An exploration of the learning experiences of Social Care students on Practice Placement

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Declaration of ownership

I declare that this project is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts (HONS) in Applied Social Studies in Social Care. It is entirely the work of the author and has not been submitted to any other university or higher education institution, or for any other academic award in this institute. Where use has been made of the work of other people it has been fully acknowledged and fully referenced.
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Introduction

The student practice placement is a key component of programmes leading to a professional social care qualification (Irish Association of Social Care Education (IASCE). It provides a platform of learning and development for students and allows for students to experience ‘hands-on’ work. The aim of this research is to explore the learning experience of Social Care students on practice placement within Athlone Institute of Technology. McHugh (2008, p.516-534) states that ‘organised placements in an appropriate setting under a suitable qualified supervisor’ are very significant for social care students because they come in contact with the most vulnerable people in our society.

The first objective is to look at the educational theory the ‘Threshold Concept Framework’ which has become popular as a way to examine significant learning experiences for higher-education students across a range of academic disciplines and professional programmes (Taylor, 2015). Meyer and Land (2008) contend that each discipline has its own domain-specific thresholds and even though they are troublesome to learn, they allow the learner to understand the interrelatedness of the different aspects of the discipline’s knowledge.

The second objective is to examine the role of supervision and how it impacted on the learning experience. Supervision is widely recognised as an essential tool to promote best practice, especially in workplaces which are highly relationship based. It also promotes reflection in situations, such as practice placement, where there is limited experience and which are overlaid by high levels of student anxiety.
Abstract

This is an exploratory study of the learning experiences of social care students on practice placement. This area has received limited research attention and little is empirically known about what learning occurs and what supports this learning process. A qualitative method was used in the form of a focus group, a small sample of five participants whose placement settings varied from disability to family support and childcare services. It looks at the threshold concept in particular as a way to examine significant learning on placement and how supervision contributes to this learning. The main findings of this study were that self-awareness is vital for all social care students and that this needs to be supported through supervision to harness all potential learning. The difference in levels of supervision afforded to the participants was striking. Without effective supervision and support, opportunities for further learning can be lost and students can become discouraged. The study concludes with recommendations for further research into the ‘use of self’ for those in the caring professions to better recognise the importance of self-awareness when working with people at times of vulnerability or need in their lives.
1 Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Irish Association of Social Care educators (IASCE) produced a useful document on practice placement in Social Care (2012) however; they did not give any insights into placement as a learning experience (Byrne-Lancaster, 2013). In a forty year history of social care education in Ireland (Courtney, 2012) learning experiences associated with social care placement have received limited research attention (Byrne, 2000), little is empirically known about what learning occurs on placement in this field. This study hopes to address this by looking at the Threshold concept as a theoretical framework from which to examine the learning experiences of Social Care students on practice placement and the role supervision played in this learning.

1.2 Social Care; background

Social Care is a rapidly changing and developing field in Ireland as elsewhere. It was defined by the Irish Association of Social Care Educators (IASCE, 2003) as ‘a profession committed to the planning and delivery of quality care and other support services for individuals and groups with identified needs’. According to Lalor & Share (2009, P.9), the social care profession uses shared life-space opportunities to meet the physical, social and emotional needs of clients by working in partnership to find solutions to various problems.

The aim of professional education in social care, according Mc Sweeney (2011, p.12), is to ‘enable the practitioner to deal with ambiguity and change through critical examination of work practices and location of these within theoretical frameworks’. Practice placements are an integral component of all courses in social care; they expose the student to the practical world of social care in a controlled situation and they facilitate the acquisition of practice skills. The focus of this study is to explore factors which facilitate learning while on practice placement and how students cope with the many complex issues that may arise on placement.
1.3 Practice placement

Doyle & Lalor (2009, p. 165) describe the practice placement as ‘the interface between theoretical knowledge and practical experience of hands-on work where individual thresholds of stress, strengths and weaknesses are explored and tested at the coalface of social care work’. This is often the first journey into the workplace for many students and there are challenges to be faced. There are many facets to caring as a professional and these include; building relationships while managing professional boundaries, integrating theory into practice, ethical obligations, reliability, and confidentiality. The early part of practice placement can physically, emotionally and cognitively ‘troublesome’ (Prendergast, 2015) and, if students are not reassured of this, it can lead to a negative experience of placement and profound student discouragement (Doyle & Lalor, 2009). This study is interested in the specific issues that occur on that initial journey into that ‘coalface’ with particular reference to the ways in which students cope with challenges they face on practice placement. One means of exploring this is to look at the educational theory the threshold concept.

1.4 The threshold concept

A threshold concept occurs when a new perspective develops as a result of an experience or from encountering new learning and Meyer & Land (2003) identified five characteristics of threshold concepts; they are transformative once they are understood; irreversible (as in it is virtually impossible to forget them) once they are understood; integrative in their capacity to promote the connection of previously unconnected ideas; bounded in that they often help define the scope or boundaries of a subject area; and they are often troublesome in that they can initially be counterintuitive or hard to grasp (Meyer & Land, 2006).

Clouder (2005) suggests that ‘caring’ as a profession is a threshold concept, as it is a troublesome notion for students and ultimately transforms their practice. She suggests that all interactions with service users lead to a transformation in the student’s professional identity because a change occurs in their understanding of what it means to care. This change, she contends, is based on the learning which occurs during interaction with clients, and this transforms the student’s view of themselves and their purpose. A similar view has been expressed by Tanner (2011) and Sibbett & Thompson (2008) who claim that key elements of the transformative experience may be common across different caring professions. They too
claim that every experience and interaction with clients leads to a transformation of the worker. This transformation, according to Meyer & Land (2003) leads to a previously inaccessible way of thinking about something.

Taylor (2015) used a small scale qualitative study as a way to examine the nature of key learning experiences for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) undergraduate students during practice placement. The study’s principal finding was that the threshold learning experience involves ECEC students successfully planning, implementing and reviewing an intervention with young children in a preschool setting. The findings of this study indicate that to get to the stage of successfully undertaking an intervention, students must overcome troublesome placement experiences and integrate personal, academic and agency knowledge. This is a significant finding for the development of ECEC students learning and contributes to the rationale for this study.

Taylor & Share (2012) argue that much of the research in social care studies neglects to address the issue of coalescence. In other words, students need support in linking their understanding of different concepts. They suggest that a ‘Threshold Concept’ such as care can be linked to other concepts, for example professional boundaries or professional role, to strengthen the formation of practitioners’ identities in the social professions. Davies & Mangan (2007) suggest that basic concepts which help students view the subject in a different way are not integrative and so not threshold concepts but can act as transformative thresholds for individual students. However Cousin (2005) describes the integrative element of the threshold concept as exposing the hidden interrelatedness of an occurrence that allows the learner to make connections that were until then hidden from view, so one could argue that linking basic concepts could be integrative.

A qualitative study by McPheat (2016) looked at possible threshold concepts or areas of learning with a sample of students/practitioners and expert/teachers in residential childcare and found that ‘self’ and ‘relational practice’ were the two main themes in his focus group discussions. Lyons (2007) is in agreement and adds that as well as honed skills and integrated knowledge social care graduates bring their values, beliefs, socialisation influences and personal traits with them to work and added that students must be aware of how the self influences and is affected by relationships with others.
Clouder (2005, p. 505-517) adds that if we are to produce graduates who are fit for practice and fit for purpose, we need to help students work through the raw experience of issues arising in the practice setting. She argues that these are ‘critical issues that need to be addressed’ Students need to figure out what ‘caring actually means, and also need to understand that not everyone can be cured or even treated and that not everyone wants to be treated. This can confuse students and can be what Land and Meyer (2008) define as ‘troublesome knowledge’. Students need help through supervision to enable them to reflect on their practice and overcome this troublesome knowledge in order to develop their own framework within which they can work effectively and efficiently.

1.5 Supervision

As Thompson has argued ‘Effective supervision can often be the difference between: success and failure; stress and job satisfaction; worry and reassurance; good practice and excellent practice. Its significant role should therefore not be underestimated’ (2002, p. 57).

This view is also shared by O Neill who claims that professional supervision is ‘an integral part of effective practice for social care professionals’ (2013, p. 182). Professional supervision can be regarded as a partnership process of on-going reflection and feedback between a named supervisor and supervisee in order to ensure and enhance effective practice, as Paley (2001) pointed out, for students to develop professionally they need support.

Morrison (2003) proposes that the purpose of supervision is to enhance the social worker’s professional skills, knowledge, and attitudes in order to achieve competency in providing quality care. It aids in professional growth and development and improves outcomes. He states: ‘The overall aim of supervision is to promote best practice for clients by maintaining existing good practice and continuously striving to improve it’. Hawkins and Shohet (2006 p. 214-225) comment that supervision is very important in a profession where the role is to pay attention to someone else’s needs and where stress, feelings of inadequacy and being emotionally drained are commonplace. They observe the purpose of supervision as: ‘not just about preventing stress and burn-out but also enabling supervisees to continually learn and flourish, so they spend more time working at their best than would otherwise be possible’.

1.6 Conclusion
The purpose of this review was to look at the literature concerning the learning experiences of social care students on practice placement, an area which has received limited research attention. By looking at the Threshold Concept as a way to examine significant learning experiences, we can explore what the possible threshold concepts are in social care, this framework is relatively new, yet has been applied extensively in other fields (Taylor, 2015). Practice placement is a vital component of social care education hence the importance of exploring the learning experience and how students are supported while on placement. Because of the unpredictability of the social care sector, practice placement can be challenging but is essential in the development of skills, knowledge and self-awareness. Supervision is part of this process and a critical element of practice placement.

2. Methodology
2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design of this study. Ethical issues and research tools will be discussed and pilot details of the research instrument presented. The research tool used in this study was a focus group and the rationale for choosing this particular tool is explained. The strengths and weaknesses of the tool are also explored. Finally the limitations of the study are detailed.

2.2 Research Design

Research is a process of steps used to collect and analyse information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue (Creswell, 2008). There are two categories of research methods, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research uses measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in research; the findings can be presented in the form of graphs and figures which conveys a sense of solid, objective research. Qualitative research is concerned with meanings and the way people understand things (Denscombe, 2003). It is more subjective in that it describes a pattern or condition from the point of view of those experiencing it. Each of the methods have strengths and weaknesses and when choosing a research method it is a matter of deciding which is the most appropriate method for the task at hand.

The author chose a qualitative research methodology in the form of a focus group as it was felt it would better serve the purpose of the project. It was felt that to explore students experiences of learning on practice placement, a qualitative approach would allow for a more in-depth view of students opinions. It is a more subjective than quantitative research which suits the purpose of this project. Another reason for choosing this method was that researcher could tackle any sensitive issues in the discussion around moral or ethical issues in practice, if they happened to arise.

2.3 Participants
As this study explores the experiences of social care students in practice placement, the participants selected for the study were fourth year social care students in AIT which were chosen by random sampling. The small sample of five participants ranged in age from 22 years to 40 years old and comprised of three females and two males. Their placement settings varied from disability to family support and childcare service.

The topic schedule, based on the research objectives of the study was given to the students just before the focus group commenced. The students were also given a consent form to sign. The researcher used a Dictaphone to record the focus group discussion for analysis. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality and assured that no identifying information would be in the final report.

2.4 Ethical considerations

The Nuremburg code (1949) provides a set of research ethics principles for undertaking research with live subjects. The code states that research participants should be voluntary and carried out only with participants’ permission, participants should not be physically or emotionally harmed, any risk should be identified and subjects could withdraw at any point (Robert-Holmes, 2011). This research is carried out in accordance with this code and also Athlone Institute of Technology’s ethical research guidelines. All information and the identity of the participants is confidential. Participants in this research study were informed of their rights relative to their participation, including the fact that participation is voluntary, anonymity is guaranteed and the purpose of the study was stated.

2.5 Limitations

The researcher noted a small number of limitations during the research study, which included the limited time scale to complete the study. Also the small sample of only five participants determines that this study therefore could not be considered a representative sample of the views of social care workers. Another limitation is the fact that the study was confined to the AIT campus.

2.6 Method of data analysis
When the focus group was completed the researcher listened to the recording and identified themes in line with the research objectives of the study. These findings were explored as they related to the points raised in the literature review.
3. Findings

3.1 Introduction

This section looks at the data received from the focus group, a sample group of 4th year Social Care students ranging in age from 22 to 44 years. The participants’ placement settings varied, two worked in family support, one in disabilities, one in children’s services and one in a women’s refuge centre. For the purposes of this research study, the participants have been given substitute names in order to ensure confidentiality.

The topic schedule was quite broad and open as the aim was to explore the individual challenges each participant faced and the significant learning that occurred. The researcher first transcribed the discussion from the focus group and then analysed the data. The results of that analysis are illustrated below.

Objective one;

Research question 1: Can the Threshold concept be used in particular as a way to examine the learning experience on practice placement? The two main themes that emerged from the data were threshold concepts/areas of learning and challenges. Both of these themes are discussed in the section below.

3.2 Findings

Threshold concepts/areas of learning

While students must learn external skills and concepts, there is also this overriding dimension of self (McPheat, 2016) that comes into play throughout their practice and in particular, in the context of the experience of learning. The concept of ‘self’ was a common theme amongst the majority of participants; it was first raised by Selene as a significant area of learning.

A big thing for me was stuff being triggered from early childhood, there was a need in me to rescue them (service-users) because I had to be rescued when I was younger, that was a big moment for me and I was aware of the process that was being playing out. I did acknowledge it and reflect on it but it was really difficult.
It is clear that Selene faced some critical issues on placement resulting from her own personal experiences but she was aware that this was happening.

In a similar fashion Margaret added that

*It is really hard not to go back to your own reference points*

Laura also had challenges around use of self and was alarmed to realise that she was pushing her own personal values onto the clients she worked with.

*That was a big wakeup call for me, you have to be aware, you really have to pull yourself back and think about what it is they want, not what you want for them or what you think is best, it has to be about them.*

Clearly self-awareness is an issue of concern for those on placement and this forms part of the learning referred to by Clouder (2005) and something that they need help with as they are significant challenges to overcome.

**Challenges**

Margaret stated that

*for me a big light bulb moment was when dealing with someone who was self-harming, that you would not try to change the behaviour but make sure that they do it safely, not correcting it, or trying to stop it, or making them feel ashamed but accepting it, you can’t try and stop it because you are not a therapist. You just learn to support them.*

Margaret learned that her role was to support the service-user and make sure that she was safe, it was challenging for her but she had support from her supervisor.

Selene

*I really had a problem with boundaries, because we were working so closely with service-users the boundaries became blurred, I felt that there was a personal element because of the close interaction.*

Ted
I was not coping very well in the first few weeks, with the stress of the difficult situation I was in (placement), I was really struggling and taking it all home with me.

The initial period on placement can be very challenging, something that students need to be aware of.

**Objective two;**

Research question 2: to examine the role of supervision and how it impacted on the learning experience.

**Supervision**

Only two out of the five participants had regular uninterrupted supervision they also had a good relationship with their supervisor, two others were not happy with their supervision and the fifth participant got ‘very informal’ supervision but was not unhappy about that. The difference in levels of supervision afforded to participants was striking, as illustrated in the examples given below.

Margaret

*It helped me understand a lot of the situations that I found difficult, there were a lot of very complex cases, and it helped me use theory to inform my practice. I was really helped along in how to support the clients, my supervisor was brilliant very encouraging and I had it regularly every week.*

Laura

*Supervision was fantastic, it was recorded and gave me a chance to analyse myself, it was a planning meeting as opposed to something about me but it was my chance to bring my learning in.*

Laura also stated that the reflective journal was really helpful in preparing her for supervision.
Ted

Supervision wasn’t great and we didn’t get it on a regular basis but she did help me reflect on self-care but I could see she was giving me advice that she herself was not following, that was a bit tricky.

Although Ted was not getting regular structured supervision, he was aware that supervision was important for all staff and that his supervisor was not receiving any.

Selene

My supervisor was my co-ordinator so it was kinda tricky, the trust issue you know, and I found that to share feelings that come up in practice you have to trust your supervisor.

Selene did not have a good relationship with her supervisor and felt she could not broach the issues arising for her in relation to her own personal experiences.

Jason

For my two placements I would have got very informal supervision which was grand because I could ask to speak to my supervisor at any time if I ran into any difficulties.

Jason was not concerned with his lack of supervision however his learning experience seemed to be limited in that, while the other participants talked about their learning in placement he had little to add.

3.3 Summary of findings

The main findings of this study were that self-awareness is vital for all social care students and that this needs to be supported through supervision to harness all potential learning. A common opinion amongst the participants with the exception of Jason is that supervision is essential and time should be made available for this. The majority of the participants felt this
would enhance their overall experience of learning on placement. A key point noted in the study was that all of the placement settings had a supervision policy in place with the exception of one.

4. Discussion

4.1 Introduction
This section of the study compares the information from the research findings with that of similar studies carried out by other researchers discussed in the literature review. The aim and objectives of this study was to explore the learning experiences of social care students on practice placement using the threshold concept as a way to examine that learning and the role that supervision played in supporting students experience on placement. For clarity and consistency, the discussion will be structured in a format that is similar to the results section under three themes and in accordance with the studies aims and objectives. Those headings are as follows:

Threshold concepts/areas of learning

Challenges

Supervision

4.2 Discussion of findings

Threshold concepts/areas of learning

Substantial empirical evidence supports the identification of threshold concepts in at least 170 disciplinary or professional contexts (Land, Rattray & Vivian, 2003). However it appears from the evidence that identifying threshold concepts in social care is more complex and unpredictable. Many possible concepts have been discussed however the evidence suggests that when working with those who are vulnerable, self-awareness and ‘use of self’ are key. McPheat (2012, p.8) described identifying clearly defined and demarcated threshold concepts or areas of learning in residential childcare as being like ‘herding cats’. One of the objectives of this study was to examine this notion of threshold concepts as it relates to students and their learning on placement.

One student had an emotional response to a service user and tended to over-identify with some of them yet she felt she could not bring this to the supervisor. There was major learning to be gained from speaking about this situation and the student demonstrated significant levels of awareness but because the supervisor did not engage with her, the learning was not
harnessed. This reflects Taylor and Share (2012) observation that students need support in linking their understanding of the different concepts. Lyons (2009) observes that the self influences and is affected by relationships with others, service-users and staff, therefore self-awareness needs to be encouraged and developed through supervision.

Laura, with supervision and support achieved a better understanding of Service-users’ needs and articulated that her values did not reflect theirs; this was significant individual learning supported by effective supervision.

There are many concepts and theories that are fundamental to grasp in social care however, our personal experiences, values and beliefs will cloud and dictate how we interact and this needs to be reflected on to enhance relational practice and relational learning. McPheat (2012) agrees that while students needed to learn external concepts there is an overriding dimension of self which is not necessarily present in other disciplines. This makes it more difficult to define a particular threshold concept in this area. The data from this study indicates that there were many individual challenges for participants of the study which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

**Challenges**

Social care work can be very challenging, emotionally and physically, and can mean working in some very difficult environments (Lalor & Share, 2009). This was highlighted by Ted, who, after only a couple of weeks felt that he could not take any more stress stating that he ‘*used to go home in tears*’. He indicated that he received very little support from his supervisor. It was on reflection that he realised that ‘*if I don’t look after myself, I will not have the ability to care for others*’ thus exposing the interrelatedness of self-care and effectiveness of practice.

Taylor & Share (2012) have argued that linking basic concepts that allow students to view the situation in a different way are not integrative and therefore not a threshold concept, but for Ted this was an individual threshold/learning experience as the interrelatedness of self-care and professional boundaries opened up a new way of thinking that allowed him to contain the burden of responsibility and move on.

Margaret’s initial fear and anxiety on encountering a service-user self-harming was quickly diffused when she looked for clarification on her role and responsibility. She was able to
acknowledge the limits of a practice intervention without loss of confidence. Laura also had anxiety initially as to what her role and responsibility within the placement was, but stated that ‘once I became aware of the policies and procedures, I had more confidence in how I would manage situations, was more aware as to how things worked in the agency’.

Other challenges discussed by participants were feelings of inadequacy and fear of making a mistake expressed by Laura, ‘I was always thinking that I should have done something differently’. These experiences give us a small insight into the much broader narrative of learning to care in a professional context. The concept of caring in a professional context has been described by Paley (2001) as complex and elusive and students need help and support through supervision to not only link concepts but for self-awareness and development.

The data also showed that some participants seemed to feel a lack of support with regard to the quality of the supervision they received, Supervision is a critical element of student practice placement; it encourages reflection and allows for professional development, this will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

**Supervision**

Thompson has argued that ‘Effective supervision can often be the difference between: success and failure; stress and job satisfaction; worry and reassurance; good practice and excellent practice. Its significant role should therefore not be underestimated’ (2002, p.57). It is clear from the research that supervision is essential for learning and development but students and practitioners must be fully engaged in the process in order for it to be effective. The data indicated that the participants had very different experiences of supervision, only two of the participants felt that supervision provided them with the support that enabled them to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence, two others felt that their supervision was inadequate, Selene stated that she ‘felt she had no support on placement’, and Ted observed that his supervisor was ‘too busy and not getting any supervision herself’.

Despite recommendations from The Kilkenny Report (1993), which showed proof, that lack of accountability and ineffective communication between professionals led to unsafe practice it would seem that supervision is still not a priority in many organisations. This, and enquiries such as Kelly Fitzgerald (1996); West of Ireland Farmer Case (Bruton, 1998); Monageer Inquiry
(Brosnan, 2009); and the Roscommon Child Care Case (Gibbons, 2010), all drew attention to the lack of supervision in place, and that this was a major factor in the provision of inadequate services.

Jason only got to speak to his supervisor if he had any difficulties and, although Jason was unperturbed about his lack of supervision this left him with no opportunity to receive feedback or discuss learning and competencies acquired. For students to be actively engaged in the learning process they need to be able to scrutinise their own performance (Brookfield, 1987). Without supervision this would be difficult, however, the majority of participants agreed that supervision was vital for all social care staff in order to provide support, quality care and to promote best practice.

While some of the participants were receiving supervision, some of them were not receiving it on a regular and consistent basis. Therefore it is believed that good, structured, regular supervision should be mandatory in all social care settings for staff and students because not only does it benefit the service offered to the client it is also a crucial part of reflective practice.

4.4 Evaluation of method

A qualitative method was used in this research in the form of a focus group discussion; this method worked very well, however, individual interviews may have given more information and insight as to how the participants who received no supervision or poor supervision coped with the challenges that they encountered.

5.1 Conclusion

The threshold concept framework is designed to help the student grasp what is essentially fundamental in a particular discipline. With so much of the self involved in relational practice (McPheat, 2016) it is difficult to define any one possible threshold concept or learning
experience. However, self-awareness seems to be a key concept. In fact Kenniefick (2006: p.213) described the self as ‘the principle tool of the social care worker’. Therefore, further research into the ‘use of self’ specifically in social care practice would be beneficial, not only to ensure best practice but also for the impact that relational practice has on service-users and for all of those working in the social professions. This would help to make the work and learning less of a challenge and more of a positive and rewarding experience.

Working with people at times of vulnerability or need in their lives is no small matter, the emotionally charged nature of social care places particular demands on students (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2015) therefore they need to be aware and in touch with their strengths and limitations. Supervision is essential in enabling students to reflect and develop their self-awareness (Mc Sweeney, 2016), by reflecting on feelings that arise as a result of an experience on placement whether it is with a service user or another member of staff and take action as opposed to doing nothing then our self-learning increases. It is reasonable to assume that if they are well supervised and supported in their role and also in dealing with the emotional aspects they will develop into effective and efficient practitioners.

5.2 Recommendations

From this research project the author has gained a greater knowledge about practice placements and the learning experiences of students while on placement. Further research into the ‘use of self’ for those in the caring professions would be a step forward to recognising the importance of self-awareness, self-development and self-care.

Reference List


http://www.ee.ucl.ac.uk/~mflanaga/Cousin%20Planet%202017.pdf [Accessed 6 Nov. 2016]


IASCE (Irish Association of Social Care Educators) (2009), *Practice Placement Manual*. Sligo: Big Fish/IASCE.


**Appendices**

**6.1 Participants information letter**

Dear ______________.
My name is Gertie Lynch, I am a final-year student at Athlone Institute of Technology completing an honours degree in social care. As part of my course, I must complete an empirical research project. I have chosen to explore the learning experiences of social care students on practice placement from Athlone Institute of Technology. The research is being supervised by a lecturer in the Department of Humanities.

I will be conducting a focus group discussion to gain some insight into the learning experiences of social care students on practice placement.

I would be extremely grateful if you would participate in the research. Participation is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw from the process at any point, if they wish.

The information I gather will be used only for my thesis. I may use quotes to highlight certain points or findings; however no names or identifying characteristics will be used. The anonymity of all participants will be preserved at all times.

The focus group discussion will be recorded, either by audio method or in writing, depending on your preference. If you consent to the discussion being recorded by an audio method the recording will be destroyed after the information is transcribed. All recorded information, written of audio, will be destroyed on or before 30 January 2017.

Focus group discussion will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

If you have any questions or queries please contact me on 086 1565146. Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

6.2 Participants consent form
**Consent Form**

I agree to participate in a focus group discussion on students learning experiences on practice placement. I understand that the information will be used as research and that my name or no other identifying information will be used in the research. It is entirely confidential. I also understand that I may withdraw from the process at any point, if I wish.

__________________   __________________
Signed              Date

I agree to that the interview can be audio recorded and understand that the recording will be destroyed once the information has been transcribed.

Yes         No

___________________   _______________
Signed              Date

**6.3 Topic Schedule**

**Policies and procedures**

Were they given to you?

Did you have to familiarise yourself with them?

Were they clear?
**Student/Practitioner or both:**

Which did you feel you were?

**Challenges on placement:**

What were the challenges?

Did you have support in dealing with challenges?

**Significant Learning:**

Individual areas of learning

Support in learning

**Experience of supervision**

Did you have regular supervision?

Was it uninterrupted supervision?

Do you feel that supervision helped your reflective practice?