direction (2009, p.572),

which on this occasion inadvertently occurred through the reflective methods employed within the interview space (Chapter 3.2:3; Chapter 3.3). The fact that formal instruction was not described, along with a lack of clarity about whether digital learning was assumed to be occurring outside of formal teaching events, supports the use of the term incidental to explain the nature of the digital development described to have been experienced.

In phenomenographic work, categories of description are constructed from fragments of experiences, found across all transcripts; and a single transcript can and often does, contain more than one category of description (Akerlind, 2005b). Therefore, a category does not necessarily reflect any one particular student’s experience, it is

composed from collective responses, meanings conveyed from across the group. Categories describe variation in ways of experiencing something in the world at a collective level. Consequently, quotations have been selected to ‘give some *sense* of the conception they are illustrating’ because as Ashwin goes on to explain, in phenomenographic work it can be ‘unusual to find single quotations that perfectly illustrate each conception’ (2005, p.635) all of the time.

The following categories of description have been constituted from student conceptions about how the phenomenon of interest was experienced; they offer a perspective on this aspect of the world through the eyes of those experiencing it. Each category represents a way that digital development was experienced, according to the accounts of this particular group of students, at this particular point in time. Aspects of the categories of description and the relationships between them are discussed in the explanations that follow. Literature relevant to contextualising the findings is woven throughout. As will be shown, exposure to the digital in its various guises was largely unplanned and unintended, however it is exposure that formed the backdrop to the experiences and the development described.

Digital development, for this group of social work students involved:

1. the expectations of the course
2. being on the course
3. observing others on the course
4. applying learning to the course

Table 1: Categories of description: that show the qualitatively different ways in which digital development was described to have been experienced whilst engaged with social work education.

The qualitatively different conceptions of how digital development was experienced and what it involved, focus on the different mediums, and means through which students describe it to have occurred. They evidence the incidental nature of the learning experienced and are, to an extent, not always consistent with what the professional requirements suggest should occur. The fact that realisations about the phenomenon of interest are recounted as materialising for the first time within the interview space (Chapter 3.3; Chapter 4.1) further supports what this study more generally found. Students' exposure to, exploration of and engagement with digital technologies and digital tools was not experienced as a direct result of formal instruction or intended curriculum. Instead, development of a digital nature, as related to 21st century social work, was largely incidental and began, for some, through more general 'expectations' associated with a university course.

The following four subsections present the categories of description: the qualitative variation in how digital development was described to be experienced by the students who participated in this work.

4.2.1 Category 1. Expectations of the course

Digital development, whilst engaged with social work education, was influenced by, ‘the expectations of the course’.

Student conceptions consistent with this category describe experiences that show digital development to have been influenced by the need to navigate the digital expectations of the course. They are largely based upon what were perceived to be ‘*assumptions*’ made, in relation to abilities and readiness to engage with digital technologies, digital spaces or digital tools.

Experiences in this category primarily relate to a university wide system that all students are expected to access and to engage with throughout the duration of their course of learning. More often than not, systems of this nature serve a functional or administrative purpose; such as the housing of course resources, to communicate information or for grading assessments. They are not normally related to a set of learning outcomes, nor are they designed with the intention of supporting digital learning or digital development. In fact, usage of them has often been the subject of much criticism, as these comments taken from an Ofsted inspection of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) in England show: ‘the impact of VLE’s on learning was underdeveloped’ and they were found to be inactive ‘dumping grounds for rarely used files’ (2009, p5). There are of course and will always be exceptions.

Even though not explicitly expressed within Category 1, engagement with online systems and spaces begins for all students well in advance of being accepted onto a university programme. From the point that a student applies to be considered for a university place and thereafter, they are exposed to online platforms and systems that require a basic level of digital skill. Irrespective of a student’s digital abilities, use of

these systems is now standardised practice across higher education (Feldman, 2018).

Students participating in this study will have had to access and use online administrative processes and procedures to have secured their position on this course.

Once on the course, the ease or difficulty of interactions with the digital elements of the educational environment was seen to partly hinge upon previous technological exposure, technical confidence, or technical skill. It can be assumed that students who used descriptors such as “easy” or “a doddle” to define experiences of the online systems necessary for engagement with elements of the course, were those who had been more exposed to a range of technologies prior to beginning their professional training, as reported earlier in this work (Chapter 4.1). Others described the use of platforms such as Blackboard as “just a different system” to be navigated and for some, what had helped was “using it [the virtual learning space] at college”. However, students who had adopted the conceptions that formed this category of description spoke of the difficulties they experienced when navigating the system they needed to use to access their course of learning:

*“This was my first real experience of this stuff [technologies required for accessing academic materials and resources online] and that was a real baptism of fire. They [academic staff] make assumptions that we can use these things you know, then when we say we can’t they give us an online link that’s supposed to show us how to *laughs*”*

“Prior to coming here, I had started to use Apple macs. This has caused me another complication as it’s different from the uni systems. It confused me and caused me even more problems when I started my course. It still does. I do everything at home on the Mac and it’s not compatible with the systems here. I needed to download things to be able to merge the two. I can use Blackboard and things but when I write it comes out here in a different format. There is a way around it, but I am a technophobe and it took me my whole course to work it out”

“Using Blackboard, again this is self-taught. So, it’s like this is your space get on with it. You’ve got to learn how to upload an essay for submission. I did that

but with the help of student colleagues. But it's like we tell you here's a space you must use but after that the support was more peer support and self-taught. I think what is really interesting for me is that academics might say here's the space, this is what you have to do and there is support for that, but the support is online. I think one of the things that strikes me is that through having to use the technologies that I experienced the biggest sense of being a mature student - it really kind of separated me from my younger peers. So not only were there issues about getting around the thing itself, there were also difficulties with having to say I don't know how to do this. There are general presumptions, I think, particularly for mature students that you know what you are doing. It's not everybody that has a background in this stuff"

"I use my Facebook [to access support to use online university systems], we do have a private group in uni on Facebook - that's been quite helpful because some people knew what they were doing more than others, so it was good to get help and tips from there. It was really helpful to this course, because it's not taught, you know, how to use all the things you're expected to use".

As can be seen, hinderances and barriers to engagement with digital technologies involved perceived assumptions about digital capabilities made by academic staff, the need to use unfamiliar digital systems and a lack of support to learn the skills necessary for using digital spaces and tools.

The Standards for Education and Training (HCPC, 2014) require social work education providers to offer 'information technology (IT), virtual learning environments and other specialist programmes' (p.23). Furthermore, they specify that these 'learning resources, including IT facilities... [should be] appropriate to the curriculum and must be readily available to students and staff'; and that if 'using a virtual learning environment such as WebCT or Blackboard' (p.25)... evidence of how these systems are being used will be expected to be available to the regulator. Student accounts in this category show these requirements to have largely been met, through the provision of a course specific virtual learning space. However, as noted, formal instruction pertaining

to the use of this technology is described as not having been made available, or if it was, it was not experienced by these students in that way.

Dimensions of digital development are described to have been experienced through: exposure to the system, the requirement to use the system, peer support to navigate the system and for some it occurred through being “*self-taught*”; as the previous and following, comments show:

“It’s not taught, you know, how to use all the things you’re expected to use. There was no help given to make sure we knew how to use it. I would put in a session on how to use blackboard in the first weeks. That is so important because it is the gateway to accessing your studies”

“Ok so Blackboard was part of being able to access the resources and all the lecturers told us it was there, but what I found was that some lecturers put some stuff up and some didn’t so that was hard. I didn’t use it for the first few months and I was struggling because I didn’t realise that here was stuff on there that was totally relevant. There were inconsistencies. There was no direct teaching on it either”

“When I came to do my course they [academics] said everything to do with the course is on Blackboard, so then I had to kinda learn how to use Blackboard. I’d never used it before, so that was quite a challenge for me”.

Alongside the requirements of the professional body, are those of the QAA, the association that set the quality standards for social work education, which state how on qualification all ‘graduates in social work should be able to use ICT methods and techniques to support their learning and their practice. In particular, they should demonstrate the ability to use ICT effectively’ (QAA, 2008, p.14). The experiences and conceptions recounted in this category raise questions about the degree to which students were formally supported to learn in a digital environment and more

importantly, to develop practices fit for the digital world. Or for the student making this comment:

“I’m [a student in the final few weeks of their professional training] still using Google for everything. I only heard last week there were other things. For other students it was common sense, for me it wasn’t, I just knew how to use Google”,

how developmental expectations of this nature could be considered to have happened at all. This is not to say that formal support was not made available but again to query, if it was, why it was experienced, by these particular students, in this way.

The highly contested work of Prensky and its ‘digital native’ verses ‘digital immigrants’ narrative has led to the entrenchment of unhelpful and inaccurate ideas across education about age related digital capabilities and digital skills (2001, p.1). Prensky (2001) posits that people growing up in the digital age are native to it and consequently, more equipped to function within it. The difficulty with making generalisations and inferences such as this, is that compulsory and post-compulsory education systems have not kept pace with digitalisation (Kellsey and Taylor, 2016) and that personal learning and development cannot be equated to formal learning or taught skill. Whilst it is reasonable to claim that there are and will be advantages for generations being born into a more digitalised world, as the experience of this student shows:

“I think one of the things that strikes me is that through having to use the technologies that I experienced the biggest sense of being a mature student - it really kind of separated me from my younger peers”,

it is unrealistic and to a degree dangerous, to equate this sole occurrence with the skills and abilities necessary for life, study and for work in the connected age (Taylor, 2017).

A more realistic view is the one asserted by Katz and Macklin, who argue that:

Despite coming of age with the Internet and other technology, many students lack the information and communication technology (ICT) literacy skills—

locating, evaluating and communicating information—necessary to navigate and use the overabundance of information available today (2007, p.50).

Indeed, even for students accessing compulsory education currently, this has not dramatically changed, as the work of Abamu (2017), mentioned in the literature review, shows (Chapter 2.2; Chapter 2.3).

For a profession such as social work, it is important to recognise and to resist the idea that personal technology usage transfers naturally or easily into the professional sphere (Taylor, 2017), as illustrated in the reflections offered by this student participant:

“I think I try to be careful. I think it’s easy to forget your professional and personal side at the same time. Obviously, you hear about what social workers have posted online that they shouldn’t have done and from this you kinda can see how that might happen. It could happen easily. You don’t think about it and you don’t really think until you map it down like this, how it can overlap”.

This student conception and the digital errors made by qualified social work practitioners mentioned earlier in this work (Chapter 1.4; Chapter 2.1) substantiate arguing against the idea that digital capabilities on entry into the profession will be sufficient, or that they can be assumed (Holmstrom, 2011). Particularly given that it was the uninformed use of digital technologies and the ill-considered presence and behaviours of qualified practitioners online, that caused significant harm to the users of services and to the reputation of the profession itself (Chapter 2.1).

Conceptions that formed this category of description evidence the problems with assuming, and it seems that assumptions had been made, that ‘all’ students are equipped with the knowledge and range of technical skills necessary for engagement with the digital elements of their programme of learning. Whilst digital development was seen to occur, formal instruction to use a system which forms part of the wider architecture of a 21st century course was not obvious, or not obvious enough for it to have been recalled

as an experience. Clearly the students involved in this category made use of whatever was available to them, to acquire the knowledge and technical skill needed to engage with this element of their course. However, this raises questions about the sufficiency of the methods in place to support learning, as set out in the professional requirements listed above; learning that supports development aligned to digital knowledge and capability for ‘all’ students preparing to practice in the field (HCPC, 2014).

Furthermore, it makes a case for thinking more about what could be gained from recognising and seizing ‘teachable moments’ so that students can enter practice feeling better prepared (Havighurst, 1953, p.5).

Whether or not assumptions about student digital abilities are linked to applicant processes on this particular course is unclear, but what is clear, according to the accounts of these students, is that support to develop digital skills, once enrolled on a course, should not be overlooked. The JISC Digital Student Tracker survey, introduced in 2017 and repeated in 2018, which recorded feedback from 22,000 students (2017) and 37,000 students (2018) respectively, found that, overall, the use of digital technologies to complement post-compulsory teaching and learning and to support student experience was positive. However, there were a number of comments and findings within the JISC reports that resonate with student conceptions in this category of description. For example:

“Don’t assume everyone can use of digital tools within learning, we all have different levels of access to digital tools and their uses” (HE Student) (2017, np)

“Don’t assume all learners are on the same level of digital expertise. Make sure to attend to every student’s needs” (FE Student) (2017, p.26)

“A third of all students turned first to their fellow students when looking for support with digital devices or skills” (2018, np)

“Only about a third of students agreed that they were told what digital skills they would need before starting their course” (2018, np).

Similarities in the findings of this work with those found in this more recent work by JISC (2017; 2018) illustrate how assumptions about digital literacy development are not unique to this student group. Indeed, it is widely recognised in higher education literature that digital knowledge and skills gaps persist; and that until formal education systems are consistent in their approach to digital literacy development, this problem will remain. I discuss this at length, in *The LearningWheel* book (Appendix 2), where I argue that:

Until formal and compulsory education systems consistently embed the development of digital literacies into the curriculum and initial Teacher Training we are always going to be filling the gaps’ (Kellsey and Taylor, 2016, p.32).

As this category and indeed as the findings of JISC (2017; 2018) show, further thought about what we require from students on entering ‘our courses’ and how we prepare them for what is to come once on the course, is required – as this student explains:

“Social workers need to know how to set up a computer, operate a computer, set up an email account. I was surprised that people coming from practice type jobs to this course didn’t know all of this. I’m still finding that people are struggling adapting to new systems. It would be much more useful to know all this at the start of the course. Someone needs to get us all using them properly and tell us how it can benefit us and service users and doing our job. We need to keep up to date. It frightens me once I leave this year what happens to my future training needs, who is going to help me”.

Otherwise, as Susskind and Susskind (2015, in Taylor, 2017) when discussing the impact of educational approaches on student employability conclude:

If we choose to do nothing and ... default to our traditional ways and discard the promise of technological change for fear, say, of rocking the boat, then this is a decision for which the later generations can hold us responsible (p.876).

The implications of this can be seen in an email forwarded by one participant after their interview had taken place:

“The interview got me thinking. I did some research, I’ve just been looking things up. In respect of the professional guidance, none that I can identify specifically mentions the use of technology, which worries me because I also note that when applying for social work positions there is specific mention of a requirement for a degree of computer literacy in all of the posts that I have looked at within both the statutory and third sectors. I’m not sure where that leaves me?”

The expectations of the course, whilst not directly related to the curriculum or intended learning, involved exposure to unfamiliar digital systems and digital tools. Students are seen to draw on any resource they could to acquire the technical skills required to enable them to navigate the digital systems they needed to use.

4.2.2 Category 2. Being on the course

Digital development, whilst engaged with social work education, was influenced by, 'being on the course'.

Student conceptions, consistent with this category, describe experiences that show digital development to have involved and to have been influenced by engagement with the course more broadly. They illustrate how 'being on the course' or within the professional education environment exposed them to circumstances and information that prompted them to examine the digital and their engagement with it. The difference between this category and the first, is that conceptions are less technical in orientation and associated more with learning to become a professional and learning about what being professional means. The professional orientation to this category is grounded in, as one student comments, "*all the things that could go wrong*". Students are seen to navigate this potential by reflecting upon the knowledge or messages they had acquired on or through the course; knowledge that enabled them to examine and engage with the digital in a way that helped them to feel more confident in their abilities to navigate the risks they perceived.

Responses in this category relate to questions asked about the changes students described themselves to have made in relation to digital usage, behaviours and presence online; identified initially through the introductory task (Chapter 3.3):

"It's just by being here. This course really hammers home that you can ruin your career, it can go to pot if you're not careful and that's before even thinking about all the internet stuff"

"Well it's just from being here, on this course you know, it makes you think about everything. It isn't that you get taught it, I think it's kinda subliminal, like it just goes into you somehow"

“I think it’s because of having professional awareness of what to put on [referring to posting online]. We haven’t had direct teaching about it really, you just hear things in passing”

“We are told about privacy and how things can impact on your professional life. Then there’s all the stuff you hear in the media about social work. It wasn’t an instant decision to change things, I made changes as I went along. It was gradual”.

In addition are the quotations cited earlier in this work (Chapter 4.1) - offered here in brief - comments such as:

“I don’t really know [referring to why adjustments had been made to presence online] - no one really told us. I think I must just be applying being a social worker across everything”

“You know what I’m thinking, just reflecting on it now, I’ve probably got some of this [when discussing changes made to behaviours and presence online] since I’ve started uni - most of it in fact”.

Students’ conceptions in this category highlight the multidimensional influences that can exist and those that were operating within social work education, as the socialising system, at the time (Gorsuch et al., 1972). They evidence how exposure to professional knowledge, whilst not directly related to digitalisation, supported development of a digital kind. Connections and associations had been made between learning to be professional and being professional in the digital age; even though students were not overly confident or clear about how this had occurred. The ways in which digital development is explained, evident in comments such as *“it’s just being here”* and *“it’s subliminal, like it just goes into you somehow”* can be linked to the idea of incidental learning; learning that takes place by chance or as a result of something else (Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Marsick et al., 2009). The something else here could be attributed to professional socialisation; a process, according to Weiss et al. that is

‘assumed to provide the knowledge, the skills, the behavioural norms and the values that are crucial for anyone engaging in social work’ (2004, p.14).

However, as Weiss et al. go on to explain, ‘the emphasis in this process is upon the internalization of a professional identity and the values and attitudes that comprise it, rather than the mere acquisition of knowledge and skills’ (2004, p.15). The elements of this are seen in student accounts offered here; accounts that reflect how through being in and engaging with their course of learning they had begun to adapt ‘internally, in the subjective self-conceptualization associated with the [professional] role’ (McGowen & Hart, 1990, p.118). Generalised learning about the principles of professionalism informed thinking about professionalism online; and was linked with the implications of digital technologies in social work and technology use:

“I think it’s because of having professional awareness of what to put on [referring to posting online]”.

Given the incidental nature of the learning described, conceptions can also be attributed to the impacts of implicit curricula; a term that came to the fore in social work literature (Mishna et al., 2013; Fang et al., 2014) following a review of the standards for social work education in the US (CSWE, 2008). The updated standards differentiate explicit curriculum, or learning from ‘the formal educational structure’ (CSWE, 2008, p. 3), from implicit curriculum, that is learning gained from being within ‘the educational environment’ (CSWE, 2008, p.10). It was introduced into the US standards due to a recognition of its significance and direct influence on learning and preparation for practice in the field. Miller (2010) discusses how the term ‘encapsulates the context within which the explicit curriculum is presented’ and goes on to explain how it can be viewed as ‘the story behind the curriculum’ (p.925).

‘Being on the course’, formed part of the story that some of the participants of this research told. As Saljo (1996) suggests ‘socialisation provides people with discursive tools through which they account for their experience’ (p.185). Whilst this category of description illustrates how students’ interactions with the professional educational environment contributed to digital development (Entwistle and Waterson, 1988); conversely, it also highlights the problems with incidental type learning, particularly when the subject matter is critical to future practice effectiveness and professionalism in the field (McNay et al., 2012). As cautioned by Bogo and Wayne, ‘what is and what is not taught conveys messages about what is important’ (2013, p.5), which therefore has implications for what students conceptualise as valuable and applicable; with consequences in terms of how prepared they are and how prepared they latterly will feel (Frost, et al., 2012).

Relevant to this is the issue of fear, interwoven into some student conceptions:

“You can ruin your career, it can go to pot if you’re not careful”

“We are told about privacy and how things can impact on your professional life”.

In addition to this, was the need, or indeed a perceived pressure to fit in, to “belong” (Maunder, 2018, p.757), to “*feel part of the group*”:

“All these things [pointing to the mapping tool, where applications such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram had been mapped] are new to me, I would have never considered them before meeting this group of people. It’s a peer pressure type of thing, to feel part of the group, to connect with the group”.

Social work students often experience fear, due to ‘anxieties’ (Grant and Kinman, 2012, p.614) that can arise about ‘getting it wrong’ (Kettle, 2015, p.87). Again, the lack of formal instruction experienced, or the need to rely on the incidental learning, seems to have contributed to this. When asked, participants of this study could not recall being

introduced to or having read the professional regulators 'Focus on Standards – Social Networking Sites' (HCPC, 2011; updated HCPC, 2017c). Nor had they read the BASW's 'Social Media Policy', the only other guidance in place at the time (BASW, 2013; updated BASW, 2018).

Regardless of the professional guidance in place, Voshel and Wesala, in the US context, have called for:

Organizations that train social work students to think seriously about developing their own clear guidelines/policies related to social media use. This is both to set the standard for professional online behavior in the organization and to acclimate students to the process of developing a professional identity related to social media use (2015, p.68).

They believe, like this category shows, that 'it is critically important that students actively participate in the formation of their online persona'. Whilst the students in this category were *not* 'passive about the development of their online identity' (Voshel and Wesala, 2015, p.68), the uncertainty inherent in their accounts highlights the problems with learning that amounts to, as one student recounts, hearing: "*things in passing*". Therefore, Hitchcock & Battista are right to suggest that there is a clear need for social work educators to 'cultivate... media literacies so students will develop the skills they need to be informed professionals' (2013, p.34). Because even though it is broadly accepted that 'new digital technologies are reconfiguring professional practice and responsibility... the education of professionals has yet to adequately reflect this change' (Fenwick and Edwards, 2016, p.117).

The following quotation, cited in full for emphasis, offers significant insights into the attention that digital socialisation appears to need and the importance of

explicitness when learning about digitalisation and its relationship to practice in the connected age:

“People are really scared of it [discussion about the online world]. I’m not overly scared but I don’t know much about it either. I don’t know what’s going to come up. What if children contact parents when they’re not supposed to, how do you stop that? This was a massive area at a session at a conference last week. I heard about the black web. What even is that? I hadn’t even heard about it before - they talked about how you manage it. How do you give people the skills to equip them to know what to do and to manage all the things that could go wrong through the internet? It was a session about cyberstalking - I hadn’t a clue. She was talking about how easy it is for people to access this and that and how not to be traced - torrent stuff. She talked about how it’s all going to get bigger and I wondered what we are going to do about this in practice. She was saying as well that people in universities need to start training staff for how to deal with it all. To be aware of it is really important. It was the first time I had heard of all of this and it felt really scary and I obviously need to know about it all. Me and another student had a discussion afterwards and we were asking each other what would we do and neither of us knew anything about any of it”.

What is distinctive about this recounted experience is, not only the contradictions within it: *“people are really scared of it [discussion about the online world]. I’m not overly scared but I don’t know much about it either”* and *“it was the first time I had heard of all of this and it felt really scary and I obviously need to know about it all”* but the degree of anxiety about what had not been learnt, and what was not known.

In summary, this category of description illustrates how ‘being on the course’ did, in effect, support digital development. All aspects of described experiences and learning, whilst largely incidental and driven by fear, contributed to a shift in perceptions and influenced thinking relevant to digital professionalism, digital spaces and digital tools. These incidental experiences led students, whether they were fully conscious of it or not, to consider what digital professionalism might involve, or what it might be. The incidentalness of the learning described raises questions however about

how 'being on the course' could be put to better use; so that engagement with digital development could be more explicitly addressed; in relation to its relationship with professionalism and to subsequent practices in the field (QAA, 2008; HCPC: 2012; HCPC, 2014).

4.2.3 Category 3. Observing others on the course

Digital development, whilst engaged with social work education, was influenced by, 'observing others on the course'.

Students' conceptions in this category, which again include reference to the lack of formal instruction, describe experiences that show digital development to have been influenced by 'observing others on the course'. The qualitative difference in this category is signified by the shift beyond the 'expectations of the course' "*what you have to do*" and 'being on the course', the idea that "*it just goes into you somehow*" to a more critical and deliberate approach to the digital, achieved here through "*watching*" and reflecting upon "*what other people*" were doing online. An interrogation of what could be thought of as digital correctness, the "*right*" way to be online, is a feature throughout. Through observing others, students in this category were seen to engage in a more active examination of the professional self in relation to the online world.

Whitaker and Reimer (2017) discuss critical reflection as 'more than just pausing for thought', they believe it to involve the 'drawing out of new knowledge' that leads to 'transformation' resulting in 'a more sophisticated sense of the professional self' (p.947). The following quotations have been selected to provide a sense of the exposure that prompted critical reflection, which in turn supported digital development, whilst on the course:

"I'm still trying to learn for myself. I don't know enough and I see my peers getting it wrong all the time and I don't want to. I think I've just got risk on my mind a lot"

"I watch my peers as well. Sometimes I notice others, like if they put something a bit dodgy and I think, should you really be putting that - but maybe I'm just being a bit over cautious. I mean on Facebook there has been a couple of incidents. Like some students are quite right wing politically and there are some things posted that make me think why you are being a social worker if you

believe that type of thing. They are two conflicting things and I can't get my head around why they'd put it out there"

"I think the most important thing practitioners need to be aware of when using internet technologies is confidentiality and being aware that confidential things shouldn't go online. I have seen examples of where people have crossed the line and maybe for example spoken about course issues on Facebook"

"I think it is just about being appropriate with no matter what. I'm quite guarded with who I add as friend anyway, even people in work. I don't like mixing the two things. I've noticed how it leads to problems. I think maybe it's because I'm not in control of what other people write and don't want to be responsible or part of anything that maybe get me into trouble, so it worries me. I don't really know. People do write things I don't agree with and I don't want them in my life. I don't really want other people seeing that on my page. You can learn a lot from watching what other people are doing – even when it's not really right"

"The HCPC have actually struck people off. Actually, because I've seen colleagues put things up [referring to posting content online in social media spaces], I've just thought oh my word that's just not helpful or appropriate. I don't think social work students should be putting up pictures up and out there clearly under the influence of substances. I just don't think it's appropriate or necessary. I've been really surprised to see my student colleagues use social media like they do. You see they don't use it professionally or to see what's going on in the world. Who is Kim Kardashian and all this rubbish? It does really just surprise me. Maybe it's because I'm old-school or something. They don't get information from say the BBC".

Bolin (2012, p.8), citing Saljo (2000) talks about how 'all human acts and interactions are situated in social practices... that learning too is determined by the situation we find ourselves in and the opportunities that it presents'. It is clear from student accounts that they had found themselves in situations that presented opportunities for learning; even though they may not have necessarily viewed them in this way themselves, at that time. Indeed, reactions to what was observed seem to suggest that students had not expected to be exposed to or encounter content and

behaviour of this nature in any space, be that actual or virtual (Taylor, 2014), whilst on the course:

“I’ve been really surprised to see my student colleagues use social media like they do”

“They are two conflicting things”

“There are some things posted that make me think why are you being a social worker?”

“Maybe it’s because I’m old-school or something”.

Social situations online, that, whilst perhaps unanticipated and uncomfortable, had caught their attention:

“I see my peers getting it wrong all the time”

“I notice others, like if they put something a bit dodgy”

“I have seen examples of where people have crossed the line”

“You can learn a lot from watching what other people are doing”,

inadvertently sparking an interrogative response:

“Should you really be putting that?”

“I can’t get my head around why they’d put it out there”

“I just don’t think it’s appropriate or necessary”.

Despite the fact that what had been observed was experienced as ‘troublesome’ (Meyer and Land, 2005, p373) and caused a degree of confusion or concern, these observations appear to have stimulated curiosity, *“I’m still trying to learn for myself”*, and contributed to students reflecting upon and learning about appropriateness in what, in essence, are public social spaces:

“I think it is just about being appropriate no matter what”

“I don’t like mixing the two things”

“I’ve just thought oh my word that’s just not helpful or appropriate”

“People do write things I don’t agree with and I don’t want them in my life. I don’t really want other people seeing that on my page”.

Dewey (1993) explains reflective learning to involve,

a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates and an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity (p.12).

Whilst these students were clearly engaged in critical reflection there is a lack of surety and clarity in their accounts, that appeared to remain unresolved. ‘Doubt, hesitation, perplexity’ to use Dewey’s (1933, p.12) words, about what appropriateness means for social work students when active in an online space:

“I don’t think”

“I don’t really know”

“Should you really be putting that?”

“I don’t know enough”.

The lack of confidence in what was known, or not, highlights the problems with incidental learning, or learning in the absence of more concrete or formal instruction:

“I don’t think it’s taught as such it’s more how other people are using it”

“I’m still trying to learn for myself”.

Particularly given the professional implications of “*getting it wrong*” in online spaces; and given that the professional regulator is clear that, when engaged in course inspections, they ‘will want to make sure that all students... [are enabled] to practise safely and effectively’ (HCPC, 2014, p.29).

Concerns about “*getting it wrong*” and “*risk*” again formed a thread running through this category of description. However, as noted, due to what was being observed, students were seen to engage in a more proactive evaluation of others’ online presence and behaviours to address the worries they were experiencing:

“I see my peers getting it wrong all the time and I don’t want to”

“Actually, because I’ve seen colleagues put things up” [referring to posting content online in social media spaces]

“I’ve noticed how it leads to problems. I think maybe it’s because I’m not in control of what other people write and don’t want to be responsible or part of anything that maybe get me into trouble, so it worries me”

“Maybe I’m just being a bit over cautious”,

which in turn appeared to support digital development. Realisations: “*I don’t want to*”, “*I’ve noticed how it leads to problems*” and implied actions: “*because I’ve seen colleagues put things up*”, “*maybe I’m just being a bit over cautious*” that served to reduce the likelihood of them infringing what they thought might be expected of emerging professionals, within the online; whilst on and beyond the course.

The content reported to have been observed, whilst not ideal, was not a new phenomenon for, or in social work at that time; as the online incidents involving qualified practitioners, mentioned earlier, have shown (Chapter 1.4; Chapter 2.1). Indeed, online presence of the nature described correlates strongly with the findings of a study by Mukherjee and Clark (2012), that examined social work students’ participation in social networking sites. Mukherjee and Clark (2012) found ‘a disconnect between students’ professional and personal selves that is fully displayed in their behavior on online social networking forums’ (p.168). What was also interesting about this work, was how ‘social work students who had been using SNSs [social networking sites] for a

longer period of time became more vulnerable to exposing private information online than relatively new user students and that the ‘virtual selves that are manifested through the SNS profiles follow a clear discrepancy from the professional image that... [students] profess to want to harness’ (Mukherjee and Clark, 2012, p.170).

Issues of this nature are not unique to social work education. Pharmacy academics in a study that considered, amongst other things, students posting of ‘private information in public spaces’ also found social media sites to be problematic for students of their discipline. They discuss:

The controversy that surrounds the use of these sites, specifically in terms of privacy, safety and attitudes toward revealing personal information to the world, and refer to, how, for their profession:

The list of incidences are long and revolve around a myriad of issues related to photos, posts and/or personal profile (Cain, 2008, p.2).

There are examples from nursing education too, that explain how:

Adults entering nursing education programs are often unprepared to completely comprehend the impact of their social media interactions. While confidentiality and professionalism in electronic communication are addressed in most nursing programs, there needs to be greater emphasis on social media communication and the perceptions that each post or interaction can generate within a more detailed curriculum (Mamocho et al., 2015, p.3).

Medicine has not escaped the pitfalls of the online world either, as this comment from Collier (2012) shows:

Doctors who use Facebook, Twitter, Blogger, Tumblr or other social media platforms are perfectly capable of embarrassing themselves and the medical profession as a whole by posting unprofessional material online. One prominent example, cited in an academic paper about online medical professionalism, involves a group of health care workers, including physicians, who travelled to

Haiti to deliver aid. Their good work was overshadowed by Facebook pictures of doctors grinning while holding guns and bottles of alcohol, as well as photos of naked, unconscious patients (p.627).

It must be remembered however, that regardless of where these comments were made or where this information was shared, it is the content itself not the location that contravenes basic professionalism. Again, these instances make the case for professional education to review how it is articulating the parameters of professionalism, as it relates to the digital, so that students can be supported to interrogate behaviours and presence online in a way that supports the development of the professional self. Because as Fang (2014) et al. point out:

Without a clear understanding of the blurred boundaries between public and private, the potentially limitless and unintended audiences, as well as the permanency of the information shared online, social work students who use social media can find themselves in difficult situations in their personal and professional lives (p.800).

Relating to social work, Watling and Rogers (2012), believe issues with understanding appropriateness, or with being professional online to be due, in part, to the fact that:

Social work students often arrive at university in possession of a range of digital technologies and behaviours without ever having to consider them within the boundaries of professional practice (np).

In the absence of explicit reference to digitalisation and digital professionalism within the professional requirements for social work education (QAA, 2008; HCPC, 2012; HCPC, 2014), since updated (QAA, 2016; HCPC, 2017a; HCPC, 2017b) this is a situation that is unlikely to change. Explicit reference to a student's transition from digital citizen to digital professional needs to be addressed, because as these findings and the literature suggests (Chapter 2.1), attention to digital professionalism as an

educational issue for social work seems to be somewhat overdue. Without formal instruction - and again it seems that formal instruction was not experienced, it is difficult to see how these students could have confidently resolved 'the doubt' and disposed of the 'perplexity' evident in accounts of their experiences (Dewey, 1933, p.12). Students whose conceptions formed this category are seen to be in a state of conflict, grappling to resolve what appears to be a contradiction between what had been observed and what they thought might be the "*right*" way to be, or right thing to do. All of which is also significant when considering those students whose online presence and subsequent content had been observed and reported upon; because they too clearly require formal support to make this important personal to professional shift.

Again, even though digital development was seen to occur, the experiences that led to this were incidental, or like in the previous category, sparked as a result or 'by-product' of something else (Marsick and Watkins, 1990, p12). In this category, the something else, as already noted, was content students became aware of through informal observations of their peers' presence and behaviours online. The idea of learning through observation or 'observational learning', as it is more commonly known in contemporary higher education, is slightly different to the experiences that the students of this study describe; in that it is more intentional, involves formal instruction and is designed purposefully, usually in line with a set of learning outcomes (Biggs, 1996). However, thinking about observational learning in higher education continues to evolve. Building upon the work of Bandura (1965), who evidenced how learning as a social construct, more often than not, involves observation, modelling and imitation, observational learning or learning through observation now takes many forms.

One such form is that of ‘vicarious learning’, a process whereby ‘students use their peer’s... experiences in order to learn for themselves’ (Roberts, 2010 p.13). Roberts (2010), in a comprehensive review of vicarious learning in nursing education discusses how ‘raw or first-hand experience may not be the only mechanisms’ through which students engage in learning and outlines how ‘there is a growing body of literature within higher education which suggests that students are able to use another’s experience to learn’. This form of learning is also intentional, ‘planned as part of the curriculum’, or employed formally and takes place through structured and facilitated peer to peer ‘discourse, discussion and storytelling’. Through engaging in learning in this way students are thought to ‘internalize what is said during discussion’ and through doing so can ‘relate these ideas to their own’ (Roberts, 2010, p.16).

In social work education learning through observation, or observational learning, is primarily associated with the ‘shadowing’ of a qualified practitioner in practice (Parker et al., 2012), or where the student is ‘observed’ in an educational or practice setting and feedback is offered on the observation, as part of a summative assessment process (O’Loughlin and O’Loughlin, 2014). Yet, outside of these more formal learning processes it is inevitable that social work students will learn. As suggested by Bruner (1969) ‘most of our encounters with the world’ or learning experiences in the world ‘are not direct [or formalised] encounters’ (p.122) and can, as was the case here, involve observing others. However, peer learning without opportunities to formally reflect can, as this data shows, leave students feeling anxious, confused and even more vulnerable to “*getting it wrong*”.

Whilst the students of this study do not recount, what could be viewed as, formal observational learning, they had clearly learnt vicariously; through observing and

reflecting upon the discourse and behaviours of others. However, as Ambrose et al. (2010), in 'How Learning Works' suggest, students who have not had opportunities to formally review and consolidate learning are left in situations where they are in danger of 'building new knowledge on shaky foundations' (p.13). Again, highlighting the points made earlier about circumstances where there is a need to make the implicit explicit in social work education. Achilike et al. (2018), in a study that sought to explore 'the relationship between social networking sites and observational learning' recognised that 'encouragement should be given to students to enable them to benefit adequately from the gains of social networking channels vis-à-vis observational learning' (p.324). Fang et al. also recognise the potential of this approach in social work, in work that found social media to lend itself to 'a participatory learning process, whereby students can be resources for one another' (2014, p.804); as the following two accounts show:

"Yeah well, I don't think it's [professionalism online] taught as such, it's more how other people are using it. Like you're exposed to your tutors and the people you research have Twitter accounts and it just kinda makes sense to look at them. You know these comments are coming straight from them and that it is them typing it, it's more reliable. So, to me I could see how it made sense to have look for yourself, but its never been taught. I would talk to students about the usefulness of using Twitter, which I found out myself. But also, who to follow and why. I did all this myself. It would have been good to know this much earlier on. I had not been told. I think it needs to be"

"We should use that [video conferencing] more, for learning to be social workers. Talking to other students and to have guest speakers via video would be good too. We should get an introductory course for using the systems. I know other students on other courses do. We need lessons, but we're nearly finished our course; it's too late and we've missed out. Maybe a separate two or three-week module to make people aware of all the technologies and how these can be used and what for. They [academics] didn't show us how to tweet, or to follow people. It would be great if someone could teach us all these things. They've just popped up these ideas and I'm not sure really, why they've not all been explained to us".

Through observing others, in this instance academic staff and “*students on other courses*” these students had become aware of and had developed some interesting ideas about the affordances of new social media technologies as a learning device.

Furthermore, they acknowledge how it would have been beneficial for them ‘*to have known this much earlier*’, illuminating missed opportunities to develop digital practices, or to employ trending technologies in a more formal sense:

“We need sessions on it [referring to the use of social media]. Communication modules could be useful on tweeting and getting us to tweet. This is how to use it and it helps this way with your studies. Lots of my student friends don’t have it and they don’t want it and if they sit them down and get them tweeting it might help them to see the benefits. Erm, you can’t help a service -user with it if you don’t know it yourself, can you?”

“I would put online stuff in the communication module. Everything now is about communication and we are using this on placement, like text messages and things. Cuts are forcing practice to do things differently. We could be using skype and things and maybe they [educators] could do some stuff about communicating through technologies, I think that’s the way things will move in the future and we need to be able to keep up with all of this. Preparing for practice module should include this, there is a massive change in practice and the digital stuff needs included in there”.

Even though the term vicarious learning is not used to describe learning of an observational nature in social work literature there is value in thinking about how this type of learning could be used, particularly when the subject matter is, like it is here, underdeveloped, complex or difficult to grasp. Roberts (2010) referring to Northedge (2003) proposes a viable and robust pedagogic solution to what appears to have been troubling for these students, explaining that when:

Students are unable to make use of discourse by themselves, finding it difficult to understand, it is the teacher who is pivotal to enabling learning through discourse because it is the teacher (who is already a speaker of the specialist discourse) who lends the students the capacity to frame meanings they cannot yet produce independently. It is the teacher who opens up the conversation and

shares a flow of meaning; the students join with the teacher in sharing meaning and they also share something of the frame of reference that sustains it. This development takes place as the teacher poses questions and introduces new elements and takes the students on an excursion into specialist discourse to experience how meaning is made there, helping the students move from the frame of everyday language to the discourse of the specialist knower' (p.14).

For this proposition to be practicable in social work education, as mentioned in Chapter 2:2.3, it requires social work academics who are digitally minded and digitally equipped. Educators themselves will have had opportunities to acquire the knowledge necessary to enable them to embark on a learning journey of this nature with students; because for instruction of this kind to be possible, they too will have had to engage in their own digital shift. The following student comment however seems to cast some doubt over the degree to which the digital development of academics had been addressed...

"I don't think there is any help at all on the course [referring to learning to use social media technologies]. I've noticed a few lecturers using Twitter. Now I know how to use it, I don't know whether to say to the academics that the way they are using it is wrong and students don't see it [content that is tweeted and meant for the student group]. You'll know what I mean about Twitter and the layout. We aren't seeing it at all. I don't think they[educators] get the directing thing [referring to how a tweet is constructed and how it is then directed and seen by the target audience] and it doesn't always show up in my feed. I don't think they know or if that's their intention. So, I was doing it wrong until I asked other people on the course and I Googled it too. I don't think they'd like knowing that they are doing it wrong".

Since the time of study design the HCPC have released guidelines about the appropriate use of social media in social work (2017c), due to a recognition of the issues that uninformed usage has caused across all professional groupings. Whilst these guidelines have come a long time after these students have qualified they have relevance for those engaged in professional social work education now; in that they

offer a level of guidance and direction to the profession, which includes reference to the implications of any wrongdoing.

4.2.4 Category 4. Applying learning to the course

Digital development, whilst engaged with social work education, involved, ‘applying learning to the course’.

Student conceptions that form this category of description, show digital development to have involved the application of learning, prompted by exposure to a range of experiences and encounters, ‘to the course’. The qualitative difference in this category includes and shifts beyond the technical orientation of Category 1 and professional orientation of Categories 2 and 3. A more sophisticated appreciation of and active engagement with the affordances and hindrances of new digital knowledge, practice values and practice skills and attempts to apply digitally orientated thinking are seen.

Conceptions in this category also contain forward-thinking realisations about how social work education, social work practice and the students themselves needed to change; and are linked to the impacts of digitalisation upon social work and the social world. Whilst anxieties and fears remain, students appear to be somewhat more confident and clearer in their articulations about what professionalism in the digital age might involve. Moreover, they present as having engaged even further with the implications of being uninformed and unprofessional in a digital respect. Once more suggestions about what is required from social work education if social workers are to develop the competence necessary to navigate the digital spaces they increasingly need to inhabit, are made by students; and in this category are largely based upon experiences in practice placement that are described to have emerged. A focus on social media networking sites, particularly Twitter, is seen to carry into Category 4 from Category 3, which corresponds with the rise in its usage in education (Ross et al., 2015), social work education (Westwood et al., 2014) and in the popularist context (Liu et al., 2014) at that time. The lack of formal instruction is an enduring theme.

Whilst conceptions in each of the categories of description illustrate learning and the application of that learning, the qualitative difference here is firmly rooted in the progressive nature of the critical thinking and engagement described and pragmatically applied ‘to the course’. This application of learning appears to have been prompted by a range of experiences, predominately, but not solely, within practice placement settings. Students describe placement experiences to include, what they perceived to be, digital indifference and unethical digital practices. Their responses to this are expressed with genuine concern. Efforts to understand the impacts of digitalisation on professionalism, on service-users and its potential to cause “*harm*” are made clear.

Conceptions in this category also include reference to accountability, employability and information practices. Significant understandings and a rethinking or reimagining of the nuanced relationship between professional social work and the online world are explained. Practice leadership, in terms of the digital literacy development of others, is actively pursued. Conceptions also outline students’ attempts to engage, as opportunities present, in influencing change at both an individual and systemic level, in a digital respect.

Even though students were consistent in their reports of not, or not being able to recall reflecting upon digital development before entering the interview space (Chapter 3.3) prior experiences appear to have been given some thought:

“I knew some stuff from before. There was an occasion on Facebook where I put something and a colleague on my nursing course got in touch with me and said have you had a look at the nursing guidelines, because he thought what I wrote might cause me a problem. So, through reading the guidance back then and after a process of reflection I realised where I’d gone wrong. That hasn’t really left me”

“It [social media] is a help, but I think you do have to be careful. There was a point in my undergrad course where we all got into trouble as we all were

sharing too much. It was a big learning curve and I think it was not understanding what you can share on there that caused the problem. Ironically getting in trouble then has helped me here. I'm really careful now"

"I've always been cautious about what I am putting online but I would have been more blasé about it before the course because I now understand no matter what you do there can be a way somebody can find it if they really wanted to. I guess my knowledge and my understanding of what you need to do to keep yourself safe has grown".

What was previously experienced is reimagined and proactively applied 'to the course', in ways that support digital development and the growth of the professional self.

Practice effectiveness and accountability were also reinterpreted and applied to the course:

"Anything I'm prepared to say and how I need to listen is the same online. It [presence online] has to be in a manner that I am accountable for. You have got to think of the harm we can cause to others if we are not skilled social workers. I don't see them [interactions online] any different than face to face in terms of being a professional anymore. You know I think I took that learning and applied it. I think maybe because I had a fear about getting it wrong".

Whilst not ideal, the fear of "getting it wrong" and the "harm" that this could cause, continued to shape development. These fears trigger important realisations; that accountability is a professional principle regardless of the context and that skilful interaction should be the aim irrespective of where a practice interaction takes place. The use of the word "anymore" emphasises a change in thinking to have occurred, with "you know I think I took that learning and applied it" suggesting that even though digital development had taken place, this development had been brought into sharper focus through the opportunity to reflect within the interview space.

The following excerpt, taken from a paper based upon this study, is offered to highlight the uniqueness of the experience described; particularly this comment:

“I don’t see them [interactions online] any different than face to face in terms of being a professional anymore”.

For social work in the connected age, it is the interrelatedness of people, places, spaces and things that needs to be reviewed. In an attempt to counter dominant discourse which describes people as somehow separate from technologies and to make the point that *‘the digital and physical [are in fact] enmeshed’*, Jurgenson (2012) coined the phrase *‘digital dualism’* (p.83). Jurgenson, a sociologist and social media theorist, stresses the dangers of focussing *‘on one side, be it human or technology, without deeply acknowledging the other’* (Taylor, 2017, p.870).

What is interesting and indeed encouraging about the content of the described conception is how, in the absence of formal instruction, significant linkages about the interconnectedness of the virtual and physical worlds had been made; and had been applied to the course. The work of Zgodia and Shane however, shows what can happen when learning about digitalisation is not as a result of fear, incidental or left to chance. They explain that:

When instructors offer a grounding in technology skills for modern social work practice and provide feedback to students in a supportive classroom setting, social work students become more confident and poised to handle the complications of technology and social media while interacting with clients, agencies, non-profit organizations and society as a whole (2018, p.32).

This is a consideration when thinking about the development of appropriate and timely digitally orientated instruction in social work.

An awareness of and concerns about the nature of information in the digitised age was also indicative of progressive thinking, for this period in time. Here, the implications of being embroiled in, what is now known as, the information rich and

sharing economy (Hadidi and Power, 2017) is linked to employability and experienced with unease:

“I think also there is something for me about things like when you are applying for jobs, if we are not doing what we should be doing from an employment point of view. Not only that and this makes me sound a bit paranoid, information is out there and if it ever needed to be used it could be used in a court of law against you, it is very public. Erm we have seen from people who are in public service in the media what can be done with that information and that frightens me a little bit”.

Learning in this conception is once again roused by anxiety and fear. The risks of getting it wrong, *“not doing what we should be doing”* and a level of consciousness about the possible consequences of *“information that is out there”* on future employment, appears to have prompted a reflective pause. A consideration of the nature of information, *“it is very public”* and information sharing *“what can be done with that information”*, *“if it ever needed to be used”*, along with perceptions about the use of information by, or perhaps pertaining to public servants, evidences critical thinking. The preface *“I think also there is something for me”* seems to suggest that a review of information that is, or potentially could be *“out there”* had taken place. A level of consciousness about the digitalisation of information, its reach and its searchability is experienced as a professional tension. Thinking of this nature is applied to the course, which in turn supports digital development, as attempts to reimagine what it means to ‘be’ digitally professional, in relation to information and employment are observed.

What is interesting about this conception is how it relates to a much wider, and to a larger degree unresolved, issue that continues to gain momentum in the media (Read, 2018), in literature (Del Vicario et al., 2016; Kurasawa, 2018; Guess et al., 2019), and in policy discussions (LSE, 2018; LSE, 2019) today. The rise in tensions and the lack of agreement about what is public, what is private, data handling, data

collection and information sharing, remain central to the digitalisation debate (Marx, 2016); and, as this conception highlights, has relevance for those seeking, or indeed for those granted, professional status, in a number of respects (Moriarty et al., 2015). Livingstone (2018), as part of a research team considering 'Tackling the Information Crisis' (LSE, 2018), relates information in the new digital ecosystem to Beveridge's 5 'Giant Evils' for society. Livingstone lists the 5 Giant Evils of the information age as, 'confusion, cynicism, fragmentation, irresponsibility and apathy' (2018, np). She goes on to point out that while there is 'no magic answer' to the management of information in its current forms, the development of a robust 'digital infrastructure' should be pursued, as part of much needed digital reforms (Livingstone, 2018, np). Linked to this is the fact that we all, as 'data subjects' have 'unwittingly' consented to and become part of the information problem, due to 'attention-grabbing algorithms' designed to bolster the click economy (Deibert, 2019, p.26).

For professional groupings however, particularly in the absence of formal instruction, there is a real danger that uninformed digital habits or digital habits of a personal kind, such as information seeking, content creation and information sharing, could continue to leak into and rupture presence and practices in the professional space. The convenience of social media type technologies can often preside over a consciousness about how they are used; which is troubling when considering professionalism and the domains in which social work now takes place. As Mishna et al., (2012), relating to social work, have previously pointed out, the 'cyber age' has 'dislodged... firm expectations' or professional givens for those we aim to serve (p.285). One of these givens relates to the how information is gathered, how it is used and how it is exchanged. Consent is fundamental to ethical social work practice, it is a premise on which trust and relationships are built (Biestek, 1954). Due to the nature of

digitalisation methods of information gathering, information handling and forms of information exchange have become blurred (Boddy and Dominelli, 2017).

The issue of information practices in social work has, more recently, become the subject of debate. Some of the reason for this is evident in descriptions of experiences reported to have been encountered by students during practice placement:

“On my placement some practitioners would use Facebook to almost spy on service users and families which I didn’t think was ethical or ethically sound practice. I wondered legally where you would stand with that and that was common practice within that team and LA. It brought up all kinds of stuff for me and I didn’t really know who to ask or what to do about it. I really wanted to report them, but then to who would I do that? Maybe they are allowed to do this kinda stuff?”

“There’s an issue also for me for gathering information on social media because we are in this job to empower service-users and we are there to empower them. I don’t want to investigate them [service-users] on social media in case it reflects badly on them and might not be current. I would be reluctant to do a Google search on people. For me it’s crossing the line but it’s what I’ve seen people do”.

The described experiences involve students grappling with values, ethics and the law, in ways that they had not perhaps imagined, or were not prepared for. Through reflection, *“I wondered”*, the observed practices were pragmatically critiqued. Challenges to fundamental beliefs, *“we are in this job to empower service-users”* and tensions about what had previously been learned, *“I didn’t think was ethical”* gave cause for concern. The fact that practices were viewed as *“crossing the line”* and are described to have *“brought up all kinds of stuff”* indicate that students were applying general learning from the course, to unfamiliar and complex experiences on the course. Even though a lack of clarity about the procedures and legislation underpinning these practices is described, *“I wondered legally where you would stand”*, practices are not accepted, instead they are questioned, in terms of whether or not they were *“ethically sound”*. The

use of the word “*investigate*” and the idea that information found on social media “*might not be current*” again evidences progressive thinking, given that this is an ongoing debate for the profession, yet to be resolved.

The issue of surveillance in social work was more recently sparked by a report in the social care publication, *Community Care* (Carson and Stevenson, 2017), where Principal Social Workers, those thought of as practice leaders, offered advice to the wider profession regarding the use of social media. On reading this publication and following a conversation on Twitter, a Care Lawyer and Blogger who felt that elements of the published advice ‘contravened the guidance’ of the Office of Surveillance Commissioners (OSC, 2016) responded through a blog. This blog focusses on ‘members of the State looking at the social media of members of the public’ without the necessary permissions (Suesspicious Minds, 2017, np). As noted by the Lawyer, the OSC make two important points that public servants should be clear about:

288. The fact that digital investigation is routine or easy to conduct does not reduce the need for authorisation

288.1 Repeat viewing of—open source sites may constitute directed surveillance (2016, p.68).

To counter some of the advice being offered in the afore-mentioned article, the blog goes on to outline how if social workers, as public servants, are found to engage in the repeat viewing i.e. more than once, of a member of the public’s social media site without consent, they could be committing a criminal offence (Appendix 8.). Even though the cited guidance was published after this data was generated, social work professionals were accountable at that time under ‘The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) (RIPA) Order’ (2010) which contains clear directives about how:

A local authority can now only grant an authorisation under RIPA for the use of directed surveillance where the local authority is investigating particular types of criminal offences. These are criminal offences which attract a maximum custodial sentence of 6 months or more or relate to the underage sale of alcohol or tobacco (Suesspicious Minds, 2017, np).

Otherwise, the current position in England for social work is that permissions from the court must be sought.

There are no indications within the recounted experiences to suggest that authorisation for surveillance had been sought or that offences, of the nature outlined in the legislation, were a basis for engaging in these types of information gathering practices. However, what is clear is the application of learning to the course. The described reflections demonstrate student attempts to adhere to a fundamental professional requirement, the ability ‘to be able to practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession’. Furthermore, they evidence an understanding of ‘the need to respect and uphold the rights, dignity, values and autonomy of every service user and carer’ and are clear ‘that relationships with service users and carers should be based on respect and honesty’ (HCPC, 2012, p.7). Overall, students are seen to be operating within ‘the threshold standards’ that the regulating body ‘consider necessary to protect members of the public’, even though they are dealing with an unfamiliar phenomenon and unexpected occurrences within the learning space (HCPC, 2012, p.3). From a philosophical point of view, students personify what Leonard, in ‘Technology v Humanity: the coming clash between man and machine’, simply states: ‘just because we can... [access information online] doesn’t mean we should’ (2016, pii).

To date, little is known about the extent to which UK social work education pays attention to information literacy as it relates to the digital; other than the more general finding from the NHS research project, mentioned earlier (Chapter 3.3), that deduced social workers across England ‘receive no specific training on digital’ (NHS Digital, 2018, np). What however is known, is that the social work curriculum ‘must remain relevant to current practice’ (HCPC, 2012, p.7); and that education providers are required ‘to show how the design of [a] programme and how it is delivered:

- predicts or reflects change in practice and its organisation, changes in the law and changes in service users’ needs
- reflects developments in a profession’s research base and advances in technology
- develops a student’s ability to respond to changes in practice’ (HCPC, 2014, p.39).

Furthermore, that students and practitioners will be held to account for behaviours, online or off, that infringe the professional standards and codes of practice in any respect (McGregor, 2011; Stevenson, 2014; Schraer, 2015).

Conceptions in this category therefore raise important questions about how all students can know what they “*should be doing*” and how they can be supported to feel more confident with regards to the parameters of information management, “*maybe they are allowed to do this kinda stuff?*” given the complexities of information and data, both theirs and that of others, in this ‘brave new world’ (Turner, 2015b, np). In addition to this was the issue of not knowing “*who to ask or what to do about it*”. The recent work of Flanagan and Wilson, ‘What makes a good practice placement’, acknowledges the lack of confidence social work students often experience when they feel the need to ‘speak up and engage in difficult conversations’ (2018, p.567). The conceptions above

illustrate the need to provide students with opportunities and a context in which they can reflect openly about the concerns they have, in a way that allows their confidence and their skills, to grow. This is particularly important given that ‘the ability to advocate for oneself is an essential skill for students to learn, as advocating on behalf of clients or service users is fundamental to social work practice’ (Flanagan and Wilson, 2018, p.567).

In contrast to the experiences outlined in these student conceptions are the experiences of the students of Cooner, who is intentional in his learning design and clear about his educational purpose:

To prepare for twenty-first-century social work, students must access learning opportunities to critically assess their SNS use, so they can ensure their online behaviour does not breach confidentiality, bring the profession into disrepute or transgress personal/professional boundaries (2014, p.1063).

Similar to the outcomes of the digitally orientated approach to learning developed by Zgoda and Shane, are the outcomes of the carefully crafted blended learning design of Cooner (2014), who through the use of the social networking site (SNS) Facebook, found students to develop:

Confidence in being able to outline the ethical issues, personal privacy concerns for professionals and service users and the potential positive and negative aspects of using social networking sites for future professional development increased as a result of engaging with the learning design (p.1063).

As part of a wider ethnographic study, Cooner, alongside co-researcher Beddoe, have recently added to his substantive work in this area; creating and openly publishing an immersive tool designed to assist social workers to reflect upon the ethics of information gathering via social media. A full report on the findings of this work is due to be published this year (Cooner and Beddoe, 2018, np).

Despite the anxieties that embracing the digital world evoked, or what was being taught, or not, described experiences in this category continue to show proactive engagement with new digital technologies. Whilst there are similarities to Category 2 and 3, 'being on the course' "*the things I used just personally before I now use differently*" and 'observing others on the course' "*we need to see what the academics and the professionals are saying*" digital development in this category also involved realisations about the ways in which a social media technology could be used, "*like for my research I am looking on Twitter and things for information*" and how it could be thought about "*I wouldn't have this way of working without being on Twitter. I embrace it as much as I can, so I can get confident on using it. I think about how I can use it in practice*". How these technologies were experienced, as adding value to professional development, was applied directly to the course, "*now I use things in a different way, in a professional capacity, that I wouldn't have known pre my Twitter days*". Attempts to develop what others knew and how they could use technologies formed part of this:

"The things I used just personally before I now use differently or professionally. Like for my research I am looking on Twitter and things for information. We need to see what the academics and the professionals are saying, so I think there has to be an introduction to new ways and applications. The way I use applications has changed. So, like say Twitter I am watching what the academics and professionals are doing, saying and researching; what books they are using. I am conscious of becoming a professional and what it means if I get it wrong. We never talk about it in uni so it's not like I've got it from there. It's hard to really say where I have got this from, it wasn't mentioned in placement either"

"I've started using it[Twitter] all the time. I tweeted it myself a link this morning. I email myself and then I send stuff around my group. I think I need to do this more and take this further. I look at all the research and link colleagues to this. But I wouldn't have this way of working without being on Twitter. I pass on conversations too. I embrace it as much as I can, so I can get confident on using it. I think about how I can use it in practice and think about where I was five years and ago and how things have changed and how I can keep up. What's going to change in another 5 years, what's it going to be like? Technology in practice is going to stay and it's going to be more and more how we do our

work, so you need to know the basics now. It is also about being a creative practitioner. How can you engage with children if this is how they communicate? We have got to keep up. They are way above us. I had a good knowledge of systems, but my confidence has increased because I could see resources and found connecting with colleagues really useful. Now I use things in a different way, in a professional capacity, that I wouldn't have known pre my Twitter days. It needs to become part of how we think in education and practice”.

Again, fear *“I am conscious of becoming a professional and what it means if I get it wrong”* and the lack of formal instruction *“we never talk about it in uni so it's not like I've got it from there. It's hard to really say where I have got this from, it wasn't mentioned in placement either”* feature in student conceptions. Nevertheless, students are seen to engage critically in reflections about the nature of technological change, for example, *“what's going to change in another 5 years, what's it going to be like?”* and practice preparedness, *“I think there has to be an introduction to new ways and applications”*. They actively build upon their knowledge, *“I tweeted it myself a link this morning”* and what they had learned, not only to benefit themselves, but also for the benefit of others, *“I send stuff around my group. I think I need to do this more and take this further. I look at all the research and link colleagues to this”*. The value of the medium is experienced through engaging critically and reflectively with it, *“I could see resources and found connecting with colleagues really useful”* and this too is applied to the course, *“it needs to become part of how we think in education and practice”*. All of which goes some way towards the professional requirement that expects students to be ‘able to demonstrate a level of skill in the use of information technology appropriate to their practice’ (HCPC, 2012, p.13); whether they were conscious of this requirement at this time or not.

The benefits of these experiences, whilst met with a level of resistance, are applied in practice placement too:

“It’s funny because we talked about this on placement and colleagues were saying how they didn’t see a place for social media in practice, they said it wouldn’t help their practice. The managers didn’t even know. I talked to them about the value of it and the way it’s helped me as a professional. I told them how I had taken part in research with other academics, which has helped me massively and how I would never have got that opportunity. That came through learning how to use Twitter and managing to engage in debate. Like I have had conversations with Sir Martin Narey and he has come back to me about Government stuff, all through Twitter. It led to me meeting the Chief Social Workers and now if I engage with them on Twitter they answer me and we can talk. Also, it means we can inform thinking and it means we can say our experiences from practice to Government. You don’t get that in your insular worlds. We get other people’s perceptions and I also think it’s good to challenge yourself. Yes, it’s only 140 characters, but if you read through you can get a lot more. People have asked me to do training on placement, to train staff up”.

Here again the value of what had been experienced is applied to the course. Even though *“the value of”* social media to support learning and development was experienced positively, this was described to conflict with the thoughts and perceptions of the qualified practitioners in practice placement, *“colleagues were saying how they didn’t see a place for social media in practice, they said it wouldn’t help their practice”*. The benefits of the learning gained, and the value of the connections made is laboured, *“I told them...”* in what appears to be an attempt to evoke interest and change, *“you don’t get that in your insular worlds”*. Evidence of the variety of ways that engaging with social media technologies supports learning and development are described to have been shared; and ultimately had an impact: *“people have asked me to do training on placement, to train staff up”*. As Doel, in the ‘Travellers Guide’ to practice placements, explains, ‘students can bring a new outlook and a fresh challenge, to you, your team and the agency’. Furthermore:

Practice placements are not just about offering individual students an opportunity for practice learning; they are about a wider philosophy that links practice agencies to higher education, research and continuing professional development. Students bring much value to the placement' (2010, p.xvi).

Whilst it would be easy to jump to conclusions and pass judgement on the recounted responses of practice colleagues already qualified in the field, it must be remembered that digital literacy development, or becoming digitally professional, in its current form is an emerging element of the practitioner role, not just in social work but across the professions, as the work of the Susskinds shows. Susskind and Susskind (2015) claim that:

We are on the brink of a period of fundamental and irreversible change in the way that the expertise of specialists is made available to society [and that] technology will be the main driver of this change (p.1).

They go on to explain how the 'professions are not immutable' and that 'the professions in their current form will no longer be the best answer' to all of the needs of the 'technology-based Internet society' (p.3). They urge 'practitioners... to think more widely and strategically and to be tolerant of the possibility of change in their own disciplines' (p.4), given that the availability of knowledge, made possible through the Internet, challenges the whole idea of and need for 'expertise' (p.8).

Helpful to understanding perceptions of technologies in social work education and practice is the work of Davis (1989), presented to social work by Thackray (2014 in Westwood, 2014, p.9), that tested the idea of 'perceived ease of use' and 'perceived usefulness' as a way of conceptualising user acceptance of and engagement with computers (p.319). Davis (1989) aimed to find 'better measures for predicting and explaining use' or what it was that 'caused people to accept or reject information

technology' (p.320). Davis differentiates two sets of persons, those who 'tend to use or not use an application to the extent they believe it will help them perform their job better', the 'perceived usefulness' group; and those who 'believe that using a particular system would be free of effort', the 'perceived ease of use' group. He goes on to conclude that 'all else being equal... an application perceived to be easier to use than another is more likely to be accepted by users' (1989, p.320). The findings of Davis's work could be useful for addressing how social work education and practice can 'bridge the knowledge gaps' (Taylor, 2017, p.867) and fears that exist across the profession, so that pedagogy and practice methods can, where needed, move on.

The following remaining two conceptions of this category of description provide examples of how practice needs have moved on and highlight some key elements of digital development for social workers preparing to engage with 21st century need:

"On my final placement there was someone from a different country grooming a young person and manipulating that young person to do extreme explicit things to themselves and that's in a different country. They were using computers, internet, technology to do that to that young person - it was horrific and that's from the other side of the world. So, this needs to be in teaching on all modules across the three years because technologies are changing and we need to be helped to know about these changes. Student social workers need to know how to be safe themselves and then they can help service users to keep safe. I don't know that much about this, but at least I know enough so can watch out for it"

Digital development, as can be seen, is again as a result of incidental learning, learning as a 'by-product of something else' (Marsick and Watkins, 1990, p.12). What is described to have been experienced through practice placement, clearly came as a surprise: "*it was horrific and that's from the other side of the world*" and has a lasting effect: "*but at least I know enough so can watch out for it*". Had this student not encountered the practice experience described, they may not have acquired nuanced

learning of this kind or had an opportunity to reimagine the relevance of digitalisation in the context of sexual abuse.

How grooming behaviours and sexual abuse are taught within the social work curriculum, now that these issues have been exacerbated by new technologies, is not widely reported within social work literature. However, within publications regarding Child Sexual Abuse (CSE) there are findings similar to what this student has described here. For example, a study by Martin (2016), albeit small scale, that examined practitioner views of CSE found that ‘all participants felt inadequately prepared in terms of their training and experience to effectively respond’ and that they too raised concerns about the implication of this (p. 372). Comments such as ‘I don’t recall any mention of the internet in any of my training’, ‘In the training that we had I don’t remember talking about the internet’ and ‘I think it is one of those areas that is seriously lacking just in terms of what’s written about it... so how are we supposed to treat these kids’, illustrate this (Martin, 2016, p. 381-382).

A survey by BASW, in partnership with the NSPCC, reported social workers to be ‘in desperate need of specialist training in how to spot the warning signs that a child is being targeted for sexual abuse online’ (2014, np). The social workers who took part in the BASW study explained that they were ‘way out of [their] depth’ and gave reasons for why ‘training measures [were] needed without delay’: ‘we need to know how perpetrators can attract children, or vulnerable adults’, because ‘for me I don’t even know how the internet works’. The overarching message from this work was that ‘social work educators and employers must keep pace with new technology and training on the risks posed by social media should be an intrinsic part of learning’ (BASW, 2014, np). A wider examination of digital development in social work will be key to further

understanding what needs to be done for social workers to feel more confident and prepared in this respect.

There are other areas of practice that too appear to remain unexplored; ones in which, as one student explains: “*hard to reach people*” are described to “*get left behind*”.

“I mean at one time you would help people to write a benefit form but now most things are done online. So, we have a role in this and even if it’s something I can’t do we learn together. I try to bring that into my environment. We work in partnership and we work together. ESA, prescriptions, job seekers are all online and then if people miss updating the information there are sanctioned. Job searches are all online and you need money to access a library because most people have to travel to get there, if it’s still open that is. So, you can’t apply for a job if you haven’t got access and then the sanction comes and sorting all of that is online too. Being able to use those systems is an issue for service users too. Lots of people are being excluded and sanctioned. Some people can’t read or write and some people have mental health issues that hinder them, or they might be autistic. In terms of older adults too, some aren’t online and sometimes giving them access can open up a whole new world for them. I’m still finding that people are struggling adapting to new systems. Technologies are a useful tool to empower people. I do work with adults with LD and it’s great for me because I can help them to find things out and it opens up a whole new world to them. I came across all this and got involved in it, when I noticed it on placement. I wasn’t great, but the qualified social workers were worse”.

Here the student describes thinking about the impacts of digitalisation upon people, upon the work and upon the systems, that have changed. There is a recognition of the shift from a ‘paper-based society’ to the ‘technology-based internet society’ (Susskind and Susskind, 2015, p.2): “*I mean at one time you would help people to write a benefit form but now most things are done online*” and what this means for contemporary social work practice, in terms of practice needs: “*being able to use those systems is an issue for service users too*”, “*if people miss updating the information they are sanctioned*”. Furthermore, reflections focus on how practitioners, working with a range of service-users, in a range of circumstances, are prepared to respond: “*I wasn’t great, but the*

qualified social workers were worse". A proactive engagement with these new practice experiences was seen to occur: *"I came across all this and got involved in it, when I noticed it on placement"*; alongside this was an optimism about what could be achieved: *"So, we have a role in this and even if it's something I can't do we learn together"*, *"I can help them to find things out and it opens up a whole new world to them"*. The practice experiences described to have occurred evidence critical analysis and the application of learning with a view to solving the practice dilemmas that arose: *"I try to bring that into my environment"*.

Conceptions in this category of description, whilst still including references to a lack of formal instruction and still involving fear, show students to be engaged in a process of rethinking or reimagining social work in the context of digitalisation. The reimagining described is linked to practice, to practice effectiveness, to practice appropriateness; and includes challenges to and indeed support to develop digital practices in the field. It can be assumed, given the focus of these conceptions, that students involved in this category had: the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate digital systems referred to in Category 1; that they had moved or were moving through the personal to professional digital shift being processed in Category 2; and that they were not observing to learn, as is evident in Category 3, but using what they had learnt to challenge what they were observing with the intention that they themselves and others would learn too. Hence why 'applying learning to the course' is placed where it is within the final outcome space, as represented in the next section.

The following section of this work offers a visual representation of the categories of description; an overview of an analysis of the structural and referential aspects of the described experiences and the relationships between them.

4.3 Outcome Space

The aim of phenomenographic research is a finite set of categories of description that capture the qualitatively different ways in which a group of individuals experience a phenomenon. Having presented the categories of description in this last section of this work, this section presents the outcome space. A final output of phenomenographic research is the construction of an outcome space. An outcome space is a diagrammatical representation of the aspects of and the relationships between the identified categories; organised to illustrate further the variation in how a phenomenon in the world is experienced. An overview of the analysis that resulted in the organisation of the categories of description into an outcome space will be explained.

Marton and Booth (1997 in Akerlind, 2005a) ‘present three primary criteria for judging the quality of a phenomenographic outcome space’:

1. that each category in the outcome space reveals something distinctive about a way of understanding or experiencing the phenomenon;
2. that the categories are logically related, typically as a hierarchy of structurally inclusive relationships; and
3. that the outcomes are parsimonious—i.e. that the critical variation in experience observed in the data be represented by a set of as few categories as possible (p.323).

The qualitatively different descriptions that emerge through phenomenographic analysis are logically related in terms of referential and structural aspects. In phenomenographic work, experience is discussed in terms of awareness and context; meaning that nothing is or can be experienced in isolation of both (Marton and Booth, 1997). The structural aspect contains internal and external dimensions; the external

dimension relates to context and the internal to awareness; with the referential aspect relating to the focus of awareness found to be uppermost in the subject's accounts.

The distinctly different categories of description presented in the previous section of this work (Chapter 4.2) were formed by examining students' descriptions of their digital experiences. The relationships between the categories of description were examined as part of this intensely iterative process; a process that involved numerous 'ah ha' moments as Akerlind et al. (2005, p.95) describe them. Approaching the analysis in this way allowed for a 'testing' of coherence, through searching for 'evidence that undermined the draft representations' found (Akerlind et al., 2005, p.94). Moving between these two methods of analysis, whilst time consuming and complex, provided a degree of confidence in the categories of description that were eventually settled upon. Whilst it could be thought of as extreme, 'going through five, ten to fifteen versions of the categories of description is necessary' when engaged in phenomenographic work, as Akerlind et al. go on to contend, it is impossible to 'read the transcripts once and write the final categories of description' (2005, p.94). It can be attested that it was this type of experience that underpinned what is presented here.

As already discussed, students' digital development is described to have been experienced in the absence of formal instruction. It was described as having been experienced or to have occurred as a by-product of something else. The overarching something else in this study was digital exposure: to digital systems, to digitally concerning information and observations, to digitally related practice encounters and to new digital tools. A consequence of this exposure was the fear of "*getting it wrong*" and an acute awareness of the implications of "*all the things that could go wrong*"; both

of which appeared to play a significant part in the impetus to find ways of getting it “*right*”.

As described within the recounted experiences of these students, ‘digital exposure’ was the catalyst for the experiences that took place; the external dimension of the structural aspect of digital development. The internal dimension of the structural aspect of experience emerged as having a technical, a professional and a practice orientation; the background focus of students’ awareness. The referential aspects are drawn from the meanings that students ascribed directly to their experiences; the experiences at the forefront of their minds. Referential aspects included: the need to navigate a digital system, realisations that led to an examining of the relationship between the professional and the digital and the reimagining of knowledge, values and skills as they relate to social work in a digital world. As was shown in the explanations of the categories of description and will be further illustrated here, these ‘aspects are dialectically intertwined and occur simultaneously when we experience something’ (Marton and Booth, 1997, p.87) in the world.

It also important to note, as the early analysis demonstrates (p.99-102), that no two students began the course from the same starting point in terms of previous digital exposure, digital abilities or digital skills. Variation in applicant attributes would not be thought of as unusual in relation to how they are judged to determine suitability to study social work. However, gathering this information was useful to understanding how, or if pre-existing digital literacies had, or should be thought of as having a bearing on the digital development in social work.

The following outcome space, as noted, was constructed to further express the aspects of and relationships between the qualitatively different conceptions of digital

development found in the data generated for this work. It depicts digital development as described by a group of social work students engaged with a programme of learning. It does not represent the programme of learning itself, it represents how this programme of learning was experienced by the student group in a digital respect. The categories of description, revealed through the analysis, are thought to be more relational than hierarchical, due to the informality and incidentalness of the experiences described.

However, there is a logical structure to what emerged: that was determined through a knowledge of the incremental nature of a programme such as this and by the level of digital skill, the level of digital confidence and the degree of digital development within the experiences described. The mechanisms and means through which development was experienced, the categories of description, are foregrounded in digital exposure and three qualitatively different orientations, structural aspects, that together with the referential, or meaning aspects make up the experiences described. All of which is outlined in the outcome space and analysis that follows below.

Experiencing Digital Development in Social Work Education

		Referential Aspects		
		Navigating the Digital	Examining the Digital	Reimagining the Digital
Structural Aspects				
DIGITAL EXPOSURE	Technical Orientation	1. expectations of the course		
	Professional Orientation	2. being on the course	2. being on the course	
	Practice Orientation		3. observing others on the course	4. applying learning to the course

Table 2: Outcome Space: a diagrammatical representation of the categories of ways of describing experiences of digital development.

As outlined in the presentation of the categories, digital development in Category 1. was influenced by ‘the expectations of the course’. There is a technical orientation (internal structural aspect) to this category, sparked by exposure to an unfamiliar digital system (external structural aspect) that was initially inaccessible to those without a particular level of digital skill. All students will have experienced the digital ‘expectations of the course’ but for some navigation (the referential aspect) underpinned the described experience. For students in this category, expectations involved the need to “*navigate*” unfamiliar digital territory which, in the absence of formal instruction, meant that ways of accessing the system needed to be found. The positioning of Category 1. within the outcome space is linked to, what could be thought of as the natural order of things, when considering how programmes of learning are designed. It is generally the case that students on commencing a course will be introduced to the Virtual Learning Space (VLS), given that it is within this space a significant amount of course information is stored. Accessing the VLS, for those without a knowledge of the system, or without the necessary skills, presents a challenge. However, through availing of any means available to them, including learning for themselves, students in this category were seen to navigate the expectations of the course. In doing so, whilst not ideal, digital development of a technical nature was achieved.

The difference between Category 1. and Category 2. is that even though students continued to describe experiences that required navigation, navigation here took on a professional orientation (internal structural aspect). Exposure to learning about being professional more broadly triggered fears that led students to examine (referential aspect) ideas of professionalism, as related to the digital shift (external structural aspect). The degree of variation in descriptions of how and why changes had been

made, again in the absence of formal instruction, indicate that navigation remained to be a feature of the lived experience. Hence why ‘being on the course’ bridges two referential aspects. The positioning of Category 2. in relation to Category 1. was also based upon student descriptions that showed them to be active online and because doing so requires a degree of technical skill. It can be assumed that these skills were sufficient for meeting the digital ‘expectations of the course’. Also, relevant here is how it is common place for students to have accessed the VLS before formal teaching begins. Learning about professionalism and becoming a professional would, as noted, in the natural order of things, follow on. Whilst, again, not ideal, fears about “*getting it wrong*” and “*all the things that can go wrong*” was the focus of these students’ digital experience.

The same would apply to the positioning of Category 3. in relation to Category 2. Student conceptions aligned with Category 3 indicate that they were already in possession of the technical skills necessary for engaging online, given that it was within an online space that the observation of ‘others’ took place. Furthermore, a general grasp on the notion of professionalism can be seen. The very fact that students are examining (the referential aspect) and questioning the professional (internal structural aspect) parameters of the digital presence and the content they observed or were exposed to (external structural aspect) evidences this. However, and again in the absence of formal instruction, there is a lack of confidence or uncertainty in their understandings of the parameters of professionalism in an online space. Therefore, student conceptions aligned with Category 3. show them to engage in a process of actively examining (the referential aspect) professionalism (internal structural aspect) as it relates to the online, driven by knowledge gaps they appeared to be trying to bridge. It is this critical analysis

and questioning of what was observed that served to contribute to their digital development.

The difference between Category 3. and Category 4. in terms of positioning, is more associated with the degree of digital development described than the natural order of things, although this does have a part to play in what would be expected of a graduating student. In saying that, in the absence of formal instruction, what students in all and particularly this category describe is quite remarkable. In this category students describe digital exposure to take the form of experiences and encounters (external structural aspect), mainly but not solely, within the practice setting (internal structural aspect). They evidence a more sophisticated appreciation and engagement with new digital technologies. There is a reimagining (referential aspect) of what had been learnt and an application of this 'to the course'. As noted in the earlier analysis, practice knowledge, practice values and practice skills were being, or had been rethought; and attempts to apply digitally developed thinking was seen. Students describe some very deep and critical reflection, which would be expected at this stage of their professional development. However, in the absence of formal teaching relating to the digital, the depth of analysis and engagement described is quite different to that described in the previous three categories. It can again be assumed that technical skills and matters of professionalism had largely been navigated and that even though observation of others was a factor, it was the degree to which students were able to challenge and engage with what was observed and noticed that evidences development. The practice orientation relates to the natural order of things, given that students are reflecting upon final practice placements.

Although this study was limited, in that it involved a small group of students studying social work in one particular location, at a particular point in time, it offers

important insights into how, where a curriculum appears not to have been explicitly digitised, development of a digital kind took place. What student conceptions across the categories of description also show, is that digital development to the degree necessary for 21st century practice to be safe, ethical and effective, must be within the reach of all students. That it must not be solely as a result of incidental learning, that it must be formally facilitated and not left to chance. The analysis highlights the need for parity, but not necessarily uniformity, in the approach taken to digital development in social work education. This point relates to the range of digital adeptness students themselves 'bring to the course'. Whilst Stanfield and Beddoe are right to point out that there has been 'a paradigm shift in social work education' regarding the need for students to learn about social media, as it relates to social work practice; their point that 'social media is embedded in course delivery as a way of developing knowledge and skills in its use' (2016, p.294) may be the exception, as opposed to the rule. Student conceptions, as captured in this work, suggest that the shift Stanfield and Beddoe (2016) mention has been partial, or that it cannot, as yet, be attributed to all social work students' experiences of social work education. That formal instruction regarding social medias in social work is the exception for some, rather than the rule for all. Furthermore, that the relationship between digitalisation and social work is much broader than just social medias; that it involves a nuanced and complex shift in the relationship between humans and their social world. It is within this world that social work takes place and it is this world that the curriculum in social work education needs, and is expected (HCPC, 2014) to reflect.

This final student conception captures extremely well what this study more generally found:

“There is so much in my head now, to think about - in short we need to know much more than we do [referring to digitalisation more broadly] - it can only get worse out there! Until today I’d never really thought about all of this”.

The following section reflects further on what this study revealed, in relation to the research questions set out at the beginning of this work. It contextualises the “*need*” for social work education providers to examine their response to the digital shift and offers a way forward where this shift has not taken place.

4.4 Listening to, learning from, and acting on what was learnt

Listening to and learning from students was central to this work. A large majority of phenomenographic studies, as already mentioned, focus on student conceptions of their educational experiences, due to the insights that can be gleaned from examining the experiences described. An analysis of the experiences students of this study describe has not only provided insights into digital development but has highlighted the need for social work education providers, where this has not occurred, to review their digital offer. The qualitative variation found focussed on the means and media through which digital development occurred; findings that highlight the need to examine what Havighurst explains as ‘teachable moments’ (1953, p.5), or untapped occurrences that could be taken advantage of within the nature or natural order of a course.

Before however presenting a suggested way forward, again, where a way forward is found to be needed, it is important to acknowledge, that while it is encouraging that associations between the digital and the professional were made, students themselves recognised that this was not enough. The following conceptions are therefore included to give a flavour of the experiences that further cemented the decision to develop an educational framework in response to what, where a curriculum has not been digitised, students describe they need:

“We need it [digital knowledge and skills teaching] to support our learning. Most of this can be done at home too. There should be homework tasks using social media and things and an assessment too”

“I don’t know a lot on it [social media and technologies on the course] and I don’t think other people do either, so we need this on the curriculum”

“We need to keep up to date [with reference to new digital technologies and the problems associated with them]. It frightens me once I leave this year what happens to my future training needs, who is going to help me”

“We need lessons [referring to digital capabilities and skills], but we’re nearly finished our course; it’s too late and we’ve missed out”

“We need sessions on it [referring to the use of social medias]. Communication modules could be useful on tweeting and getting us to tweet. This is how to use it and it helps this way with your studies”

“In short we need to know much more than we do”.

The phrase “*we need*” was articulated 106 times throughout the data, and along with the incidentalness of the learning described, was seen to contribute to a preoccupation with “*getting it wrong*”. This preoccupation involved, amongst other things, concerns about the lack of formal instruction in relation to the appropriate use of social media sites. Although the data shows digital development to be much broader than social media, due to the significance of these conceptions and in staying faithful to the student voice, it felt important to bring these experiences into focus.

Student preoccupation, particularly in the absence of formal instruction, with getting it wrong on social media sites is not misplaced, in fact, their recognition of this potential is essential to 21st century professional development. As Fang et al. (2014) point out, when reflecting on the recentness of discussions about the challenges of social media in social work, the likelihood of ‘students who are in the process of becoming social work professionals... to be faced with these challenges’ is quite high (p.803), therefore ‘educators cannot simply ignore or disregard social media use’ (p.810). If the challenges and nuances of social media in social work are not being addressed or are being left unexamined, this would account for the steady rise in the number of incidents of professional misconduct online, incidents similar to those mentioned earlier (Chapter 1.4; Chapter 2.1), that continue to occur.

These more recent occurrences are reported to have involved qualified social work practitioners: sharing explicit personal images with service-users on mobile devices, inappropriate social media contact and communication with service-users, and the berating of parents engaged with social services on social media sites (BBC News, 2018; Turner, 2018; Turner, 2019). Misconduct of this kind exposes an even more concerning lack in awareness of the need, or indeed the ability to translate professionalism into the online, than that outlined in Chapter 2. It illuminates further the failure to recognise or appreciate the ‘challenges associated with traditional ethical concepts’ when engaging with the net (Reamer, 2017, p.151). These issues suggest emerging knowledge, research and literature may not, where necessary, be influencing wider course design or be reaching those preparing to enter the field.

Whilst not to dismiss or condone the misconduct taking place, there are much broader issues and influences that need to be considered if this issue is to be understood and contained within social work. It would be easy, if not naive and foolish, to jump to conclusions about how these practitioners had ever come to be part of the profession in the first place; to question how they were deemed fit to practice or qualified to register with the regulator. However, as outlined in Chapter 2.1 (p.39) the reasoning of incidents of misconduct online is somewhat more complex and is in part due to how we’ve all ‘become critically dependant on a technology that is poorly understood’ (Naughton, 2012, p.10). Also, how as end users we have yet to fully recognise or ‘reason... risk and responsibility’ when active online (Busby et al., 2015, p.5).

The fact that the so called ‘Internet Giants’ (Routley, 2019) have been unable to fully explain the technicalities or nuances of their platforms serves to highlight the precarity of engagement for end users, an issue that came to light through the US

Presidential Election and the Brexit Referendum in the UK (Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison, 2018; Sherr, 2018). For a significant period of time however the implications of the false digital economy they cultivate had been hidden from view. Purposive persuasion and subtle distraction have subsumed cognisance and consciousness; judgement online has been hindered further by another new phenomenon, the fear of missing out (Milyavskaya et al.,2018). Convenience and connection have come at a heavy price. The costs in the form of, amongst other things, data dealings, are just beginning to come to light (Eubanks, 2017).

In work to understand why people ‘behave differently when they are interacting with technology than they do face to face’, Cyberpsychologist Aiken outlines that which is more broadly known: ‘human behaviour has always been affected and shaped by technology’. However, as she goes on to point out: ‘there has been no greater influence [on the human condition] ... than the advent of the internet’ (2016, p.4). In her book of the same name she defines the current ‘impact of emerging technology on human behaviour’ as the ‘cyber-effect’ (p.5), a concept she explains to involve ‘new norms’ created through what she aptly frames as ‘cyber-socialisation’ (2016, p.5). She defers to the ‘father of cyberpsychology’ John Suler when outlining ‘online disinhibition effect’ (ODE) (2016, p.12), a term developed by Suler (2004) to make clear how skewed perceptions of anonymity online can lead people to behave out of character, or to behave in ways that ordinarily they would not.

Aiken, like many others, firmly believes that the problems of the internet could be solved or at least minimised, if:

There were more consideration of ethics in cyberspace, greater governance, better education, and if necessary, appropriate regulation, it could spare many

vulnerable individuals from harm and pain and prevent susceptible people from going deeper into behaviours that may ultimately be destructive' (2016, p.39).

While Aiken's proposals are not wrong, the digital errors of qualified practitioners suggest that vulnerability online is not limited to a particular group, those perceived to be more susceptible to the 'cyber-effect'. In fact, it seems that for some the cyber-effect is creating new vulnerabilities or illuminating vulnerabilities that perhaps otherwise may not have come to light. Such complexities further highlight the need for social work education, where it has not, to engage with understandings and knowledge such as that outlined, so that it can be better prepared to identify and manage the potential for issues of misconduct online. Social workers in turn would be better prepared to practice ethically and proficiently in the digital age.

In relation to social work, thinking of a related nature is beginning to emerge. For example, Fang et al. (2014) believe there to be a lack of 'clear understanding of the blurred boundaries between public and private, the potentially limitless and unintended audiences, as well as the permanency of the information shared online' in social work (p.800). Student conceptions within the Categories of Description go some way to confirming this to be the case. Fang et al. (2014) also discuss how 'professionals may possess a false sense of online security and privacy, particularly because social media encourage openness, dialogue, and connection of ideas and people' (p.802). This perspective fits with Suler's explanation of 'online inhibition effect' (2004, p.315), which again, is evident in student conceptions in this work.

Whilst also contributing notably to the conversation, Boddy and Dominelli claim that there is 'no comprehensive contemporary discussion of the complexities and interrelationships between social media, social work practice, and social work ethics' (2017, p.173). However, their assertion fails to take account of the work of Turner,

who in the year previous (2016) tendered considerable insights helpful to settling anxieties about social media in social work. On the one hand Turner (2016) acknowledges how ‘the lack of robust advice available for practising social workers on how to negotiate social media’ (p.315) has hindered ‘appropriate conduct’ online (p.315). On the other she showcases a range of ‘positive relational practices’ (p.314) made available through engagement with ‘online networking’ sites (p.314). Turner in no way denies ‘the darker sides’ of social media (p.325); her message however is clear:

Social work should both engage with and embrace the opportunities provided by social media so that the potential difficulties can be directly faced and the opportunities harnessed for the greater enrichment and enhancement of the profession, as well as for all those with whom it interacts (p.325).

It is here that social work education has a role. It is this, as well as more general digital development, that the students of this study explain they “*need*”.

It suffices to say that we are all, in a more general sense or to one degree or another, having to “*navigate*” digitalisation, and for some this is proving to be more problematic than it is for others. Based on the findings of this work, and the research that is beginning to emerge, it is reasonable to claim that the profession needs to pay closer attention to the impacts of digitalisation upon the lived experience, for both students and for those students will go on to serve. Which in turn requires professional and educational requirements that are reflective of social need, as it appears in the current social world.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the professional requirements for social work were more recently updated (QAA, 2016; HCPC, 2017a). Even though some critical changes were made, opportunities to emphasise digital literacy development, to make clear the nuances of digitalisation and to define digital professionalism were largely missed

(Appendix 1.). Changes would have signalled to the profession the necessity for development such as this to be explicitly facilitated and reasonably assessed, so that professionalism and being professional online could be brought into focus and conscious thought. Because as the findings of this study show, in the absence of accessible and explicit digitally orientated instruction and information, understandings regarding practice appropriateness online are much harder to grasp. The changes relating to professionalism of a digital nature advise that ‘graduates in social work are able to use information and communication technology effectively and appropriately’, expect that they adhere to the confines of ‘confidentiality’ and encourage the ‘use of social media as a process and forum for vulnerable people, families and communities’ (QAA, 2016, p. 17&21). All of which relies on an informed and appropriate level of digital literacy development, including opportunities to examine the intricacies of social media sites.

Digital literacies or capabilities, the technical skills required to live and work in a digitised world, however are just one layer of the digital shift. Issues such as datafication, predicative risk modelling or the automation of services that were previously only possible face-to-face, are becoming more and more pervasive in social care (Keddell, 2015; Boyd and Holton, 2017; Fuchs, 2017). Terms such as dataveillance, sexting, artificial intelligence, machine learning (Naughton, 2003, Shirky, 2009; Naughton, 2012; Collins, 2018; Lyon, 2018; Murthy, 2018) and cyber-everything as listed in Appendix 7, are seeping into the discourse surrounding professional social work. However, for the majority, as already mentioned, the intricacies and nuances of these world changing innovations, and related terms, are not well understood (Bartlett, 2018). Even though both sets of requirements (Appendix 1.), like the requirements they supersede, mention that students are to be made aware of the

impacts of the ‘digital divide’, there is little to evidence how learning and development of the kind is being facilitated across the board (QAA, 2008, p.15; QAA, 2016, p.21). The persistence of misconduct online leaves social work educators vulnerable to questions about how this learning could be viewed as happening at all.

The technology standard stipulated by the professional regulator remained the same (HCPC, 2017b). The HCPC did however, within the same year, issue ‘Guidance on Social Media’, a document aimed at helping registrants to meet the professional ‘standards’ whilst using social media (2017b, p.3). While not specific to social work, it is advised that this guidance should be read alongside the ‘Code of Conduct, Performance and Ethics’ (HCPC, 2016b). That being said, the profession awaits another iteration of the standards given that a new regulator is now in place (Scourfield, 2019). There are no indications, as yet, to how digitalisation as an issue for the professional will be addressed; although consultancy has been commissioned by the new regulator as a result of the circulation of a paper based upon this work (Taylor, 2017).

As outlined in Chapter 2:2.3, literature pertaining to social work and technologies evidences innovative and progressive digitally orientated teaching methods, grounded in robust digitally orientated thinking. However, as mentioned, there is little to evidence the degree to which these or any other methods are being adopted or embedded into social work education in England more broadly, and therefore how the technology related standards are being addressed. This issue is of particular relevance considering the expectation placed on programmes of learning by the professional regulator that requires all students of social work to be practice prepared (HCPC, 2017a; HCPC, 2017b). In the absence of evidence about how digital or technological development is being accommodated for social work students in England at this time,

and informed by the findings of this study, the following framework (Figure 3.) is offered as a means of maximising the potential for digital development in social work education, where digital development has yet to occur.

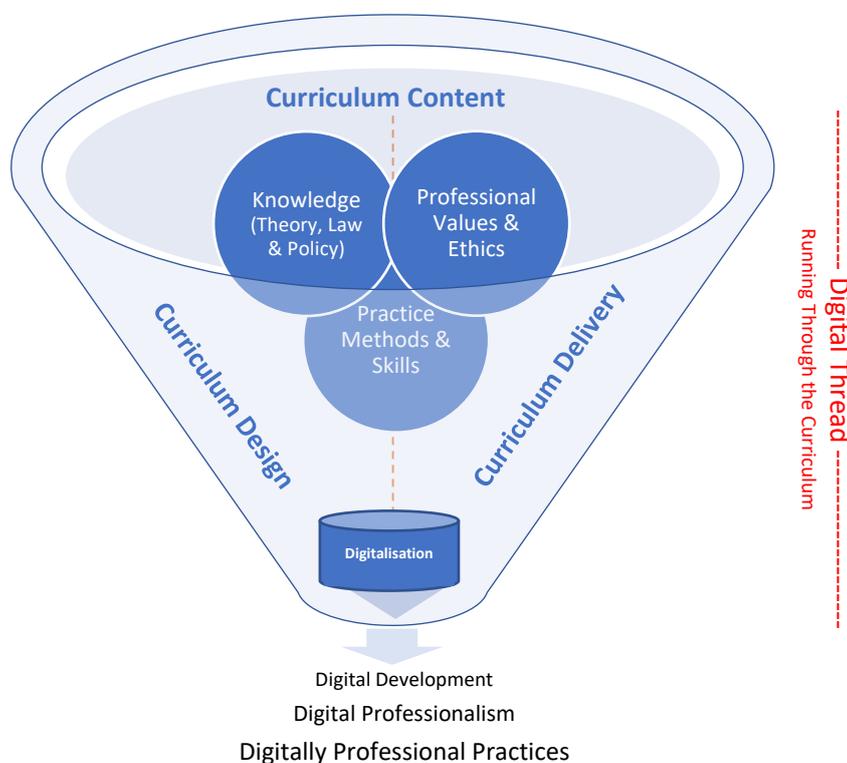


Figure 3. *Digitising Social Work Education Framework*

The ‘Digitising Social Work Education Framework’, developed in response to the research findings, is an approach to course development or review. It has been designed to provide students with opportunities, interwoven into more general learning, to understand the relationship between the digital and the professional; opportunities to consider the digital within the context of the psychological, the physical and the social; opportunities to examine digital values and to develop digital skills. Even though the regulatory body has yet to define digital professionalism for social work, definitions from human professions such as those described in Chapter 1 are helpful to outlining what this might realistically include. Particularly physiotherapy, as mentioned earlier, who have taken a more pragmatic approach to defining digital professionalism, urging

practitioners of the discipline to ‘reconceptualize how existing standards apply online’ (Gagnon and Sabus, 2015, p.409).

Taking a similar approach, the suggested framework does not separate the digital from the professional, rather it sets the digital within the professional to reflect the relational nature of the two. Digital professionalism is understood as an aspect of professionalism, which involves digital knowledge, digital values and digital skills, actualised through digitally orientated professional socialisation built into the course. It involves learning that makes clear the importance of professional conduct regardless of place and space; that highlights the physical and the digital as both real, and enmeshed (Jurgenson, 2012). Digital professionalism in social work is therefore conceptualised as a professional characteristic that involves practice appropriate digital skills, underpinned by digital values and informed by a knowledge of the impacts of digitalisation on human socialisation, and on the social world.

The qualitative variation in experiences of digital development revealed through this work highlight the importance of assessing the range of digital knowledge and abilities ‘brought to the course’ and the opportunities, or teachable moments available within the natural order of a course, through which digital literacy development could be introduced and taught. Havighurst, as outlined in his 1953 ‘Human Development and Education’ text explains ‘teachable moments’ as points in a learner’s journey when the ‘timing is right’, or when and where it is possible for the learner to engage with ‘a developmental task’ (p.5). In applying the framework, course design, course content (knowledge, values, skills) and course delivery are reviewed, and the digital, where relevant, is threaded throughout. Teachable moments, or junctures where it is possible for students to engage with ‘a development task’, are identified. Prompts, such as those suggested below, could be used:

1. Course Design: where does or where could course design support digital development?
2. Course Content: where does or where could course content support digital development?
3. Course Delivery: where does or where could course delivery support digital development? (Appendix 7).

Viewing the course through a digitalisation lens helps to ensure that the requirements of the regulating body, even as they currently stand, have been met; particularly those requirements that state the ‘curriculum must remain relevant to current practice’ and it must reflect ‘developments in a profession’s research base and advances in technology’ (HCPC, 2014, p.37).

For example, as outlined in the data, the ‘expectations of the course’ finding, linked to a time when the use of digital technologies is key to course engagement, shows how digital expectations of the course could be put to better use. Assumptions about digital capabilities would be suspended, and explicit attention paid to the personal to professional digital transition that needs to take place. The methods students described themselves to employ, such as peer support, offer other plausible solutions when considering existing digital abilities and the point made earlier about the need for parity but not necessarily uniformity in relation to the facilitation of development of a digital kind. The ‘being on the course’ finding draws attention to the potential for digital development to occur through and throughout the professional socialising experience. However, course content would need to include explicit reference to the professionalism online, providing a more concrete and conscious learning experience that replaces the “*subliminal*” type learning described to have occurred.

‘Observing others on the course’ offers the occasion to model appropriateness online, through the inclusion of observational and vicarious learning strategies that provide the occasion to introduce students to the idea of the digital self and the complexities of both place and space. Category 4. ‘applying learning to the course’ illuminates a level of knowledge, skill and curiosity that could and should be harnessed, particularly in the information age, where knowledge is no longer exclusive to the expert (Susskind and Susskind, 2015). Students in this category move beyond the immediate education environment into the realm of fieldwork, and in doing so raise questions about the preparedness of those already in the field to receive students who are digitally advanced in their thinking. Therefore, field or practice placement education should form part of the digital curriculum review.

The aim of the ‘Digitising Social Work Education Framework’ is a teaching and learning assemblage that embeds the development of digital knowledge, digital values and digital skill into the curriculum; it is a way of complementing and extending existing pedagogical approaches to respond to emerging social needs. The process threads the digital through all elements of the curriculum, from the point of curriculum design through to curriculum delivery, with scope to embed the approaches already developed by the social work education technology community (Chapter 2.3), and those developed by the wider learning technology community too (JISC, 2014a). It is a means of addressing digital development that is built upon a premise similar to the thinking of Howe, who explains:

If social work is an activity that benefits from practitioners who are able to explore the nature and meaning of situations, developing deep approaches to learning seems not only worthwhile but essential (1989, p.11).

As this study shows, deep approaches to learning about digitalisation in social work education, where these approaches have not already been embedded, are necessary so that all students of social work are afforded opportunities to respond professionally to the practice issues of the digital age. Listening to and learning from students helped to shape what the suggested framework aims to capture. Students' suggestions, as described throughout the categories of description, offer insights into the future development of curriculum design, content and delivery. Together, their thinking is not unlike that of Quinn and Fitch, who believe that, 'instead of teaching skills... [solely] suited for an academic setting, the curriculum needs to be teaching technology literacy skills that are more likely to be used in professional settings' (2014, p. 146).

Whilst it is not overly helpful to speculate about the digital capabilities of social work educators, the dearth of available literature in this area indicates that this too should be the subject of review. What must be borne in mind however is that many educators will have completed their professional training prior to the digital shift and therefore may have not have made the shift to using the digital for pedagogic purposes. A starting point for understanding this, as a continuation of this study, would be a comparative study designed to examine relationship between the digital preparedness of educators and the digital preparedness of students, to ensure the means are in place to support the next generation of social workers to 'become' (Fook et al., 2007).

This study offers important insights into the relationship between social work education, social work students and technologies. It illustrates how, in the absence of robust regulatory guidance, there is a risk that digital development will be left to chance. Thus, the findings provide a starting point for addressing the calls for changes in social work education that continue to be made; and are timely too, given the introduction of a

new professional regulator in England and the planned amendments to the professional requirements that will follow (Morgan, 2016). It is therefore essential that research knowledge, such as this, is used to inform any review of the requirements social work education; because as has also been evidenced, at an individual and professional level, the nuances of digitalisation are proving incredibly difficult to grasp.

The issues associated with digitalisation continue to emerge. Not only do they challenge the processes through which students are practice prepared, but they have a bearing on how students are selected to study social work, as the discussion relating to misconduct online highlights. Furthermore, they are making life more difficult for those who experience disadvantage the most, now that systems are being completely digitised and data is being mined and used indiscriminately as markers of delinquency and social need (Eubanks, 2017; Noble, 2018). It will be the people affected by the changes to these social constructs who will seek or need the services that social work students will go on to provide. Therefore, social work students entering the profession now need to be prepared to face the complexities of the digital age; they need to be equipped with the range of knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to take on this task. Even though to a larger extent it is difficult to forecast what this knowledge, or what these skills might be, as Crisp forecasts, criticality as a practice skill will be key:

Looking forward, some of our current students may still be practising in 40 years' time, in a world that is difficult to imagine, except that many of the problems that social workers address, such as poverty, social exclusion, violence, abuse and chronic illness, will almost certainly still be present. Rather than learning sets of facts, which may quickly become redundant in this ever-changing world, the need for social workers to be able to critically reflect on situations and respond appropriately is critical (Crisp, 2019a, p.3)

The following chapter concludes this thesis. Included is a summary of the research and contribution to knowledge, study reflections, recommendations, and suggestions for future research. It ends with an epilogue outlining my professional reflections on knowledge impact and what has been learned through engaging in this work.

5 CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Study summary and contribution to knowledge

Bass (1999) discusses how ‘it takes a deliberate act to look at teaching from the perspective of learning’ (np). This phenomenographic study was a deliberate act, designed purposively with the intention of addressing a gap in knowledge, pertaining to the contribution that social work education makes to the digital professionalisation of students for practice in the connected age. It was underpinned by anxieties relating to notions of preparedness, and questions about how this can be facilitated in an ever-changing technology infused world. The approach taken was grounded in the belief that as educators we can ‘teach with integrity only if an effort is made to examine the impact of... [our] work on the students’ (Shulman, 2002, p.vii). Moreover, that we ‘can improve our teaching by studying our students learning’ particularly when this involves ‘listening to and learning from’ students themselves (Ramsden, 2003, p.6).

Before considering the findings, it is useful to return briefly to where the study began, with an explanation of the relevance of digital development, in light of the digital shift (Chapter 1.). Furthermore, to what the study sought to reveal, which in this circumstance was variation in:

1. *Social work students’ experiences of digital development, throughout the duration of their professional training*
2. *How digital development was perceived to have been facilitated, or how conceptions of digital professionalism were formed*

from the student point of view. Reference was made to how social work students, as the future of the profession, need to be prepared to take up this mantle; and that once

prepared, how the affordances of digitalisation makes this more possible than ever (Chapter 2.1). Attention was paid to professional socialisation and professionalism, and to what these concepts might mean for students preparing to practice in the digital age, because as the digital errors of qualified practitioners have shown, professional expectations were not seen to translate when these colleagues were present and active online. (Chapter 2.2). Looking back on social work's relationship with technologies, as a means to moving forward, provided a realistic view on why this work is needed and why it is needed now (Chapter 2.3). As noted, 'the anomalies that exist [in terms of the digital development of students in social work education] are incongruent with the work that has been done and the calls for change that continue to be made' (p.55).

This study has responded to these calls. Firstly, it offers insights into the ways in which a programme of social work education, social work students, and technologies failed to fully coalesce (Table 1. & Table 2.). Secondly it allowed the development of a framework, created from the insights revealed through the analysis, which identified a need to put the digital into the professional, where this has not occurred in social work education (Figure 3.).

The unique contribution to knowledge revealed through this study, in keeping with the phenomenographic approach, has been presented as Categories of Description (Table 1.) and articulated further in an Outcome Space (Table 2.). Four categories of description (the expectations of the course; being on the course; observing others on the course; applying learning to the course), an overarching external structural aspect (digital exposure), three internal aspects (technical; professional; practice) and three referential aspects (navigating the digital; examining the digital; reimagining the digital) were revealed through an analysis of the data. The described experiences illustrate how digital development occurred independently of formal instruction or intended learning:

digital development was incidental, it happened by chance, as a by-product of digital exposure, 'encounters' or digitally orientated experiences that occurred whilst 'on the course'.

The qualitative variation in how digital development was experienced became apparent through the different preoccupations students held when exposed to, what were explained as, unanticipated digitally related occurrences, encountered throughout the duration of the course. Each of these events evoked varying degrees of uncertainty and fear, which was reported to be compounded by the lack of formal digitally related instruction throughout the course. In the absence of formal instruction, students describe having to negotiate their experiences through any means they could, to meet the expectations and standards they had introjected as significant to being professional on, and beyond the course. Through a pragmatic examination of the exposing experiences, conceptions of digital professionalism or ideas about being digitally professional were tentatively formed.

While digital development was seen to occur, social work education, where this has not been the case, or where it is seen to develop in the way and to the degree it did here, must consider a more explicit and facilitated digital learning experience, if students are to have a chance of feeling, or indeed being in any way digitally practice prepared.

5.2 Study Reflections

As with any small-scale study, caution should be taken when stating the significance of what has been found. Whilst this study is not, nor was it meant to be, representative of the student population in England, it does provide considerable insights into what can occur when social work education, social work students and technologies fail to fully

coalesce. Due to the variables involved in approaches to teaching and learning, it is impossible and unrealistic to expect that all students will have the same educational experience. However, all courses are bound by the same regulatory and educational requirements, therefore no student can be awarded without having been assessed as demonstrating the requirements as set. Literature pertaining to social work education and technologies evidences unique approaches and ideas that support digital literacy development in social work (Chapter 2.3). Yet, approaches to the development of digital professionalism, as a characteristic of professionalism, have not been examined or reported on until now. Therefore, this research project, along with the insights it provides, offers comparative data for studies in the UK and beyond.

While the methodological approach and methods were carefully chosen and employed, the limitations, such as those stated in Chapter 3.2, are acknowledged. The use of reflexive journaling helped with staying true to what the participants of this study had to say; because as already pointed out, regardless of how a course is designed and delivered, if students do not experience it as intended then there is something of value to be learnt.

In terms of validity and reliability, as noted in Chapter 3.1, this is a much-debated area of phenomenographic work (Cope, 2002), which can be addressed through what Kvale refers to as 'pragmatic validity' (1996, p.248), a checking out of the extent to which the outcomes are viewed as trustworthy and useful. Trustworthiness and usefulness, whilst largely subjective notions, were built into the research process, using what Sandberg (2000) describes as 'communicative validity' (p.14). A process that involves reflective dialogue with participants within the interview space, as evidenced in the illustrative quotations included in the analysis section of this work; included, as the phenomenographic approach, to show how the categories were conceived of.

Communicative validity is also evidenced through how the researcher engages with the data during the analysis, as demonstrated in the discussion regarding the categories of description and outcome space. Furthermore, in the way the work is shared with those the research is relevant to, as reported the dissemination of the study to direct and indirect communities of practice. That being said, what should be borne in mind, is the challenge that Cope presents relating to the interpretation of the data in phenomenographic work:

If individuals experience phenomena in the world in different ways why shouldn't different researchers investigating the phenomena of variations in a group of individuals experiences, experience the variation in different ways (2004, p.9).

Therefore, it is accepted that if the study were to be repeated something different to what is presented here is likely to be found.

This study has provided the opportunity to develop as a phenomenographic researcher. Whilst Akerlind (2005) acknowledges the appropriateness of the approach for doctoral studies, the learning as a sole researcher has involved many challenges. Most of these were addressed by the seeking out of the phenomenographic community of practice and through engaging with various iterations of phenomenographic work reported in the literature. Furthermore, it has also allowed for an appreciation of the possibilities of the approach for examining further phenomena in social work education.

5.3 Recommendations

This study has revealed significant insights into the ways in which digital development is or could be experienced, when digital development is incidental, when it occurs by chance. The findings add considerable weight to the historic calls for change in this area, that continue to be made (Chapter 2.2; Chapter 2.3). They present an opportunity

to review and address digital development in social work education, where curriculum review has not occurred or where curriculum development has not been carried out. The following recommendations are offered in the absence of a comprehensive picture about how digital development is being addressed across social work education in England. Information of this nature has not yet been collated; a point that is acknowledged in section (5.4), areas for future research. The recommendations therefore reflect the learning gleaned from available literature and the insights revealed through this work.

The overarching recommendation is that social work education providers review programme design, content and delivery, from the point of application for entry onto a professional course through to graduation into the profession. A process that includes a review of the content and methods used to establish a balanced pedagogic response to digital development in social work education; one that identifies and exploits the many teachable moments that lie, and those that could be established, within the natural order of a course (Wilson and Kelly, 2010b). They are offered with the aim of promoting a teach 'with' and a teach 'about' the digital approach to social work education; underpinned by content and methods that enable students engage with and to realise the knowledge and skills needed for critical digital practice in a complex and changing digital world.

Recommendations include:

1. Digital capabilities assessment on application to the course:

The digital capabilities of applicants should be reviewed as part of the entry requirements for social work education. Whilst a lack of digital competence should not be used to exclude candidates from being invited to interview, applications should involve more than the current self-declaration or self-audit approach that Holt and Rafferty (2004) found to be 'unreliable' (p.10). Digital

qualifications or evidence of the aptitude to engage in digital development should be sought.

2. Digital capabilities assessment during applicant interviews:

As with all other elements assessed to evidence the potential to study social work, an assessment of the potential to develop digital knowledge, digital values and digital skills should form part of the interview process. Interview questions and activities used to assess candidate suitability should include digital references. The use of digital technologies could be woven into candidate processes, such as the use of online systems, in place of, or as well as the handwritten test. The virtual learning environment is conducive to this.

3. Digital development throughout the course:

The 'Digitising Social Work Education Framework' offers one solution to digitising a curriculum of learning, where this has not occurred (Figure 3.). As explained, the framework is aimed at assisting social work providers and educators to review existing course design, content and delivery, to ensure that programmes of learning facilitate digital development.

The teach with digital and a teach about approach mentioned earlier could be used to underpin course design and development. Appendix 7 offers an example outline of a digital course review. As part of digitising a qualifying programme it is recommended that educator preparedness is also reviewed, so that they too can feel confident to build and to teach a digitally infused curriculum.

The 'expectations of the course' and 'being on the course' findings for example, offer natural opportunities to consider and facilitate digital development. The former could form part of course induction, with the latter being addressed through the explicit reference to digital professionalism throughout the course.

Disseminating available guidance on the use of social media and networking sites (HCPC, 2017a; BASW, 2018) should also be woven into course content. In addition to this, as Voshel and Wesala advise, education providers should consider the benefits of producing school specific guidance, 'to acclimate

students to the process of developing a professional identity related to social media use' (2015, p.68); bearing in mind that social technologies are only a fragment of the digital shift.

4. Digital capabilities assessment on qualification into the profession:

The assessment of digital capabilities should be integrated into modules of learning, through the inclusion of a digitally orientated learning outcome. An approach, whilst not fully reflective of the knowledge, skills and values pertinent to practice in the digital age, such as this has been adopted by the new Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education for social work (IATE, 2018a; IATE, 2018b). In addition, online portfolios offer another natural way of assessing digital knowledge and skills for practice, due to how they require students to learn about and navigate a digital system. Engagement with the VLS could be further exploited as a way of assessing digital development.

As the qualitative variation in the categories of description show, student digital capabilities can be compared to the more general variation in knowledge and skills that students 'bring to the course'. Consideration should be given, as is the case with more general student attributes, to how this variation can be accommodated and developed through 'being on the course'. On a fundamental level, all students are required to make the transition from personal knowing and skill to professional knowing and skill. The digital, now more than ever, forms part of this and therefore must form part of the socialising process that social work education facilitates.

Tied in with these recommendations is educator digital development, and the need for proactive buy-in and engagement from across the sector; where buy-in and engagement is identified not to have taken place. It is difficult to imagine how digital development, as an aspect of professionalism more broadly, could be realised through social work education without digitally minded and digitally equipped educators. Educators who are not only equipped to teach with and to teach about digitalisation but

those who recognise the dangers of reducing digital development to a set of technical skills. Those who appreciate the professional and practice orientations that are also required if curriculum content is to reflect the needs of the practice landscape.

As has been acknowledged, there may be programmes of learning in England that are facilitating digital development as a characteristic of professionalism more broadly. Where this is the case it is recommended that this information be gathered so that practices and approaches can be shared and compared, so that a collective response can be collated to inform the professional requirements and benchmark statements. None of the above recommendations can be fully or consistently realised unless the benchmark statements and professional requirements for social work education are reviewed and the content amended to reflect practice requirements of the digital age. These recommendations therefore provide a challenge to the currency of professional requirements for social work education and training, as they currently stand (Appendix 1.).

5.4 Future Research

This study, whilst providing the significant insights outlined, raised questions about how other social work education providers across England facilitate digital development. Also, questions about the methods in use to assess digital capabilities in relation to new and emerging practice needs. The issue of the possibility of knowledge gaps in practice arose, and therefore how digital development could be addressed for those practitioners within the field. Further research is therefore felt to be necessary, and an obvious direction for this is an extension of this study or studies that complement the work that has been done here.

Therefore, suggested areas for future research include:

- a mixed methods examination of how digital development is experienced by social work students across England, at the point of qualification
- an exploration of how social work educators in England teach with the digital and teach about the digital
- a review of how practice education in England facilitates digital literacy development for students engaged in field placement
- an examination of the provision of digital literacy development for practitioners in England already practising in the field

The understandings that work of this kind could reveal would help to avoid any repetition of the educational methods that have already been developed in this area and provide clarity about what is required to bridge any gaps in knowledge that exist in the field (Taylor, 2017). Furthermore, it would help with the development of a whole profession response to the digital shift, bearing in mind that the world and therefore social work's response to it will always be an ever-moving target.

5.5 Final remarks

Technological innovation is, and has been, fundamental to the development and sustainability of societies as a whole. As Leonhard points out, it has taken many forms:

Each shift in human society has primarily been driven by one key enabling shift factor – from wood, stone, bronze, and iron, to steam, electricity, factory automation and the internet (2016, p.5).

Few of these shifts however have taken place without problem or concern. Indeed, the formalisation of social work, formerly charitable works, coincided with the first industrial revolution, in a move to manage the impacts of urbanisation that took place (Rogowski, 2010). With each subsequent revolution have come new forms of social need, each requiring social work to respond. The current industrial revolution is no different. The evolving social world and people's experiences of it, and in it, should

therefore be enough of a prompt for social work education to review its pedagogical approaches so that students can be prepared for the work they will need to do.

While there is of course a fragility in any attempt to forecast educational methods that will be appropriate to equipping students to address future social need, the rapidity of digitalisation, particularly for those who are already socially disadvantaged, provides enough of an onus to at least try. Pedagogy that extends students' thinking beyond a knowledge of people and societies needs to be developed; pedagogy that facilitates the development of knowledge, skills and values that support informed and ethical approaches to social problems of the digital age. As identified by Wilson and Kelly, there is:

A growing body of research that argues the need to develop a new social work pedagogy more firmly grounded on empirical evidence of what works (Fook et al., 2000; Trevithick et al., 2004; Richards et al., 2005; Orme et al., 2009; Wilson and Kelly, 2010). However, knowledge and understanding of how students acquire, apply and develop professional social work knowledge and expertise remains quite limited (2010b, p.1).

This study offers a framework (Figure 3.) through which to evolve digital social work pedagogy. It provides a means to creating a whole course approach to digital development, informed by social work students' experiences of acquiring, developing and applying digital knowledge, digital values and digital skills. No longer can the relationship between digitalisation and social work be glossed over or ignored.

Any future pedagogic developments in this area however must be cognisant of the work that has been done (Chapter 2.3) and the work that is currently taking place. The existing body of knowledge must be made explicit because the development of a digital pedagogy in social work began long before this study took place, and for this

body of knowledge to be impactful it needs to be made more visible than it currently is. The affordances of digital technologies provide us with the tools to do this, therefore, as social work educators we must take responsibility for this.

This study shows that curriculum design, content and traditional methods of educating social work students, of professionalising social work students and of preparing social work students for practice need to be reconsidered in line with the digital age. That a teaching, not just 'with' digital technologies, but a teaching 'about' digital technologies approach should be adopted. Whilst Tarte is right that:

Technology won't replace teachers, but teachers who use technology will replace those who do not... #edtech (2015, np),

there is much more at stake. The human race is facing one of the most challenging times in its existence and social work, like education, is key to how it navigates the tensions that new technologies create. As noted in Chapter 4.2:1, 'if we choose to do nothing and... default to our traditional ways and discard the promise of technological change for fear, say, of rocking the boat, then this is a decision for which the later generations can hold us responsible' (Susskind and Susskind 2015, in Taylor, 2017, p.876). Not just generations of social work students, but also the generations that they will go on to serve.

Epilogue

Reflections on research impact

This epilogue reflects upon the decision to circulate aspects of this research online, from the point of study design, rather than following the more traditional convention of reporting to scholarly audiences and reporting on completion of the work. Reference is made to why, to how and to what content was shared, and to the unanticipated degree of research impact that followed on. The possibilities and challenges of the approach are discussed. In particular, the extent to which technology infused methods can, and perhaps should, upend conventional approaches to knowledge exchange.

The principles underpinning the professional doctorate bode well with the idea of knowledge exchange, because of how they require doctoral students ‘to look at their own practice and context’ and to embody the advancement of ‘professional practice and its knowledge base’ (Thomson, 2017, np). The processes involved, whilst different in design, are no less robust than other doctoral routes (McSherry et al., 2019). As Shulman points out:

For an activity to be designated as scholarship, it should manifest at least three key characteristics: It should be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one’s scholarly community (1998, p.4).

However, the central tenets of Shulman’s proposition take on new meaning when both applied at the point of study design, and, when applied to the online. The idea of publicness, critique, and knowledge exchange are reconstituted, due to how online spaces are organised and due to how they often organise themselves (boyd, 2010).

On commencement of this study a new form of scholarship, digital scholarship, was beginning to emerge. ‘The ubiquity of social media... [had] destabilised the boundaries’ of the institution and as a result scholarly practices, in varying ways and to varying degrees, were being transformed (Carrigan, 2016, p.64). Research activity, in a form that acts ‘with and for publics, rather than at them’ was becoming the basis of knowledge exchange (Carrigan, 2016, p.66). The idea that ‘engagement necessitates something more than dissemination’ by the ‘expert’, the ‘amelioration fallacy’ as Carrigan coined it, creating a very different tone (2016, p.67). The information society was seen to be levelling the power. No longer were the professions able to hold court on knowledge production or knowledge exchange (Susskind and Susskind, 2015). Despite how ‘enormously beneficial’ this destabilisation was considered to have been, it presented a challenge for those wedded to traditional scholarly norms (Carrigan, 2016, p.64). Regardless of this, open practices continued to drive on, due to how they had been shown to provide academics with opportunities to engage with and across audiences; audiences

that may not naturally, intuitively or ever connect (Weller, 2011). This new way of doing academia or being an academic was being more and more widely embraced because of how it situated 'meaningful... engagement at its core' (Carrigan, 2016, p.66).

It was through engaging with these new and emerging ideas that I became convinced of the value of circulating my study online. I believed that making this work visible and accessible from the outset had the potential to raise awareness of the significance of digitalisation and digital professionalism to the profession, and in doing so increase the likelihood of shaping practices in the field. A steady increase in the number of practitioners found to engage in misconduct online seemed to suggest that there would be others in practice who were struggling or ill-equipped to manage the unintended consequences of digitalisation too. Relating to this was the rapidity of the digital shift. I was acutely aware of the time it would take to report on this work and the fact that the moratorium for conversations about digitalisation in social work would be confined to the academy if I were to follow a more traditional route. This was likely to limit the potential to engage practitioners, users of services and students in valuable knowledge exchange, during, as opposed to solely on completion of this work.

Given that the circulation of academic work is principally limited to, and to an extent limited by physical attendance at academic conferences (Weller, 2011) or hidden behind costly paywalls (Carrigan, 2016) further solidified my decision to break with convention and to circulate this work before one might normally do. Whilst 'one's scholarly community' offers a particular type of critique, open practices neutralise the exclusivity characteristic of a professional group (Susskind and Susskind, 2015). Furthermore, they can reduce the potential for echo chamber type thinking, which can stifle rather than liberate the research impact available through this new form of knowledge exchange. Carrigan explains how open approaches of the nature described offer a more 'cumulative' type of scholarly influence (2016, p.68); a more meaningful method to knowledge exchange, through which barriers to engagement with research can be broken down and relevant audiences reached. However, significant to this and to how this study was received, was my ability to navigate the 'social mediated publicness' (Baym and boyd, 2012, p.325), that in this instance involved: my work, my profession, Twitter and me! (Taylor, 2016a, np). Because as Baym and boyd (2012) point out, publicness in the new world requires the skills to manage 'an ever-shifting process throughout which people juggle blurred boundaries, multi-layered audiences, individual attributes... [and] the specifics of the systems they use' (p.320).

Having made the decision, I posted, what could be thought of as a fairly traditional research poster, online. Within one calendar month, using the analytics tool built into Twitter's design, 28,342 impressions (the number of times a post online is seen) and 597 engagements (the

number of times a post online is interacted with) (Taylor, 2016b) were tracked. Whilst this impact appeared to validate my decision to circulate this work online, I was unprepared for the extraordinary amount of interest that followed on. Invitations to present my work within academic communities and to practitioner communities already practising in the field (Appendices, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16) and to publish, again perhaps before a traditional doctorate would (Taylor, 2015b; Taylor, 2016a; Taylor, 2018) and (Appendix 13, 14, 15) remained consistent throughout. Even though I had an awareness of the potential reach of social technologies, the extent of engagement that followed came as a surprise. Not only did this open practice generate an interest in the work, it evidenced the value of the use of new social technologies to support meaningful knowledge exchange.

The reflections above are underpinned by the belief that social work academia, must now more than ever, authentically embrace unconventional approaches, so that 'the familiar and honorable term scholarship' takes on 'a broader and more capacious meaning' (Boyer, 1990, p.16). The seeds for this study were planted a long time before the work began, and the impact, I hope, will serve to bring further into focus the body of knowledge with which social work, now more than ever, needs to contend.

Word count: approximately – 54,999

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Technology requirements for social work education; as updated.

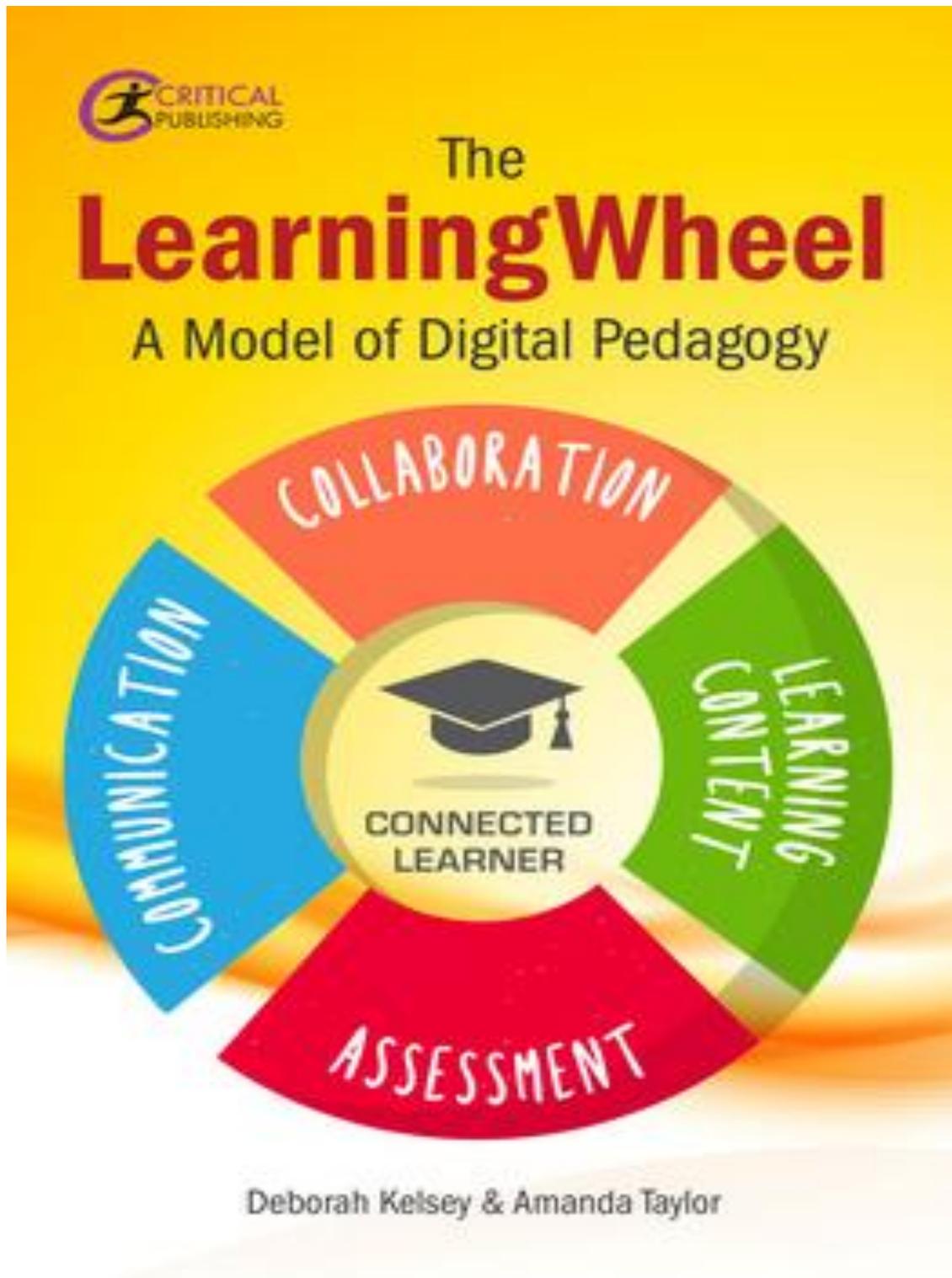
The following table provides a brief overview of the previous and current technology related requirements for social work education and practice. The more recent amendments are underlined to highlight the differences between the regulations now and those that would have shaped the educational experience that this study examines. The updated requirements are those to which current social work education providers will defer, in terms of curriculum design, content and delivery.

QAA (2008)	QAA (2016)
<p>During their qualifying degree studies in Social Work, students acquire, critically evaluate, apply and integrate knowledge and understanding in the following:</p> <p>The implications of modern information and communications technology (ICT) for both the provision and receipt of services (p. 9).</p>	<p>During their qualifying degree studies in Social Work, students acquire, critically evaluate, apply and integrate knowledge and understanding in the following:</p> <p>The implications of modern information and communications technology for both the provision and receipt of services, <u>use of technologically enabled support and the use of social media as a process and forum for vulnerable people, families and communities and communities of professional practice</u> (p.17).</p>
<p>Approaches to support blended learning should include the use of ICT to access data, literature and resources, as well as engagement with technologies to support communication and reflection and sharing of learning across academic and practice learning settings (QAA, 2008, p.15).</p>	<p><u>Learning and teaching</u> approaches include the use of <u>technology</u> to access data, literature and resources, as well as engagement with established and <u>emerging</u> technologies to support communication and reflection and sharing of learning across academic and practice learning settings (p.23).</p>
<p>Graduates in social work should be able to use ICT methods and techniques to support</p>	<p>Graduates in social work <u>are</u> able to use information and communication technology</p>

<p>their learning and their practice. In particular, they should demonstrate the ability to use ICT effectively for professional communication, data storage and retrieval and information searching. Use ICT in working with people who use services. Integrate appropriate use of ICT to enhance skills in problem-solving; have a critical understanding of the social impact of ICT, including an awareness of the impact of the 'digital divide' (p14-15).</p>	<p><u>effectively and appropriately</u> for: professional communication, data storage and retrieval and information searching, <u>accessing and assimilating information</u> to inform working with people who use services, <u>data analysis to enable effective use of research in practice</u>, enhancing skills in problem-solving, <u>applying numerical skills to financial and budgetary responsibilities</u>, <u>understanding the social impact of technology, including the constraints of confidentiality</u> and an awareness of the impact of the 'digital divide' (p.21).</p>
<p>HCPC (2014)</p>	<p>HCPC (2017)</p>
<p>Social workers in England must: be able to demonstrate a level of skill in the use of information technology appropriate to their practice (p.13).</p>	<p>Social workers in England must: be able to demonstrate a level of skill in the use of information technology appropriate to their practice (p.13).</p>

Appendix 2.

The LearningWheel: A Model of Digital Pedagogy Book



(Kelsey and Taylor, 2017).

I wrote all five chapters of The LearningWheel book. It was written for an educational technologist and was aimed at teachers in training and those educators already practising in the field. It is based on a model of pedagogy developed by D. Kellsey. The acknowledgements below are evidence that the text within this book is my work. The LearningWheel Concept, the Glossary and Figures, apart from the Figure 3.1 The CoActed Learner (p.43) and Figure 3.2 Social Work Book Group Case Study (p.46) are not my work.

The inaugural Social Media for Learning in Higher Education Conference was held on December 18th, 2015 in Sheffield Hallam University. We attended as a result of having papers accepted: Deborah 'The LearningWheel' outlining this digital pedagogical approach as a means to engaging learners through digital technologies and Amanda's 'When Actual Met Virtual' seminar that provided an overview of how through connecting online the Use of Book Groups in Social Work Education became an international Community of Learning. Previous to the conference and indeed throughout the conference we had not formally met, in fact it was on the eve of the event that we virtually connected on the social media platform Twitter through the use of the conference hashtag #SocMedHE15. However, a serendipitous mix up in train journeys resulted in a very interesting conversation from which the idea for this book was born.

We would like to thank each and every one of the students and colleagues who have tolerated our innovative and driven natures and engaged with us as we have tried out our ideas. More particularly we would like to offer a special thank you to all of those who have contributed to the LearningWheel and embraced this teaching and learning methodology wholeheartedly. Our collective ideas and efforts as a virtual community of learning and practice can only but improve and enrich the overall student experience.

On a more personal note...

I would like to express my gratitude to the then stranger on the train (Amanda), who offered and has delivered on her promise to write about the LearningWheel. Sacrificing endless hours, days, weeks and months, Amanda has literally interrogated the enthusiastic ideas of my mind to enable her to articulate in such an interesting manner the What? Why? and How? of the LearningWheel concept. She entered into the collaborative spirit of the LearningWheel to develop and refine what has become a shared labour of love! Thank you, Amanda.

DKellsey

Appendix 3. Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Study title Examining the Contribution of Social Work Education to the Digital Professionalism of Students, for Practice in the Connected Age

Invitation to participate

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you make a decision as to whether or not you wish to participate it is important that you understand why the research is being completed and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If there is anything that is unclear, or about which you would like more information, please get in touch. *It is advisable that you take some time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study seeks to explore the contribution of social work education to the development of digital awareness and digital competence of students for practice in the connected age. I am keen to hear from you if you LIKE, DISLIKE, NEITHER LIKE NOR DISLIKE or ARE NOT SURE about digital technologies in social work education and practice. I may need to use these preferences to manage respondent numbers should the number of participants wishing to take part outweigh the number required for this study.

Why have I been asked to take part?

You are nearing the end of your social work degree and therefore will have had the opportunity to engage with the social work curriculum in its fullest. Thus you might have opinions and perspectives about the use of technologies throughout the course of your studies, that you are willing to share.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is on a voluntary basis. Therefore, it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be provided with a copy of this information sheet and be asked to sign a consent form. You are still free to withdraw within one week of the interview taking place, without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect the standard of

education you receive within the School of Social Work; nor will it impact on any other element of your professional training or assessment.

What do I have to do if I decide to take part?

Participation will involve attendance at one 45 minute long semi-structured interview on campus. The interview will comprise of a short reflective task (Research Interview Mapping Tool- attached) and number of short questions pertaining to your experience of and exposure to technologies over the course of your studies. It will also ask you to comment on the link between learning about technologies and using them in practice; and any thoughts you might have about the technologies in practice more broadly. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed for analysis.

What are the benefits and risks of taking part?

There are no direct benefits in participation. However, the experience may encourage you to further reflect on technologies in social work education and practice. You will have the opportunity to contribute to this body of knowledge. I do not foresee any adverse side effects to taking part in this study, other than the time you will give up to attend the interview.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

The interviews will be tape recorded and notes will also be taken. The notes and the tape recordings will only be available to the research team and will be destroyed after a maximum of five years. You will not be identifiable in the data and will have the opportunity to choose a pseudonym for the interview transcript at the end of the interview. *If a participant discloses any information which could result in actual harm to themselves or a third party then they will be required to disclose this information to the relevant authority.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be used for a doctoral thesis and may also be written into a paper to be submitted to a peer reviewed, relevant and reputable journal. Student participants will not be identified in any report/publication.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is not funded.

Who has given permission for the study to go ahead?

The Ethics Committee at the University of Central Lancashire has approved the research to be completed.

Contact for further information

If you wish to take part or have any further questions please contact me at:

amltaylor@uclan.ac.uk

Dr Candice Satchwell is my research supervisor and can be contacted

at: CSatchwell@uclan.ac.uk

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider participating in this important research.

Appendix 4. Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Project: Examining the Contribution of Social Work Education to the Digital Professionalism of Students, for Practice in the Connected Age

Name of Researcher: Amanda Taylor (University of Central Lancashire)

Please acknowledge that you agree with the following statements:

I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet **Yes / No**

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can opt out within one week of the interview. I understand that I do not have to answer all the questions if I do not feel comfortable answering. I understand I do not have to take part in the activity **Yes / No**

I have been offered the opportunity to ask any questions relating to this research and they have been answered to my satisfaction **Yes / No**

I am happy to take part in this research **Yes / No**

Please can you circle one of the following categories, the one that you feel describes how you feel about technologies:

LIKE

DISLIKE

NEITHER LIKE NOR DISLIKE

NOT SURE

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Amanda Taylor

Appendix 5. Ethical Approval



1st July 2015

Candice Satchwell/Amanda Taylor
School of Social Work
University of Central Lancashire

Dear Candice/Amanda,

Re: PSYSOC Ethics Committee Application
Unique Reference Number: PSYSOC 220

The PSYSOC ethics committee has granted approval of your proposal application 'Exploring the contribution of social work education to the digital socialisation of students for practice'.

PLEASE NOTE: This study is granted ethical approval on the proviso that evidence of the previous conditions 3a & 3b being adhered to is provided in due course.

Approval is granted up to the end of project date* or for 5 years from the date of this letter, whichever is the longer. It is your responsibility to ensure that

- the project is carried out in line with the information provided in the forms you have submitted
- you regularly re-consider the ethical issues that may be raised in generating and analysing your data
- any proposed amendments/changes to the project are raised with, and approved, by Committee
- you notify roffice@uclan.ac.uk if the end date changes or the project does not start
- serious adverse events that occur from the project are reported to Committee
- a closure report is submitted to complete the ethics governance procedures (Existing paperwork can be used for this purposes e.g. funder's end of grant report; abstract for student award or NRES final report. If none of these are available use [e-Ethics Closure Report Proforma](#)).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Brewer', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Gayle Brewer
Vice-Chair
PSYSOC Ethics Committee

Appendix 6. Research Interview Mapping Tool

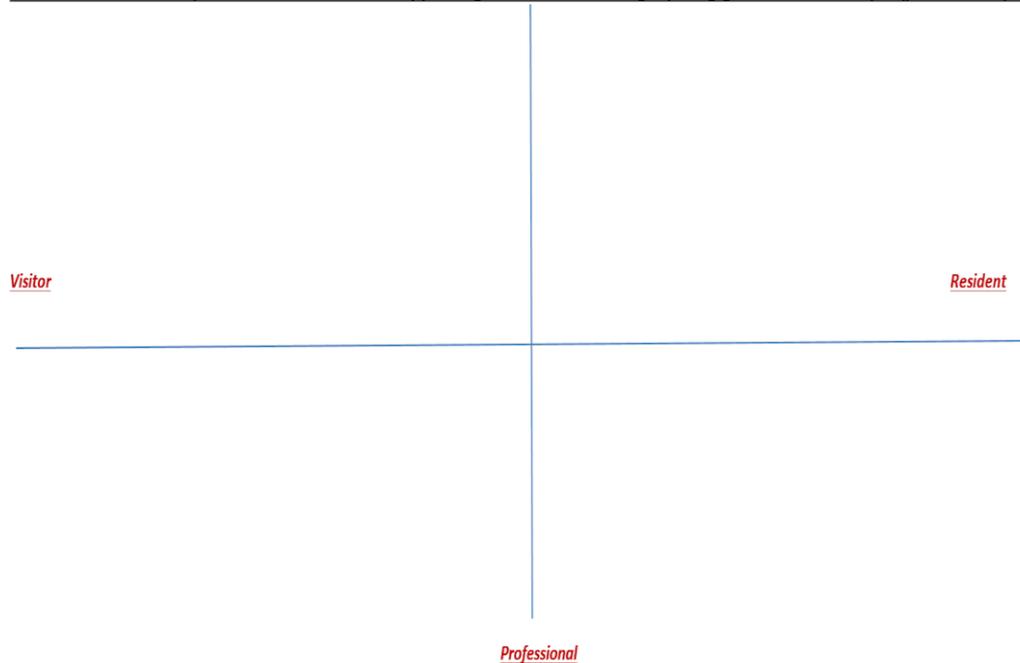
Digital Professionalism Mapping Tool

Chart technology usage, presence, purpose.

Reflective Mapping of Social Media / Technologies Tool

Personal

Place the icons below in the quadrant that indicates most closely your usage of the various technologies you engage with and in what respect (professional or personal)



Adapted from <http://daveowhite.com/vandr/> WHITE, David S.; LE CORNU, Alison. *Visitors and Residents: A new typology for online engagement*. First Monday, [S.l.], aug. 2011. ISSN 13960466. Available at: <<http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3171/3049>>. Date accessed: 01 May. 2015. doi:10.5210/fm.v16i9.3171.

Live link:

<https://docs.google.com/drawings/d/1PkFVpNhpjiMjqD4NYeSKeW5utqnCj2UYOY2ZZYk2RK0/edit?usp=sharing> (Taylor, 2015).

Appendix 7. Digitising Social Work Education Framework: An Example Course Review

Digitising Course Design, Course Content, Course Delivery Prompts:

1. Course Design: where does or can course design support digital development?
2. Course Content: where does or can course content support digital development?
3. Course Delivery: where does or can course delivery support digital development?

Digitising Course Design, Course Content, Course Delivery: (example replies)

1. Course Design: has been developed or reviewed and aligned with the regulatory requirements, the current practice landscape and practice needs. Digital development, where relevant, has been woven into course content and delivery. A range of formative and summative assessment methods such as: blogs, vlogs, infographics are woven into module requirements. Digital learning outcomes are embedded into module requirements. Digital professionalism tasks are included in course induction processes.
2. Course Content: all modules have been reviewed in light of digitalisation:
 - Law and Policy Module: includes opportunities to examine and learn about GDPR, OSC Procedures & Guidance and Digital & Data Ethics. Students are made aware of University and Professional Regulator social media and networking policies. The School has developed a digital professionalism policy, shared on entry onto the programme. Digital literacy development forms part of the module learning and assessment.
 - Sociology Module: includes reference to how digitalisation is shaping the social world. Literatures pertaining to digital sociology inform learning about the history of sociological change. Datafication predicative risk modelling and automation, as relevant to social work, forms part of this. Digital literacy development forms part of the module learning and assessment.

- Human Growth & Development Module: includes reference to the influences of digitalisation on life stage development – across all life stages. Module content includes literatures such as growing up digital, screen-aging, the quantified-self and cyber-socialisation. Digital literacy development forms part of the module learning and assessment.
 - Interpersonal Skills Module: outlines the nuances of and the skills to communicate online. Theory and literatures relating to issues such as the cyber-effect and online disinhibition effect are reviewed. Digital literacy development forms part of the module learning and assessment.
 - Preparation for Practice Module: pays attention to digital professionalism and the transferability of professionalism into the online. It provides opportunities to examine the personal to professional digital transition and boundaries linked to the connected age. Students are made aware of cases of misconduct online and are provided with opportunities to review their digital footprint, presence and privacy online. A range of digitally orientated practice methods are highlighted – such as social care robots, counselling online, predicative risk modelling, social media for social work. Digital literacy development forms part of the module learning and assessment.
3. Course Delivery: digital teaching methods from the literature have been reviewed and where relevant embedded into course delivery. Digitally orientated teachable moments have been identified. Induction has been highlighted as a key juncture for the review of existing digital skills. Teaching Teams use the Virtual Learning Environment and other available technologies to highlight and develop digital literacies relevant to 21st century practice need. Educators model digital professionalism online and the balance of professional boundaries as per the regulatory body and university policy.

*All other modules (including practice learning modules): should be reviewed in light of the influences of the digital shift. All modules should involve the dissemination of social work and technology literature as relevant. Module content should reflect digital knowledge, digital values and digital skills. Module assessment should include at least one learning outcome relating to the digital shift. The use of the prefix cyber is also useful to reviewing module content, due to how this too is used to describe concepts relating to the online. For example:

CYBER:	addiction	emotions	kidnapping
	activism	ethics	identity
	assault	etiquette	politics
	awareness	everything	safety
	bullying	extortion	security
	capitalism	feminism	sex
	citizenship	feudalism	socialisation
	crime	footprint	societies
	culture	forensics	stalking
	discourse	fraud	surveillance
	disinhibition	harassment	terrorism
	disobedience	health	vetting

Course design, content and delivery should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect technological change.

Appendix 8.

Excerpt: Office for Surveillance Commissioners Procedures and Guidance for covert surveillance and property interference by public authorities (Lord Judge, 2016).

‘Covert surveillance of Social Networking Sites’ (SNS)

288. The fact that digital investigation is routine or easy to conduct does not reduce the need for authorisation. Care must be taken to understand how the SNS being used works. Authorising Officers must not be tempted to assume that one service provider is the same as another or that the services provided by a single provider are the same.

288.1 Whilst it is the responsibility of an individual to set privacy settings to protect unsolicited access to private information and even though data may be deemed published and no longer under the control of the author, it is unwise to regard it as —open source, or publicly available; the author has a reasonable expectation of privacy if access controls are applied. In some cases data may be deemed private communication still in transmission (instant messages for example). Where privacy settings are available but not applied the data may be considered open source and an authorisation is not usually required. Repeat viewing of —open source sites may constitute directed surveillance on a case by case basis and this should be borne in mind.

288.2 Providing there is no warrant authorising interception in accordance with section 48(4) of the 2000 Act, if it is necessary and proportionate for a public authority to breach covertly access controls, the minimum requirement is an authorisation for directed surveillance. An authorisation for the use and conduct of a CHIS is necessary if a relationship is established or maintained by a member of a public authority or by a person acting on its behalf (i.e. the activity is more than mere reading of the sites content).

288.3 It is not unlawful for a member of a public authority to set up a false identity, but it is inadvisable for a member of a public authority to do so for a covert purpose without an authorisation for directed surveillance when private information is likely to be obtained. The SRO should be satisfied that there is a process in place to ensure compliance with the legislation. Using photographs of

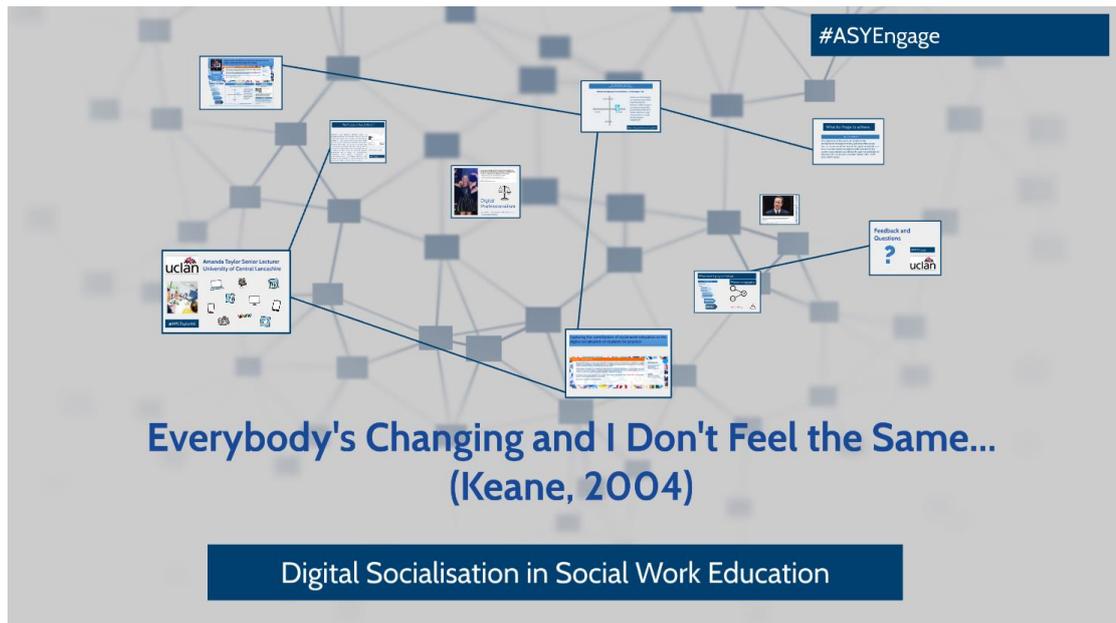
other persons without their permission to support the false identity infringes other laws.

288.4 A member of a public authority should not adopt the identity of a person known, or likely to be known, to the subject of interest or users of the site without authorisation and without the consent of the person whose identity is used and without considering the protection of that person. The consent must be explicit (i.e. the person from whom consent is sought must agree (preferably in writing) what is and is not to be done) (p.68).

Appendix 9.

Seminar: Everybody's changing and I don't feel the same

An invited academic seminar at the University of Sussex, social work department. Outlining this research project and its contribution to understanding students experiences of new technologies in social work education.



Prezi Presentation:

http://prezi.com/nautiuwxz5ji/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

Taylor, Amanda M. L. (2016) ["Everybody's changing and I don't feel the same" \(Keane, 2004\): Researching Digital Socialisation in Social Work Education](#) [Invited Seminar] In: #ASYEngage: Exploring the opportunities and challenges of social work encounters with social media research project seminar series, May 2016, University of Sussex.

Appendix 10.

Conference Paper: Researching the Contribution of Social Work Education to the Digital Socialisation of Students in Preparation for Practice in the Technological Age

The purpose of this paper presentation is to provide an overview of a current research project which aims to investigate how technologies are being exploited within social work education for the digital socialisation of social work student social workers in preparation for practice. To examine how equipped they feel on qualification to navigate a practice landscape that is embroiled, shaped and influenced by the technological age (Cooner 2004).

Social work practitioners are navigating uncharted waters when it comes to practice in a digital world; practice where the boundaries between practitioner digital knowledge, skill and ethics are not explicitly understood in terms of appropriateness and professionalism. This being evidenced by the investigations of two practitioners (Stevenson, 2014; Stevenson, 2016) and one student social worker (Schraer, 2015) who have been called to account by the professional regulator (HCPC) for online behaviours that left users of services, agencies, peers and the practitioners themselves vulnerable. However as yet little has been done to address the knowledge gaps that have come to light through these investigations. It is on this premise that this study began and is being pursued.

The study is phenomenographic in nature. A small scale study that employed semi-structured interviews (based on the work of White & Le Cornu, 2011) to capture the experiences of 10 students social workers from under and postgraduate programmes at the point of completion of their professional studies; as it was felt that they would have experienced the curriculum in its fullest and therefore more able to reflect the actualities in terms of exposure to digital technologies. Early findings indicate that the use of and discussion about technologies for learning and ultimately practice requires review. Furthermore, they suggest that there is a lack of consistency in the usage of technologies that appears to be leading to student ambivalence regarding the realities of the technological age from a learning and practice point of view.

Literature and study around phenomenon of technological advancement amounts to a vast body of knowledge, yet the same cannot be said of literature pertaining to technology in social work education and practice, where we find a knowledge base that is quite embryonic and disparate in comparison. The studies that do exist make a recurrent case for a more consistent and proactive use of technology for teaching and learning in social work education.

In as much as this study pertains to social work students and social work education digital socialisation is an issue being unpacked across not only professional courses but education more broadly. It would be useful to share this work with like-minded colleagues and consider its relevance through the conference themes:

- Becoming digitally capable in a social world
- Being informed and in control of your digital identity
- The evolution of curriculum design

References:

Cooner, T.S. (2004) 'Preparing for ICT Enhanced Practice Learning Opportunities in 2010: A Speculative View.' *Social Work Education*. Vol.23 (6) pp.731-744.

Schraer, R. (2015) Social worker who sent 'offensive' tweets to David Cameron found fit to practise. [online] Available at: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2015/08/11/social-worker-sent-offensive-tweets-david-cameron-found-fit-practise/> Accessed (09 June, 2016).

Stevenson, L. (2014) HCPC sanctions social worker over Facebook posts. [online] Available at: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2014/09/10/social-worker-given-conditions-practice-order-disrespectful-facebook-posts/> Accessed (09 June, 2016).

Stevenson, L. (2016) Social work student 'expelled' from course after anti-gay Facebook posts. [online] Available at: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2016/02/29/social-work-student-expelled-course-anti-gay-facebook-posts/> Accessed (09 June, 2016).

White, D. S. & Le Cornu, A. (2011) Visitors and Residents: A new typology for online engagement. [online] 5th September 2011. First Monday. Available at: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3171/3049> Accessed (9th June, 2016).

Taylor, Amanda M. L. (2016) Researching the Contribution of Social Work Education to the Digital Socialisation of Students in Preparation for Practice in the Technological Age. <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/socmedhe/16-researching-the-contribution-of-social-work-education-to-the-digital-socialisation-of-students-in-preparation-for-practice-in-the-technological-age/> [Paper] In: SocMedHE Social Media for Learning in Higher Education Conference, December 2016, Sheffield.

Appendix 11.

Conference Paper: Examining the Contribution of Social Work Education to the Digital Socialisation of Students in Readiness for Practice

SWSD Social Work, Education and Social Development Conference, July 2018, RDS Dublin.

Abstract: This paper provides an overview of a research project designed to investigate the contribution of social work education to the digital socialisation of students in readiness for practice. Furthermore, to examine how equipped students felt on qualification to navigate a practice landscape that is increasingly being infused with issues linked to the technological age (Cooner 2004). In England digital knowledge, skills and ethics for social work education and practice have not been articulated formally, therefore practitioners have been left to roam in uncharted waters. As a result practitioners (Stevenson, 2014; Stevenson, 2016) and students (Schraer, 2015) have been called to account for online behaviours that were thought to leave the users of services, agencies and indeed the practitioners themselves in vulnerable positions. However, as yet little has been done to bridge the knowledge gaps that have come to light through these investigations. This small scale phenomenographic study employed semi-structured interviews to capture the experiences of 11 students on qualification. Given that these students would have experienced the curriculum in its fullest it was felt that they would well situated to reflect upon the actualities of digital development. Early findings indicate that the use of technologies for learning and practice requires review. Furthermore, it suggests that a lack of guidance and consistency in technology usage appears to be leading to student ambivalence regarding the affordances of technologies for learning and practice. In as much as this study pertains to social work students and social work education, digital socialisation is gaining recognition as an issue in education more broadly; accurately aligned to employability. It would be useful to share this work with like-minded colleagues and to consider its relevance through a comparative discussion that would be useful to thinking globally about how social work takes this agenda forward.

Keywords: Digital Professionalism, Professional Socialisation, Social Work Education

Taylor, Amanda M. L. (2017) Examining the Contribution of Social Work Education to the Digital Socialisation of Students in Readiness for Practice. <https://sites.grenadine.co/sites/mcidublin/en/swsd-2018/participants/6795>. [Paper] In: SWSD Social Work, Education and Social Development Conference, July 2018, RDS Dublin.

Appendix 12.

Journal Paper: Social work and digitalisation: bridging the knowledge gaps



Social Work Education
The International Journal



ISSN: 0261-5479 (Print) 1470-1227 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cswe20>

Social work and digitalisation: bridging the knowledge gaps

Amanda Taylor

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 Published online: 09 Aug 2017.

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Click here for online access: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02615479.2017.1361924> (Taylor, 2017).

Appendix 13.

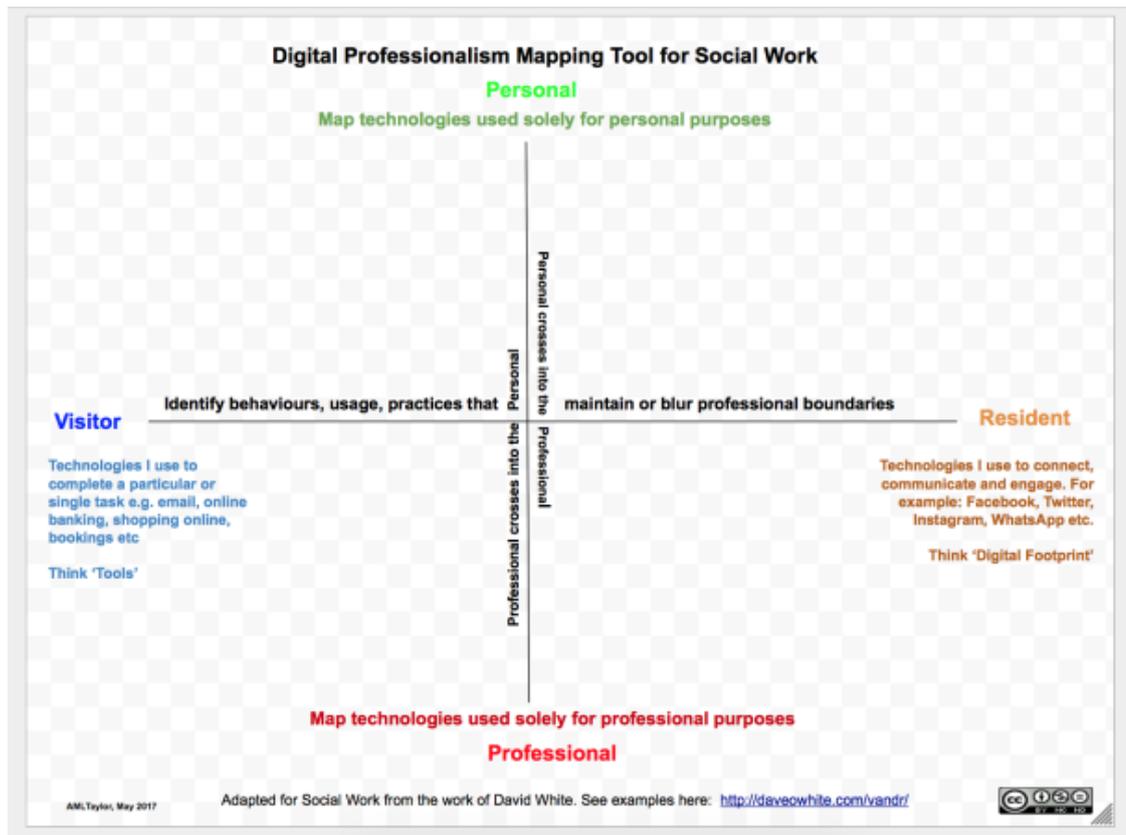
Blog Post: The Unintended Consequences of I Daniel Blake

[I Daniel Blake](#) first came to my attention whilst scrolling through the [local theatre](#) listings, on what was a fairly drab Saturday afternoon, set aside for data analysis. Many of you will recognise and maybe even appreciate the avoidant behaviours of this early stage researcher. However, in my defence, I am sure that I've heard it argued that it is within these avoidant moments that the most useful unintended happenings arise... and arise they did. There was little in the brief synopsis of the [Ken Loach](#) film that suggested an epiphany of any kind could occur, or that justified the abandoning of my analysis. In truth I wasn't quite sure what to expect. I just remember being quite curious and booking tickets for what looked like an interesting watch.

Interesting it was. The opening scene ([I Daniel Blake Trailer](#)) included a series of intrusive questions, delivered in a manner that even the most saintly amongst us would struggle to 'hear'. This set the tone for what was an incredibly challenging watch. The story that unfolded stopped me, literally, in my [#digitalbydefault](#) tracks! A term that I had become so familiar with through the writing of [The LearningWheel Book](#). Indeed, on reflection perhaps far too familiar with.

My encounter with Loach's work forced me to revisit my responsibilities as a social work academic interested in digitalisation and to reexamine the idea of [knowledge impact relating](#) to my current [research project](#). The study outlined, stemmed from anxieties about the preparedness of the profession to contain and respond to the [digital shift](#) and ironically here I was faced with its realities. Cue justification for my doctoral tardiness. As I navigate this study I remain, more now than ever, acutely aware of the speed of digitalisation and the UK Governments drive to default to the digital by 2020.

As I travel around England working with Local Authorities at [various stages of their digital journeys](#), I am frequently reminded of the need to provide opportunities and methods through which digital knowledge gaps can be explored. As a result, I have developed a Digital Professionalism Mapping Tool for Social Work.

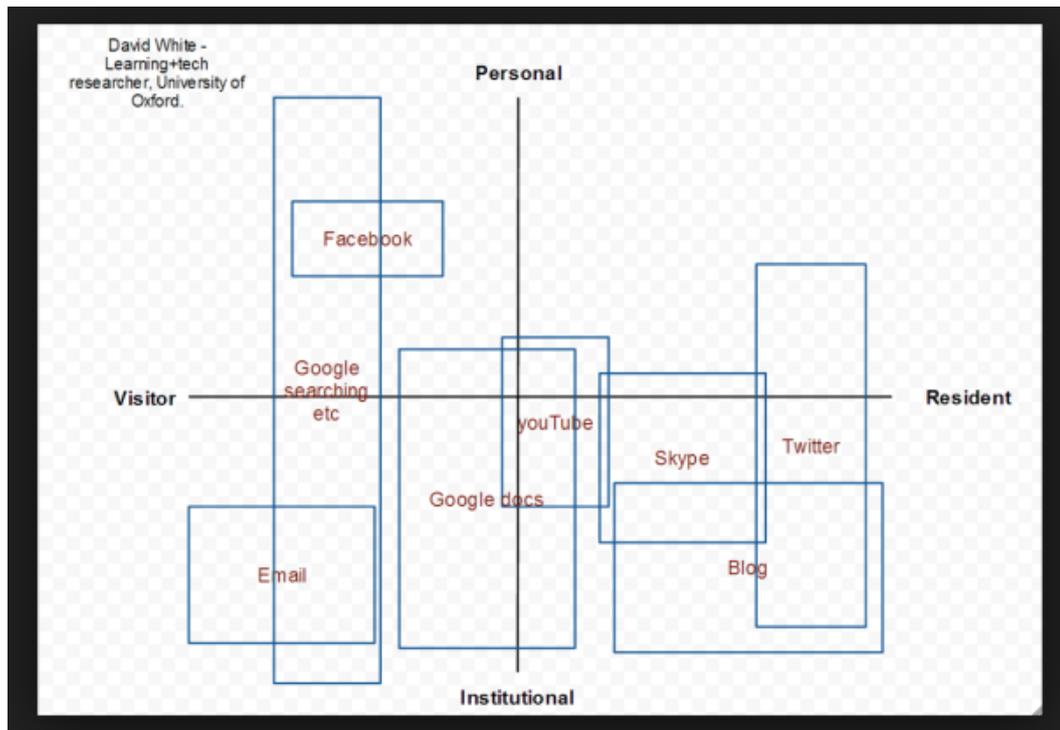


Click on the link to access and download the tool: [Digital Professionalism Mapping Tool](#).

This mapping tool has been adapted (with permission) from the work of [David White](#) , who is keen for his original method to be used across disciplines for the purposes of reflection – as noted below.

“You can find out about the ‘standard’ [V&R mapping process here](#) which is an effective method of making visible individuals’ engagement online. This process has been used by people in various contexts globally with one of my favourites being by [Amanda Taylor](#) with Social Work students. This starts from the principle that if we now, at least in part, live online then Social Workers need to be present in online spaces (or at least understand them as somewhere people are present)” [White, \(nd\)](#).

David provides this example of [mapping digital usage and presence online](#)



As you can see, David's use of technologies and online presence bridges both the professional and personal, but as an academic this is less likely to be cause for concern. For social work the implications of blurring professional boundaries has always been acutely felt, however how often do we consider how worlds might collide in the online, or the ramifications of this?

Social work as profession is starting to see and feel the impacts of the digital shift. Therefore, the social in social work, once again, needs re-thought. We need to think more about how technologies are permeating our lives and therefore the lives of those we serve. I Daniel Blake outlines a set of circumstances that are becoming increasingly familiar in practice. In addition to this, are issues such as [sexual abuse](#), [bullying](#) or [scamming](#) that need considered in past, present and future terms, to enable us think about what has changed due to the involvement of technologies. Furthermore, to enable us to consider what might constitute an appropriate practice response to issues emerging in the networked age.

Practitioners are set to see a steep rise in the use of technologies, both as tools of the trade but also influencing how issues present. Before we can even begin to deal with the practice issues, like and similar to those mentioned above, we need to address the digital capabilities of the profession. The Digital Professionalism Mapping Tool is one viable option. It is designed to assist students, academics and practitioners to chart or as White

explains ‘make visible’ (nd) the range of tools and online platforms they use and the various purposes for which they use them. It helps to identify those practices that may maintain or perhaps blur professional boundaries. The Visitor – Resident axis provides a context in which to define the tools that are being used, with the Professional – Personal axis positioned to consider where the tools, platforms or technologies are being used. Reflecting on their own digital maps, students, academics and practitioners can then consider if said usage might in any way impact upon perceived professionalism and public trust.

It appears, from the Twitter Hashtag [#IDanielBlake](#), that a significant proportion of the social work profession have now seen the film. If you are a social work practitioner, an academic, a student social worker... indeed linked to social work in any way and haven't seen, it I would suggest that you do... and you do so as a matter of some urgency. I would also urge students, academics and practitioners to consider their own digital journey as related to the requirements and standards for practice so that attention to digital professionalism can be evidenced as part of ongoing professional development.

Reflective prompts to help populate your map:

- Which technologies do I use and for what purpose?
- Which do I use in my personal life?
- Which do I use in my professional life?
- Is there any crossover between the professional and personal and if so what are the benefits or ramifications of this?
- What has this mapping of my online behaviours and practices shown?
- How might I address any knowledge gaps?

I hope you find this tool as useful as I have. I have found it particularly helpful to thinking out how to make best use of my doctoral studies. Please feel free to share it and to get in touch [@amltaylor66](#) should you have any questions or ideas for developing it further.

AMLTaylor (2017)

Click here for online access: <https://amltaylor66.wordpress.com/2017/06/02/the-unintended-impacts-of-i-daniel-blake/>

Appendix 14.

Blog Post: husITa Board Member Blog Series: Professionalism, Social Work and the Connected Age

This blog post by [Amanda Taylor](#) (husITa board member and Senior Lecturer in social work at the University of Central Lancashire) outlines Amanda's digital journey and why it is that she is committed to finding ways for social work in England to engage more fully with the digital shift.

My initial interest in digital technologies arose out of a need to keep in touch with my family and friends when I left Ireland in 2008 to pursue a [career](#) in social work education in England. I experimented with a number of platforms and apps until I found those most suitable for maintaining my connections back home. At that time choices were fairly limited. I used Email, Facebook and Instant Messenger (IM). My usage was largely dictated by both my communication requirements and the functionality of the tools. It wasn't long however, having 'felt' the benefits of these tools, before my mind drifted to the affordances of new technologies for teaching and learning in social work education. I began to notice how conscious I was becoming about my 'presence' ([Rettie, 2003](#)) online. This shift in my awareness was, in part, due to my role as a social work educator, tasked with the responsibility of professionally socialising students for contemporary social work practice. I became increasingly curious about professionalism, linked to the digital shift and began to explore human existence more broadly within the context of place and space ([Hubbard and Kitchin, 2010](#)). More recently my attention has shifted, to concerns about why it might be that an increasing number of colleagues are being called to account by the [professional regulator](#) for behaviours on social media ([Schraer, 2015](#); [Stevenson, 2014](#); [McNicoll, 2016](#), [Stevenson, 2016](#)) that weaken the credibility of the profession and threaten public trust.

Since my journey into the online and indeed to a greater degree the unknown, began I have taken the opportunities available to me to raise the profile of digital technologies in social work education, in a bid to highlight their relationship to professionalism in social work more broadly. I have embedded various methods into my teaching approaches to increase the digital awareness and capabilities of students, underpinned by the current [professional standards](#) for practice. An example of which is [@SWBookGroup](#), an approach that incorporates the use of the microblogging

platform Twitter to connect the profession in a global discussion for the purposes of [consolidating learning](#) through prompting reflection. The population of the group, both numerically and geographically, is testimony to its success. Another is [@SWVirtualPal](#), a medium through which social work students, practitioners and academics can identify and connect with like-minded colleagues across the world to share interests and ideas. My social work virtual pal [Laurel Hitchcock](#) and I have recently [blogged](#) about this work at the request of the [Chief Social Worker for Adults](#) in England. You can read the blog here... [Local Practice with Global Connections](#).

Even though I felt like I was progressing my teaching methods and engaging in some really interesting work I remained dissatisfied about my understanding of the use of digital technologies in social work education. In some respects, I felt like I was doing social work education ‘to’ and not ‘with’ students and had a deep desire to explore their digital experiences whilst engaged with their professional training. This need to know led me to design a study aimed at ‘[examining the contribution of social work education to the digital socialisation of students in readiness for practice](#)’. Due to the rapidity of technological change I have been sharing the progress of my study as it evolves on my [professional social media channel](#). I have also [blogged](#) about this work and have just this week had a paper accepted for publication in [Social Work Education: The International Journal](#) entitled ‘Social work and digitalisation: Bridging the knowledge gaps’.

There is still much to unpack and learn about social work in the connected age. I am often challenged about why I prefix the term professionalism with the word digital. My rationale for this is explained in the pending paper mentioned above, but in short it relates to the ongoing struggles that, as a profession, we seem to be experiencing in online spaces. The answer, as I see it, is quite simple: we need to account for the digital in everything we do. We need to reconsider the [Professional Capabilities Framework](#) in a way that reflects the digital shift and we need to develop more pointed guidance that enables the profession to become more equipped and confident in online spaces. If we are to convey the complexity of the work and truth about who we are we need to do this ethically. Social media offers so many possibilities for this, so many opportunities to promote social justice and to tell the true and messy story of social work. A profession committed to the greater good.

My need to stay connected personally has led me down a path of connecting professionally. It is hoped, if you haven't already, that you might join me on this journey, of connecting the dots between the professional and the digital so that we can exploit the affordances that new technologies offer to do social work and to tell our story in a better and much more informed way.

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Appendix 15.

Blog Post: Here, There and Everywhere

Here, There and Everywhere: The Arrival of the Digital Professionalism 'Interactive' Mapping Tool for Social Work Students, Practitioners and Academics

[#digitalpedagogy](#) [#DigitalProfessionalism](#) [#digitalisation](#)

[#digitisingprofessionaleducation](#) [#e-learning](#) [#highereducation](#) [#pedagogy](#) [#Socialwork](#)

This short blog outlines an update to the Digital Professionalism Mapping Tool for Social Work, previously discussed [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Those who have already read the blogs and publication (highlighted above) will know that I developed the Digital Professionalism Mapping Tool (based on the work of [David White](#)) to enable social work students, practitioners and educators to review their technology usage and presence online; as related to the professional standards and ethics of the profession. The tool has been received positively across the profession and indeed by other professional groupings as they think about what [Turner](#) describes as the '[brave new world](#)' (2015). Regardless of the enthusiasm expressed about its usefulness, I have never been quite satisfied with how it is accessed. I have always been niggled by the fact that it was predominantly a paper-based activity that ironically reviews presence and activity online. And whilst that has been 'ok', I wanted to offer a more accessible alternative. Something that I had never got around to sorting out until now.

I was recently introduced to [Laura Ridings](#), a new appointment to the University of Central Lancashire, located within the [TELT](#) team. Laura is a graphic designer and a former teacher, turned e-learning developer. A wonderful combination of creativity, pedagogy and technological skill; and the most pragmatic 'nerd' (her word not mine) that I have ever met. Within hours of me sharing my 'wants' she had produced a more realistic version of my 'needs'; in other words taken the [Digital Professionalism Mapping Tool online](#) and turned it into an interactive tool.

I am sharing the updated version of the tool [here](#)... in the hope that it will remain useful as social work education and practice continue to navigate the issues and possibilities of the digital shift.

As you can now use the tool here, there and everywhere please let us know what you think in the comments box below or on Twitter [@amltaylor66](#) and [@LRidingsUCLan](#)

AMLTaylor-Beswick (October 2018)

Click here for online access: <https://amltaylor66.wordpress.com/2018/10/23/here-there-and-everywhere-the-arrival-of-the-digital-professionalism-interactive-mapping-tool-for-social-work-students-practitioners-and-academics/>

Appendix 16. The Future of Social Work Education in the Connected Age husITa Talk
The Future of Social Work Education in the Connected Age
husITa 30th year anniversary talk

I stand before you all as a fairly young, in terms of time not chronological age, academic who at her first ever JSWEC conference in the UK literally stumbled across her tribe. That tribe, in that moment, mainly consisted of Jackie Rafferty. Getting scolded for 'being on our phones' aka 'live tweeting', in the workshop of Tarsem Singh Cooner, another of the UK tech tribe, confirmed that I was in the right place, at the right time, with the right people, doing the right thing. After a brief conversation with Jackie I knew that my efforts to embed new technologies into teaching and learning methods and to revitalise old ones, as a way of digitally socialising social work students in readiness for practice were not misplaced.

Up until that point I hadn't really come across any technology engaged social work academics - and was struggling to engage colleagues and students with what, in my opinion, was a really important body of knowledge and signification skills given the rapidity of digitalisation at that time. What however struck me, when talking with Jackie, was how the issues she raised relating to the relationship between technologies, social work and the social world, mirrored my experiences and my thinking, again at that time. I spoke to Jackie, with what I now realise was a GND - 'general naivety disorder' because I was and am still unable to accept how technologies in social work have been largely rejected and thought of in such negative terms. Over the years I have become more aware of the misappropriation of technologies in social work, such as recording systems that are not fit for purpose, or those platforms that have mutated into performance management tools. More recently I have become aware of the trialling of PRMs in LA's but am unconvinced by the narrative that surrounds these 'innovations' - descriptions and purposes that sound nothing like the 'technology for good' message that is at the core of husITa's work.

My doctoral work has helped me to further consider social work education in the UK in a digital respect and to evidence the need for change. I am currently wrangling with notions of preparedness and the direct link between educator preparedness and that of students. I am anxious about AI, Big Data and PRM and am on a crusade to challenge

social work education and educators about what students are taught, how they are taught it and am set through my work to question the validity of qualifying programmes if they are unable to evidence attention paid to the digital shift.

I continue to find myself battling uphill, whilst grappling with how digitalisation is shaping our world. I continue to need Jackie and indeed Neil's support which they give this freely, openly, transparently and with good grace. I am honoured to be in the company of the founders and developers of this body of knowledge and I agree with Jackie that husITa offers us an important context in which to build on and continue the work of digitally professionalising social work and influencing the social care professions on a global scale.

I believe husITa to be key to driving digital capabilities across the care professions and feel that it is we who should be writing any guidance that is to be disseminated to social work education and practice - endorsed by the various regulating bodies across the globe - not the other way around. I also feel that this is more possible than ever, as we now have the advantage of leveraging the current focus on digitalisation to shape this agenda for the greater good. I want to avoid getting into an echo chamber type situation where I am missing the mark by solely talking to my tribe... I aim to keep taking all that we are doing on the inside and circulating this outwards - in a bid to make some impact

It is my hope that we can use the space that has been created for us in Dublin to think more about how we as a group are going to further harness what we have each have to offer in a way that enables us each to give... I believe that the spirits are willing and the context is ripe. There is a 30-year body of knowledge that we need to bring to back to life and bring to light

On behalf of all who will take this work forward can I thank all of you who have created a foundation from which to proceed. I do hope that we do you proud and in doing so serve well for those, who more now than ever, need to feel the impact of our work

Amanda Taylor husITa Board member