Primary school senior leaders' experiences of a work discussion group: An interpretative phenomenological analysis.

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Abstract

Educational psychologists have an integral role to play in the support of emotional wellbeing in schools; at the individual, group and organisational level (Beaver, 2011; Pellegrini, 2010). Whilst there is a growing body of research concerning the emotional experience of school staff in their work with students, families and professionals, there is very little concerning their experiences of support. Less still, the experience of senior leaders.

Work discussion groups (WDGs) have been reported to be an effective resource to senior leaders reporting a virtual absence of prior training and opportunity to reflect on the impact of management (Jackson, 2008). In order to extend the literature available on the use of WDGs and the experience of leadership in education, the aim of this research was to explore the individual experiences of a primary school's senior leadership team of engaging in a WDG.

Semi-structured interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) were used to shape an exploration of the senior leader's accounts, resulting in the identification of seven overarching themes: 'Conceptualisations of leadership: juggling responsibilities and increasing expectations (OT1)', 'Senior Leadership Team: relationships, relating in role and developing the work group (OT2)', 'Emotions, expectations and assumptions: surfacing and working with (OT3)', 'Reflection on the use and function of communication: a revised channel (OT4)', 'Negotiating difference, boundaries and safety: relational concepts (OT5)', 'Through new lenses: revisiting practice, revisiting the self (OT6)' and 'Time: restraints, pressures and necessity for growth (OT7)'.

The overarching themes are discussed through the application of a systems psychodynamic lens, with reference to the developing research base around WDGs in educational organisations. The strengths and limitations of this research are outlined alongside suggestions for future research and the associated implications for educational psychologists.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter outlines the rationale for pursuing the subject of this research, through discussing the national context of staff stress in educational organisations and the current support offered in response. The role for educational psychologists (EPs) within this is considered, followed by the proposal of work discussion groups (WDGs) as a model for work in this context. The chapter concludes with an outline of the purpose and aim of the research.

1.2 Research rationale

1.2.1 National context: staff stress in educational organisations

In recent years of austerity, many agencies have been eroded nationally. With thresholds of existing support services receding, schools have been left shouldering anxieties on behalf of the wider professional network and community (Greenfield 2015; Tucker, 2012), and are “expected to tackle an ever-growing list of societal issues” (Spielman, 2018, p4). These have been wide ranging and most recently inclusive of radicalisation (Coughlan, 2015), childhood obesity (Spielman, 2018), knife crime (Sellgren, 2019), and mental health (Department for Education, 2018).

These blurring lines of responsibility have been reported to “distract [schools] from their core purpose” (Spielman, 2018, p10) and put too strong an expectation to independently identify, respond to, and solve issues that are beyond the reasonable knowledge and expertise of school staff. This confusing and highly emotional situation has resulted in conflict at the boundary of educational organisations and generated increasing pressure and stress for those who work in schools (Tucker, 2014).

Accordingly, in October 2018, when the Education Support Partnership (ESP) published their ‘Teacher Wellbeing Index’ exploring the mental health and wellbeing of staff working within the education sector, they “highlighted a stress epidemic and rising mental health issues across the entire UK education workforce” (p1).

Specifically, ESP (2018) reported finding that from a survey of 1502 education practioners, over 75% reported experiencing work-related behavioural, psychological or physical symptoms; 57% had considered leaving within the past two years due to health pressures and teachers are leaving the profession at the highest rates since records began.

These findings echo a vast range of literature, spanning many years and highlight the continued deteriorating situation in educational systems (Castro, Kelly & Shih, 2010; Doney, 2012; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Keates, 2017; Teachers Assurance, 2013; TeachFirst, Teaching Leaders & The Future Leaders Trust, 2016; The Association of Teachers & Lecturers, 2014).

Notably, ESP’s (2018) research highlights that most recently, senior leaders were reported to have been more acutely affected, with “80% suffering from work-related stress, 40% suffering from symptoms of depression and 63% considering leaving the profession” (p25).

- ***Senior leadership teams***

Senior leadership teams (SLTs) in schools are comprised of staff either regarded as a ‘senior leader/manager’ (SL) or a ‘head’ of a ‘year group/department’. These roles are most frequently attributed responsibility for the development, delivery and monitoring of whole school systems and practices, the support and management of middle leaders, and ensuring that the ethos of the school is given a practical focus (DfE, 2017).

Many SLs have reported to experience conflict in their daily practice between their teaching and management roles; one rooted in the ‘here and now’ and the other, in the development towards the future of the school (Leblanc and Shelton,1997; Owings and Kaplan, 2012; Porter, 1986).

The School Leadership Challenge (TeachFirst, Teaching Leaders & The Future Leaders Trust, 2016); an analysis of the supply and demand for school leaders, indicates that schools across England will be confronted with a shortage of up to 19,000 school leaders by 2022, unless more is done to support the emotional wellbeing of teachers and SLs and address their current challenges. Whilst the systemic influences pushing educational organisations are unsurmountable (Johnson & Down, 2013), SLs are pushed in terms of personal expectations of their role (Castro, Kelly & Shih, 2010).

Research exploring the experiences of SLs noted the converging force of internal and external pressures has an acute impact on the emotional wellbeing of SLs (Crawford, 2004, 2007, 2012; Nias, 1996; Pratt-Adams & Maguire, 2009; Tucker, 2012). Tucker’s (2012) research into the experience of school leaders found “criticism or any failing at work appeared to be acutely felt and was defended against through working harder, even when participants recognized this was unrealistic” (Tucker, 2014, p267).

However, Tucker (2012) reported that this effort did not make school leaders effective, and, without a space for developing understanding or reflection, staff were unable to gain perspective on their own welfare, let alone their professional practice. Research has well documented that without a formal system of supervision, emotions are often left to be internalised by staff themselves, leading to the development of a range of negative work-related and psychological outcomes (Elton, 1989; Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Hawkins and Shohet, 2012; Milstein & Golaszwski, 1985; Tucker, 2014).

These findings were further corroborated by ESP’s (2018) survey concluding of particular concern “is the sharp rise in poor mental health amongst senior leaders. Through a perceived notion of ‘commitment’ and ‘selflessness’ this group is failing to seek help when they need it most – something not aided by increasingly intolerable demands and expectations within the current education system. We must do more to protect this group and support them to manage their own wellbeing as well as equipping them with the resources to create a positive culture for their staff” (Stanley, 2018, p3).

1.2.2 Support for staff wellbeing

The literature surrounding potential ways to promote staff wellbeing encompasses suggestions of access to regular opportunities of a space to talk, disentangle and process some of the concerns that arise in their work (Ellis, 2012; Salter-Jones, 2012), and developing a stronger sense of personal and professional identity by engaging in self-reflection (Johnson et al., 2014).

Additionally, learning opportunities that develop skills in managing stress, collaboration and problem-solving (Annan and Moore, 2012; Doney, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2014) and the promotion of strong peer group support, through work-teams that foster supportive, rather than competitive, cultures (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Huisman et al., 2010) have been proposed. Each of these recommendations share a united belief that staff in educational organisations should be encouraged and actively supported to develop relational, reflective support systems (Greenfields, (2015).

It has long been noted that staff in educational organisations are largely neglected to the access of a boundaried space in order to reflect on their professional practice (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015). This seems contradictory to the practice of psychologists, psychotherapists and social workers, where accessing a supervisory space is a desirable, if not essential, professional requirement. Whilst these roles serve different functions, research has documented the commonality of emotional labour[1] across these roles and with educational staff (Schutz & Pekrun, 2007; Sutton, 2004; Zembylas, 2003).

This irregularity was acknowledged as early as the Elton Report (DfE,1989) where suggestions of good practice constituted the provision of a space for staff to reflect on their practice. In the wake of this, extensive work has been undertaken to achieve the recommendations of developing group support systems for staff in educational settings (Bartle & Trevis, 2015).

- ***A role for educational psychologists: group support***

There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that EPs have had a long-standing role to play in the support of emotional wellbeing in schools at an individual, group and organisational level (Beaver, 2011; Pellegrini, 2010). Of particular note to this research, is the extensive work EPs have undertaken developing staff support groups, for example, Annan and Moore (2012); Duffy and Davison (2009); Farouk (2004); Forest and Pearpoint, (1996); Gill and Monsen (1995, 1996); Hanko (1989, 1995, 1999); Newton, (1995); Squires (2007) and Stringer et al. (1992).

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[1] *'Emotion labour' defined as having to "induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild, 1983, p7).*

These have tended to take the form of problem-solving or solution-focussed frameworks employed in both group supervision and group consultation, where a "facilitator would hold the group to a sequential process by which the presenting problem might be thought about and possible solutions generated" (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015, p32). Whilst these consultation models have been employed by EPs to great effect, they often fall short of providing space to "focus on teachers' emotional needs and the painful feelings that arise in their work" (Maggs, 2014, p8).

There is a growing literature concerning staff support groups that take a different stance, whereby the problem-solving element of discussion is secondary to the primary factor of reflection and contained exploration. It is this approach that is argued as the most fitting support for "occupational stress that results from this demanding work" (Maggs, 2014, p8), and will be discussed exclusively in the following section.

1.3 Work discussion groups

A comprehensive discussion of the historical foundations, theoretical underpinnings, various applications and implications of WDGs have been well documented in Rustin and Bradley's (2008) seminal text: 'Work Discussion: Learning from Reflective Practice in Work with Children and Families'. For the purpose of this research, an overview of the aims and purposes, the process and the theoretical framework of work discussion, will be outlined.

1.3.1 Aims and purpose of work discussion

The first work discussion groups in educational settings, were offered in 1968 by Martha Harris and Edna O'Shaughnessy, with the aim to "provide a carefully structured and facilitated forum where work experience [could] be sensitively thought about, and practices questioned in a way that is attentive to underlying emotion and individual experience" (Elfer, 2012, p133).

Engaging in this group process defines the task as "not only of understanding what is going on, and the emotions and anxieties that are in play in a situation, but also of actively trying to help a [presenter] to cope better with a situation and through this, to enable practice to become more thoughtful" (Rustin, 2008, p269).

The guiding assumption of this method of learning is that high-quality work has a crucial relational dimension, and that the 'holding in mind' of intense feelings is a precondition of good organisational practice. Work discussion, and the kinds of practice it sensitively seeks to enhance, therefore has a conception of interpersonal work, which contrasts the dominant managerial focus on measurable targets and outcomes, whilst not necessarily disputing the usefulness of these (Rustin, 2008).

Its' particular interest is in the unconscious emotional dynamics that are inseparable from many work situations, especially in the domains of education. In order to achieve this, the capacity to relate in empathetic and sensitive ways, and to be able to bear the stresses of occupational anxiety need to be developed by group members (Tucker, 2012). Work discussion thus provides the scene of a form of reflection that takes place outside the work context, yet it may also provide a model of reflective interaction that could usefully take place within it (Jackson, 2008).

1.3.2 Work discussion group process

The essence of a WDG involves a group member being invited to share a presentation regarding an issue that is of significance to them in their work. The remaining group members listen to the presenter, before engaging in discussion about the processes of the presenter's work and their emotional responses and reflections, whilst the presenter listens (Jackson, 2008).

The notion of 'gossiping in the presence of' has been attributed to this 'listening phase' enabling the presenter to be open to the discussion and really hear what is being said rather than immediately responding (Burnham, 1986; Ellis & Wolfe, 2019). The presenter will re-join the group discussion to think together about what had been discussed, and further thoughts evoked by the process. The groups do not aim to ensure a solution to the presentation is found, but to promote greater understanding and insights into the processes and interactions involved within the work (Jackson, 2008).

The group should be facilitated by a psychologist or psychotherapist with training in psychodynamic theory; with the intention of "helping the 'presenter' unpack their concern in sufficient depth and breadth so that it can be thought about productively" (Jackson 2008, p67), whilst paying "careful attention to not only what is openly said but what may appear to lie just beneath the surface of discussion" (Elfer, 2012, p133).

The application of WDGs vary in duration, location, membership, facilitation and size dependent upon the context of the group (Jackson, 2008). Furthermore, the process of WDGs can also vary to include one or two, oral or written presentations (Elfer, 2012; Maggs, 2014; Ellis & Wolfe, 2019, Jackson, 2008, Rustin, 2008), and the adoption of additional facilitation techniques. The latter has extended in some literature to the use of reflecting teams and the application of consultation models (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Hulusi, 2007).

1.3.3 Theoretical underpinning of work discussion groups

Rustin (2008) described the theoretical background of work discussion as "belief in the central importance of the emotional dynamics of experience at work. This entails a focus on those feelings, both conscious and unconscious, evoked in the worker by the task, context, institutional constraints, and daily relationships" (p4).

These notions are derived from concepts of systems-psychodynamic theory; "an inter-disciplinary field that integrates three disciplines; the practice of psychoanalysis, the theories of group relations and open systems perspectives" (Fraher, 2004, p.1). For a description of each of these theories, please refer to Appendix 1.

1.4 Research aims and purpose

- ***Research purpose***

Whilst group support processes have been utilised by EPs over the last two decades, there is scope for further research, understanding and development (Bartle & Trevis, 2015). This scope pertains not only to the exploration of the specific models of group support used, but of the 'groups' that are being supported.

It is of note that when perusing the literature detailed in '1.2.2 - Support for staff wellbeing', the groups engaging in these forums were exclusively classroom teachers or teaching assistants. Given current research highlighting the rise in stress across SLs, it is clear that this is a neglected group when considering the provision of support.

EPs are well placed to support head teachers and leadership teams with the difficult task of managing a school. Eloquin (2016) surmises that “work at this level can be a significant means of improving the outcomes and emotional well-being of a school community as a whole” (p175), as supporting leadership teams is not a discrete activity. Rather, working in this way affects a range of factors that preoccupy schools and those who work in them; including motivation and performance (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000), job satisfaction and employee morale (Elizabeth, 1999; Tsai, 2011), and organisational culture (Lewin,1947; Litwin & Stringer, 1966; Barker, 2001).

Previous research regarding the use of WDGs in educational contexts have tended to rely on evaluations of those participating concerning their perception of how helpful the groups have been (Elfer, 2012). These reports albeit positive; with group members reporting “what a relief it is to discover that they are ‘not alone’ in struggling with a particular difficulty, issue or dilemma”, how “differently this makes them feel afterwards” and feeling “much more positive about their work’” (Jackson, 2008, p79-80), have been limited in validity and reliability.

• ***Research aims***

The application of WDGs in educational organisations is at an early stage, with a clear research agenda to develop more extensive and systematic methods of understanding group members’ processes and outcomes (Rustin, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this study will be to explore the perspectives of individual members of an SLT, about their experiences of engaging in a WDG.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the systematic literature search undertaken to identify research related to the focus of this study: the experience of senior leaders engaging in work discussion groups. The search approach will be described, followed by a critical review of the research available. The literature review will then be used to highlight gaps within the literature, concluding with the aims of the current study.

- ***Literature review questions***

The aim of this chapter is to gain a deeper understanding of WDGs by conducting a systematic literature review to investigate: What does the existing research tell us about school staff's experience of WDGs?

2.2 Literature search strategies

An initial search in August 2018, using the EBSCO host online referencing system was conducted through the following databases to find relevant papers: 'Psych INFO', 'PsycARTICLES', 'PEP Archive', 'Education Source', 'ERIC' (Institute of Educational Sciences) and 'Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection'. These databases were chosen as they have relevance to the area of research either in practical application or through the development of theory.

This search was repeated in April 2019 with three new returns, which were then included into the same process as the previous articles from the initial search and have been reported in the information provided below.

2.2.1 Search terms

The search terms used were “work discussion group/s” in combinations with “school/s”, “nursery/ies” and “education” through the Boolean operator “AND” in an attempt to identify literature that included a focus on both WDGs and staff in educational organisations. The subject limiter function enabled the researcher to isolate papers that were written in the English language and published in the last two decades.

2.2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established in advance of conducting the searches. This ensured the literature returned would provide sufficient information around the phenomenon of interest. The criteria listed in Table 1 were applied to ensure all of the research reviewed was relevant and appropriate to the current study.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Inclusion Criteria	**Exclusion Criteria**
1.	Empirical papers	Use of secondary data sources
2.	Peer reviewed	Editorials or book reviews
3.	Research relates to the experience of a WDG in an educational organisation.	Research relates to the experience of a WDG in an organisation that is not a nursery, school, 6th form, college or alternative education provider
4.	Research relates to school-based staff’s experience of a WDG in an educational organisation.	Research relates to non-school staff’s experience of a WDG in an educational organisation.

Of the nineteen references that were identified through these terms, thirteen were excluded on the basis of the criteria listed above after reading their abstracts. Full details about the databases, search terms and results generated can be found in Appendix 2. Whilst, further details of the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria can be found in Appendix 3.

2.2.3 Method of critical appraisal

The six remaining articles were screened for quality using Walsh and Downe's (2006) evaluation tool (see Appendix 4). Application of this evaluation tool enabled the use of specific questions to aid the appraisal of research studies; developing an understanding of how relevant each study was to the literature review question posed. This tool was selected due to the comprehensive criteria and prompts, and the inclusion of reflexivity in the appraisal criteria.

This led to a further three papers being excluded due to lack of transparency regarding the methodology of the research and data analysis approaches. These articles were kept for reference in the discussion due to their important theoretical contribution, however the researcher emphasises the need to approach their findings with caution. The remaining three articles were used to answer the literature review question. A summary of the context and the critique of each paper can be found in Appendix 4.

2.3 Work discussion groups in educational settings

As evident from the search strategy, research regarding the use of WDGs in educational settings is scarce, however from the excluded references, Elfer (2018, 2019), Ellis (2019), Jackson (2008, 2015) and Hulusi and Maggs (2014) offer broader theoretical contributions of interest to this research. Information abstracted from these six excluded articles found that WDGs have been used to positive effect with staff in nurseries (Elfer, 2018, 2019) mainstream primary and secondary schools (Jackson, 2008, 2015; Hulusi & Maggs, 2014), and in special and alternative education provisions (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019).

Jackson (2008, 2015) and Hulusi & Maggs (2014) illustrate through case vignettes from WDGs, findings to suggest that WDGs serve as emotionally containing spaces where staff in educational settings can be supported in thinking about their feelings resulting from complex organisations and their experiences of challenging interactions with colleagues and the young people they teach. These findings are also corroborated by Elfer's (2018, 2019) WDGs with nursery staff, where he advocates for the past and continuing relevance of work discussion, as a model of professional reflection.

Ellis & Wolfe (2019) and Jackson (2008) also describe from the facilitators' perspective, the application of the work discussion method in educational settings; outlining key contextual factors when setting up the WDGs, and observations of the developing and challenging group processes.

As found when conducting the literature review for this research, Hulusi & Maggs (2015) highlighted the limited research into the use of WDGs, and more generally the use of systems-psychodynamic theory amongst Educational Psychologists (EPs). Whilst Elfer (2018, 2019) also emphasises the complex methodological issues in evaluating the impact of WDGs; emphasising the particular challenge of combining the "intense subjectivity of work discussion with an evaluation that is rigorous and objective" (p.1, 2018).

Of particular note to this research, Jackson (2008) also discusses the use of WDG for SLTs in educational organisations. Whilst he does not directly report on this work, he describes the value placed by school leaders on experiencing opportunity, together with their peers, to explore and reflect on the issues, concerns and dilemmas facing them within their management and leadership role. He attributed these ideas to the reported limited training in the management of people reported by staff, but difficulties experienced in transitioning to roles and responsibilities that focus on activities that contradict their initial reasons for taking up their role.

As discussed, due their research focus, reporting secondary data and/or, lack of methodological transparency, these articles have been excluded from the literature review (Appendix 3). However, reference to these papers have been made in the discussion due to their valuable points of consideration for the interpretation and application of the current research's findings to the existing research field.

2.4 Literature review

In this section a critical review of the literature is reported. It begins by discussing each of the studies within their respective research areas, considering their strengths and limitations, before collating the themes of the studies in order to answer the literature review question.

2.4.1 Literature overview

Research regarding the use of WDGs in schools is scarce, particularly involving the engagement of participants in positions of leadership. Through the search process, the first paper meeting criteria for review was authored by a Principal Lecturer at the University of Roehampton; Elfer (2012), whilst the remaining two papers were the doctoral theses of trainee Educational Psychologists from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust; Hulusi (2007), and Maggs (2014).

The three articles utilise and research WDGs with homogenous educational staff groups of nursery managers, newly qualified teachers (NQTs), and primary school teachers working with children and young people (CYP) with social emotional and mental health need (SEMH or SEBD). For each study, the ‘scope and purpose’, ‘methodology’ and ‘relevance and transferability’ will be discussed to highlight their strengths and limitations.

2.4.2 Elfer (2012)

- ***Scope and purpose***

The aim of Elfer’s (2012) research was to evaluate the use of WDGs as a model of professional reflection for nursery managers. This was focussed through reporting the content, process and the nursery managers’ evaluations of the WDG. The aims and foci reported would suggest that the research was positioned to both explore the interpretations participants gave to their experience of the WDG, whilst explaining the factors and contexts that led to this meaning. The proposed research aim would seem to fit well with the grounded theory method selected; examining what works for whom, in what context, with what outcome.

Elfer cites research recognising the emotional demands of nursery interactions (Bain & Barnett, 1986; Hopkins 1988; Elfer & Dearnley, 2007; Elfer, 2008) and makes a case for nursery practitioners to access opportunities to “talk through the emotional demands of such work” (p133).

Furthermore, Elfer argues that engagement in WDGs could provide three separate but interrelated functions: “to be heuristic in relation to relationship theory and practice in nursery”, “to be emotionally containing of stress and anxiety arising from emotionally close and serial engagements with young children”, and to “provide a space for the voices of nursery practitioners themselves as a key constituency in a wider democratic discussion about nursery relationship policy in particular societies and cultural contexts" (p132).

- ***Methodology***

Elfer recruited nine nursery managers from a local authority in the south east of England, who had previously expressed interest in taking part in a WDG. Following an introductory meeting in which the process and expectations of the WDG were explained, the nursery managers consented to their confidential engagement in audio-recorded WDGs for a period of nine sessions, and their recording of a monthly diary; detailing the issues or challenging events in their respective nurseries.

The researcher does not report explicit rationale for the use of a qualitative design, epistemological or ontological positioning, or the use of grounded theory as the analysis method. However, the explicit citation of Charmaz (2006), alludes to the adoption of a social constructivist grounded theory that is more aligned with a relativist position. Furthermore, as described above, using a qualitative grounded theory approach is consistent with the proposed research aims and focus.

Data was collected through the recording and subsequent transcription of the WDGs, collation of the nursery managers' monthly diaries, the session notes from the facilitators, interviews with six of the nursery managers, and two follow up interviews with the LA Senior Advisor (who observed the groups). The extensive process of data collection outlined was reported to enable sufficient triangulation, and therefore would have been appropriate for application of grounded theory.

Whilst samples of interviews, diary entries nor session note extracts were provided, Elfer reports that cumulatively the data collection returned sixty-five monthly diary entries providing "rich data concerning daily life in these nurseries and an invaluable context for the issues brought for discussion” (p134). This suggests that the quality of these data sources in addition to the recordings of the WDGs and interview transcripts were sufficient to capture the complexity and diversity of experience and illuminate individual context. However, it is unclear as to the spread of these diary entries across the participants and thus the consequential distribution of participant voice in analysis.

The researcher also discusses the application of Charmaz’s (2006) approach to grounded theory as a two-staged approach. Initially the transcripts from the WDGs were coded, followed by triangulation with the facilitators' WDG notes and the nursery managers’ monthly diary entries. Following this, the nursery managers’ interviews were “analysed for any comments made about the WD process and outcomes” (p134), and all three data sets were combined to enable themes to emerge.

The nursery managers’ monthly diaries and the recordings of the WDGs are contextually bound themselves; ensuring that the context of the data would have been retained throughout the analysis process alongside the subjective meaning the participants made of their experiences, shared through interview. However, it is unclear as to how the data was managed, whether it reached theoretical saturation or how the conceptual framework evolved. Furthermore, information is not explicitly offered about the purpose of the senior advisor’s attendance or analysis of their session notes and interviews.

An audit trail has not been provided, discussed or referenced and so poses challenges regarding the transparency of the systematic analysis of data. However, throughout each theme, example extracts from either nursery managers’ interviews or diary entries are provided. This consequently provides some exposition of how interpretations made have led to the conclusions shared.

However, the same cannot be said for the conclusions drawn exclusively about the nursery managers' value of the WDG. Whilst it is shared that "a positive assessment of the impact of the [WDG] on nursery culture and interactions was made by the LA adviser in follow up visits and discussions with the managers" (p138), no detailed information has been shared as to how the information was obtained, collated, reported or analysed.

- ***Relevance and transferability***

Elfer explicitly discusses the duality of his relationship to participants as co-facilitator of the WDG and as researcher. Whilst acknowledging the potential convolution of these roles and in a participant's hypothetical struggle of not being able to voice negative experiences, Elfer suggests that the nursery managers' ability to voice in the WDG if something had not been helpful, would act as a potential safeguard to this eventuality.

There is no information shared of the researchers' influence on the stages of the research process, nor documentation of the effects of the research on the researcher. This poses a challenge as the constructivist grounded theory approach that Elfer has reported to implement, emphasises reflexivity as recognising the impossibility of remaining outside of one's subject matter while conducting research (Charmaz, 2006). This is further exacerbated by the deductive approach that appears to have been used. However, in the concluding comments, Elfer does ask several questions of his findings, highlighting his position on the potential limitations and complications within the research.

Elfer raises questions of the facilitation of the WDG and perceived deviation from the initially intended contents of presentation choices. However, when contemplating whether the WDG may have required more structure; due to the nursery managers choosing to utilise the space for reflection on “problematic or upsetting situations to do with staff rather than issues to do with children directly” (p143), Elfer concludes that enforcing a presentation theme may have added to the nursery managers’ sense of “oppression at the extent of external instruction and control” (p139).

This justification seems to avoid reflecting on why the nursery managers’ felt the need to use the space provided in this way; at the expense of sharing a presentation that fit with the researcher’s preliminary hypotheses of the most effective use of this space.

Despite adopting grounded theory as an approach to the research, it is not apparent that a theory was generated from the findings. This may be due to the conclusion drawn that the research “shows evidence of what WD may contribute to enabling managers to manage increasingly complex and demanding roles and the emotional components of these”, not fully corresponding with the reported evaluative aims. Despite this, Elfer does consistently apply theory and contextual grounding to the findings shared, and this is also evident when considering potential limitations. Furthermore, the researcher states the specific transferability of findings through acknowledging the systemic and contextual roots sourcing and maintaining many of the challenges faced by nursery managers.

2.4.2 Hulusi (2007)

- ***Scope and purpose***

The aim of the research was reported to be twofold; primarily to explore the effects of participation in WDGs on the narratives of NQTs in a secondary school, and secondary to this, to explore the usefulness of narrative analysis in monitoring consultee change during EP interventions. The latter of these aims will not be discussed due to the limited relevance to the current literature review question.

Hulusi cites existing research recognising that schools are increasingly becoming more stressful working environments, leading “to an increase in reported physical, emotional and behavioural stress related problems in teachers” (p13). The researcher references the increasing need of CYP attending mainstream schools and historic recommendations to “provide teachers with space to reflect on their own classroom management” (p14).

The research focussed on exploring how participants’ narratives were initially presented and changed during the WDGs, in order to increase the understanding of the effect of participation. However, the aims and foci reported would suggest that the research is positioned to evaluate the WDG’s impact on the narratives of the presenting NQTs and explain the factors and contexts that led to this outcome. This somewhat convolutes the study’s reported exploratory aims.

- ***Methodology***

Hulusi justifies the use of qualitative research due to the research’s exploratory intentions to elicit unique and subjective knowledge, noting his ontological position as social constructionist. This approach and positioning would fit well with the data obtained from the WDG, and the selection of narrative analysis to understand it; as “narrative psychology supports the view that we construct and create the problems or concerns we present. Equally, we construct and create the solutions” (p88).

However, the researcher goes on to state, “if one accepts that language is performance…then analysis of the structure of [participants’ narratives] in WDGs may enable some discoveries regarding the impact of these groups" (p88). This seems to convolute previous assertions that the purpose of the research is explorative, as it would appear that the rationale for analysis and foci is again, primarily based on conducting an evaluation.

Data was collected through the recording and subsequent transcription of the two WDG sessions attended by five NQTs. Extracts of interviews have been used to illustrate interpretations within the findings, and full transcripts of the sessions have been provided. This suggests the provision of suitable data to capture the complexity and diversity of experience and explore context in sufficient detail. Moreover, the recordings of the WDG sessions are contextually bound as the key area of research; ensuring that the context of the data would have been retained throughout the analysis process alongside the meaning the participants made of their experiences.

The researcher makes explicit reference to the use of a three-stage model of analysis proposed by McLeod and Balamoutsou's (2000), involving preliminary analysis, micro analysis and communication of findings. The final stage of analysis was reported to involve applying a temporal scheme described by Gergen and Gergen (1986) through identifying and comparing the participants' presenting narrative (the 'entry narrative') with their narrative at the end of the WDG (the 'exit narrative').

Hulusi reported that the narrative change was construed using the structures of 'progressive'; a positive and hopeful narrative with movement towards a goal, 'regressive'; a narrative that is negative in that it suggests movement away from the goal, and 'stable'; a narrative that suggests a situation that is 'stuck' in that a way forward is perceived as not possible, as outlined by Gergen and Gergen (1986).

The researcher explicitly states that the narrative analytic strategy was used solely on the presenting participants' narrative, whilst a thematic analysis was applied to the facilitator and group activity. Whilst Hulusi has provided an extensive detail of the process applied to the narrative analysis used, no information pertaining to the process or application of the thematic analysis has be shared.

Throughout each theme of the presenter's entry and exit narrative, example extracts of the facilitator's and group's activities have been provided from the WDG transcriptions. Additionally, full transcripts of the WDG sessions were submitted to aid transparency of the systematic narrative analysis of data. This consequently provided some exposition of how interpretations made have led to the conclusions generated.

- ***Relevance and transferability***

Hulusi discusses his relationship to the participants through his role as a senior EP linked to the school. He recognises the focus on this particular group (NQTs) was a request from the school, but this is somewhat mitigated by the researcher's conceptualisation of typical EP practice.

The researcher discusses his professional position; sharing an account of his current and historic professional experience and experience of peer supervision as an NQT, his 'personal beliefs'; sharing awareness of his empathetic responses evoked by the participants' presentations, and 'critical reflexive account'; reporting anxieties and hopes for the WDG. However, there is no acknowledgment of the duality of his role as researcher and WDG facilitator, information shared of the researcher's influence on the stages of the research process, nor documentation of the effects of the research on the researcher.

Hulusi, explicitly references the use of Farouk's (2004) process consultation model within the WDG and uses his phased model to make interpretations of the data. This is problematic for this literature review's aim, as it appears that Hulusi's approach to the WDG is of notable difference to what the present researcher's conceptualisation of a WDG is (as discussed in '2.5.4 - Application and Challenges of Work Discussion Group).

Hulusi does state that he employed various strategies "in order to ensure that the work discussion model was employed systematically and consistently across each session" (p115). The strategies reported include the application and sharing of Farouk's (2004) model with the participants, and perhaps suggests that researcher's desire for transparency and reliability led to the incorporation of this model, although he does not explicitly state this.

Furthermore, when considering the limitations of this approach, Hulusi asserts that "a major function of the WDG is its ability to respond to individual needs for being heard or particular narratives being held regardless of the phase in which they occur. The experience of this research suggests that asserting an overly rigid model with a consultee or group who are anxious can be unhelpful and a potential barrier to consultee feelings of containment and group member's motivation to contribute" (p209-210).

The application of this model is nevertheless of note and does suggest the approach adopted in the group was likely to be different than the approach adopted in the present research. Thus, the transferability of Hulusi's findings would need to be considered with caution.

Despite adopting a clear and considered narrative analytic approach to the participants' entry and exit narratives, how this is used in conjunction with the thematic analysis of the facilitator and groups' activity is difficult to ascertain. Furthermore, this is does not fully correspond with the reported exploratory aims of the research.

2.4.3 Maggs (2014)

- ***Scope and purpose***

The aim of research was to explore primary school teachers' experiences of engaging in WDGs focusing on their work with CYP with SEMH needs. This was focussed through eliciting five teachers' experiences of the support networks perceived to be in place for them in their work with CYP with SEMH needs, and their experiences of the role WDGs had in their work. The proposed research aim would seem to fit well with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method selected; as the researcher highlights the relationship between the study's adoption of an exploratory and constructivist approach to acquire a phenomenological view.

However, on occasion the researcher has stated and justified certain activities or actions based on the notion that the research has evaluative qualities e.g. "the researcher subjected the data, this being five interview transcripts, to IPA which is appropriate to the evaluative model of research" (p53). These notions are inconsistent with previously stated aim and convolute some of the scope and purpose initially stated.

The research is located in the context of the literature reporting the increasing number of CYP in mainstream education experiencing SEMH needs and the absence of support that teachers receive to process the emotional impact of this work on their own wellbeing.

- ***Methodology***

Maggs engaged in a purposive convenience sampling method from a pool of teachers who had previously accessed WDGs that he had facilitated in two separate mainstream schools in a South London borough. The researcher reported adopting this approach to avoid the reported financial and time constraints posed by using random sampling techniques.

The researcher reports through paying close attention to the homogeneity of the sample of participants, he was able to recruit five teachers that were fully qualified, had taught for a minimum of two years in primary schools and had referred CYP with SEMH needs to the EPS over the course of their engagement in the WDGs.

The researcher states that the use of a qualitative approach is in the interest of exploring meanings and interpretations, as opposed to hypothesis testing. As such, the research has been positioned with a constructivist approach, as Maggs asserts the research intention is “exploring the teachers’ sense of their own reality. The researcher does not seek either to prove or disprove that WDGs are an effective means of supporting staff in their work, rather to explore teachers’ experiences of their use and any changes in practise that arise as a result” (p18-19).

Data was collected through the recording and transcription of semi-structured interviews. Maggs discussed how utilising this approach enabled opportunity to gain a detailed picture of the idiographic experiences of the participants and flexibility to follow themes of particular interest that emerge during interview. This approach is suited to the reported aim and focus of the research, intending to explore an area with little extensive study, and enable access to the complexity of experience, whilst illuminating the context in sufficient detail.

The researcher makes explicit reference to the use of Smith, Flowers and Larkin’s (2009) approach to IPA, as the researcher reports that this approach acknowledges the challenge of accessing and deriving meaning from a participants’ thoughts and beliefs without being influenced by the researcher themselves. Maggs asserts that this proposes a more realistic approach to getting “as close as possible to the phenomenological world of the participant and to explore beliefs or constructs that are manifest in what the respondents say” (p42).

When analysing the interview transcriptions, Maggs provides a clear step-based framework outlining the process. Through describing the different stages of analysis, the researcher discusses reading and rereading the individual transcripts to immerse himself into the participants’ world. This suggests that both the context and the subjective meanings of the participants would have been retained. Additionally, the researcher reports that wherever possible, he sought to represent divergent views within the findings.

Maggs provides the transcripts of each interview alongside the emergent codes that he developed. This enables a clear picture of how the coding system developed. Additionally, the researcher provided a full list of the participants’ emergent themes, enabling a clarity of how the conceptual frameworks evolved and providing some exposition of how interpretations made have led to the conclusions shared.

Furthermore, Maggs reports that he shared with the participants their transcripts and the resulting themes, despite this not being a requirement of the IPA process. This was reported to aid transparency of the analysis process, but it is unclear if or how any feedback was then incorporated in the research.

- ***Relevance and transferability***

Maggs explicitly discusses his relationship with the schools of the participants through his capacity in the EP role. He notes his relationship with both schools has spanned over four years resulting in well established relationships with the participants, their special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and headteachers prior to the research. Maggs reports the good rapport already established within his relationships to the participants enabled him to “elicit information within a context that was less prone to defensiveness and reservation on the part of the participant” (p63), whilst assuring the participants of the measures undertaken to provide confidentiality and anonymisation, “seemed [to enable them] to talk freely” (p59).

Maggs also discussed the efforts to ensure awareness of how his perspectives and motivations have influenced his attitude to the research and interpretation of the data. He acknowledges that not using an independent interview may have potentially compromised the data. However, Maggs considered that an independent interviewer would not have been able to follow up questions based upon shared experiences of the WDG.

The researcher also discusses his position to the research through reflecting on both his attitude and opinion of WDGs, and from his personal experience of, and engagement with, colleagues who have been experiencing significant challenge whilst supporting CYP with SEMH needs.

Adopting IPA within the research places clear restrictions on transferability of findings. The researcher acknowledges this and reports that the findings offer a “brief snapshot of teachers’ perceptions of WDGs taken on a particular day, albeit within certain clearly specified contexts” (p143). Furthermore, Maggs relates this proposed limitation back to the research aim, pointing out that it was never the intention to generalise findings or draw grand theories.

Maggs consistently applies theory and contextual grounding to the findings shared, and this is also evident when considering potential limitations. This enables a clear and insightful exploration in to the experience of teachers’ engaging in WDGs, consequently meeting the intended outcome of the research.

2.5 Overview of the findings: What does the literature tell us about Work Discussion Groups in Educational Settings?

2.5.1 Challenging experiences and the impact on the self

Key themes identified in Elfer (2012), Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) related to the challenging working contexts participants reported to experience, and the consequent painful emotions impacting on their working interactions. The challenges participants reported to experience at work stemmed from both home and work settings; spanning depleting resources, increasing workloads and the difficulty of meeting external expectations.

Elfer (2012) reported that nursery managers shared painful experiences at work, originating from stresses outside of work. For example, through nursery managers’ diaries, various personal experiences of their staff, such as “relationship breakdown, bereavement and family illness” (p135) were recorded. Through presentations, nursery managers reported experiencing challenge and uncertainty when striking the balance of maintaining their professional role and acknowledging the sensitivity of their staff's personal circumstances.

However, Elfer (2012) reported that nursery managers also experienced stresses sourced directly from their working environments. These were reported to involve "breaches of safety or confidentiality procedures, absenteeism, over dependence on manager guidance or subversion of manager authority" (p135). Maggs (2014) also found that the challenging experiences teachers faced were often inherent to the school's working context.

Teachers reported experiencing a "culture of coping" (p71) within their schools, whereby staff "[we]re worried about being seen not to cope… that it might look bad professionally" (p72). This was reported to be associated with denying problematic situations, occupational stress and worsening professional practice.

Hulusi (2007), Maggs (2014) and Elfer (2012) reported their participants experienced significant challenges through the limited and depleting resources available to them. An NQT in Hulusi's (2007) study reported experiencing a lack of support from colleagues within the school. This was experienced through working in a "very heads down department", where requesting support was indicative of "professional weakness" (p169), and through a perceived resistance to sharing resources; comparing positions of having nothing and "coming up from literally nowhere" to having readily accessible resources; "just [whistles], pick it up, and go" (p170).

Maggs (2014) reported teachers had similarly experienced limited resources when supporting CYP with SEMH needs. These involved perceptions of limited access to EPs and limited focus on SEMH in staff meetings and INSET, resulting in expressions that “people aren’t supported and at the end of the day, the children don’t’ get the best from their teachers” (p71).

However, nursery managers seemed to report the depleting resources as a double bind (Elfer, 2012). On the one hand, depleting resources meant that nursery managers “in low income areas [found it] difficult to ensure basic conditions of service including sick pay” (p136), whilst having to “ask staff to undertake additional tasks (extra hours or shifts, or additional recording and assessment work) for very low or no pay” (p136).

Keeping on top of the workload was reported to be a particular struggle in the working contexts of NQTs (Hulusi, 2007). The first NQT in Hulusi (2007)’s study presented a concern “regarding his ability in keeping up to date with submitting lesson plans to his head of department” (p131), whilst the second NQT reported concerns regarding “keeping up with the setting and marking [of] homework” (p164).

Similarly, Elfer (2012) reported his participants experienced significant challenge adhering to the expectations placed on them by others. This included struggling “with the increased emphasis by government on what were considered to be overly narrow educational outcomes and the relentless demands of curriculum planning” (Elfer, 2012). Additionally, Elfer (2012) reported that nursery managers were resentful of the “expectation by parents that nursery should not only cover working hours but also leisure time for parents” (p137).

However, Maggs (2014) reported the external perspective of others were most frequently sought and welcomed by teachers. Teachers reported that external perspectives enabled “fresh opinions” (p75), and an opportunity for someone with more capacity to “take the pain away” (Maggs, 2014, p77).

Elfer (2012), Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) reported these challenging working environments led to participants to experience consequent painful emotions impacting on their working interactions. Elfer (2012) and Maggs (2014) reported that participants experienced feeling a need to emit constant positivity across their interactions with others.

Elfer (2012) reported that nursery managers expressed feeling "a consistent pressure to keep the atmosphere cheerful" (p135), as though admitting to any negative feeling could "trigger a spiral of despair regarding the difficulties and challenges of the work" (p135). Whilst Maggs (2012) reported that teachers expressed within the school, there was a "sense of needing to maintain some sense of a façade" (p73).

Both nursery managers and NQTs reported feelings of guilt and loneliness (Elfer, 2012; Hulusi, 2007). For nursery manages, this seemed to be associated with asking more of their staff than they thought was reasonable or fair, whilst resisting "the temptation to confide in their staff about issues" (Elfer, 2012, p136). Concealing their emotions in this way was reported to be justified by respecting the confidentiality of others (Elfer, 2012).

Whilst Hulusi (2007) reported that NQTs experienced a resistance to share with others, the emotions that they were grappling with, these feelings seemed to be evoked through hiding their mounting workloads, deceiving others, and a fear of being isolated as punishment for their perceived insufficient practice.

Experiencing challenging working contexts whilst holding on to the painful emotions evoked by them, led nursery managers to conceptualise and express polarising views (Elfer, 2012). These views were reported to convolute the way in which managers saw their role and their means for practice. For example, one manager described “feeling split, of feeling ineffective and ‘soft’ or of failing to understand the staff member’s position… feeling either useless or ruthless” (p137). This was reported to have led her to polarise her conceptualisation of her role, that she “must be ‘hard headed’ or ‘not in that category’” (p137).

2.5.2 Exploration and reflection through work discussion groups

Elfer (2012), Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) identified key themes relating to perceived opportunities for exploration and reflection that engaging in WDGs offered. Findings from the research discussed the purpose of reflection, the role of the facilitator, the role of the group, opportunities for making sense of the self and others, and building a capacity for difference.

Elfer (2012) and Maggs (2014) reported conceptualisations of the purpose of reflection and exploration within their WDGs. Elfer (2012) reported that “the issues [nursery managers] brought for WD were the ones that had proved most problematic and intractable” (p135).

Elfer (2012) surmised that the nursery managers considered the WDG as “a collective power of a committed group of professionals to enable thinking about, rather than avoidance of, difficult emotion and its impact on professional practice” (p135). Whilst Maggs (2014) reported that teachers expressed that the “WDG had created a space for thought and reflection where this had been absent” (p78).

Hulusi (2007) discussed the different roles the group adopted when engaging in explorative and reflective processes in the WDG. These were reported to be through sharing experiences, consensus testing, exploring their emotional reaction to the presenter’s narrative, offering protective or supportive language, balancing inflammatory views, and exploring alternative narratives.

Nursery managers reported opportunities to make sense of the self and others, through engaging in exploration and reflection (Elfer, 2012). For example, through reflecting on expectations; where participants reported feeling they “were often expected and often expected of themselves, to be omnipotent” (p135), the group provided opportunity to discuss, rather than avoid these notions, and question and modify practice.

Further to this, nursery managers reported that engaging in exploration and reflection enabled the development of a capacity for difference. Elfer (2012) reported, that the WDG focus was “not how to resolve conflicts between competing priorities, which are probably an inevitable feature of any enterprise” (p137) but develop a capacity to explore and reflect on motivations and values leading to conflict, as opposed to blaming and judging.

2.5.3 Opportunities through work discussion groups

Key themes identified in Elfer (2012), Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) related to the various opportunities that participants reported, and were observed to engaged in, through participating in WDGs. Findings from the research discussed feelings of containment[2] and shared understandings and experiences. Engaging in WDGs was also reported to create opportunities beyond the group, including collaborative working, renewed capacities, and a desire to protect time for each other in the future.

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[2] *‘Containment’ in a psychoanalytic concept regarding one aspect of parental/carer function as being that of a ‘container’; a thinker with the capacity not only to care about, but also to think about, their dependent’s experience (Bion, 1962).*

Elfer (2012), Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) reported their participants experienced a feeling of containment through their engagement in the WDG. Nursery managers reported that through the containing experience of the WDG, nursery managers were enabled to explore challenging and painful experiences with the group, question and reflect on the interactions and meanings attributed to it, in order to find ways of appropriately responding in their working contexts (Elfer, 2012).

Similarly, NQTs were reported to experience WDGs "as a container for [their] concerns" (Hulusi, 2007, p200). This was exemplified by considering the participants' presentations as their "unmanageable concerns, as seen in the entry narrative, were psychologically 'held' by the group" (p200). The group was reported to manage the presenter's concern through facilitating and enabling thinking to occur. The processed presentation was then introjected[3] by the presenting NQT. This introjected presentation was reported to be seen in the NQT's exit narrative. Hulusi concluded "in a way, a successful experience for the teacher in the WDG is an indication that the [facilitator] and group are providing a function of reverie[4]" (p201).

Maggs (2014) found that teachers reported feeling listened to through engaging in the WDG. This was reported to be linked to the development of emotional security with colleagues in the group through the provision of a space where teachers could "express their difficulties in working with SEBD and possibly arrive at their own solutions consequently" (p125). Furthermore, this approach was reported to be a stark contrast to the teachers' experiences of the provision of "immediate solutions…where possible, rather than to encourage thinking about any difficulties that arose" (p125).

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[3] *'Introjection' is a psychoanalytic concept encapsulating the unconscious mechanism whereby an individual internalizes feelings, attitudes, and values that belong to the external environment by transferring them into their inner world (Moustaki Smilansky, 1994).*

[4] *'Reverie' is a psychoanalytic concept described as a function that leads to containment. Reverie is based on Bion's (1962) observation of holding on to "feelings, needs and unwanted parts" for another person, with the intent of conveying to the owner of the feelings that their "anxieties and communication are bearable and have meaning" (Moustaki Smilansky, 1994, p247).*

Maggs (2014) and Hulusi (2007) reported participants' experiences of recognising shared experiences between each other through engaging in the WDGs. Maggs (2012) shared that teachers reported the WDGs provided an opportunity for "problems to be normalised" (p79), through sharing and the subsequent creation of a shared perception of experiencing challenges with children with SEMH needs. One teacher exemplified this through her reflections of "it's like we're saying, 'its's okay to have a problem with a child's behaviour, as it's not just you'. A problem shared is a problem halved" (p80).

However, Hulusi (2007) reported that whist the presenting NQT's entry narrative resonated with the group at both individual and group levels, this was reported to be responded to in both aggressive or anxious reactions, and empathetic and pragmatic responses. Hulusi (2007) surmised this difference was attributed to "a shared sense of being new to the profession and anxiety concerning their developing professional roles" (p147). Whilst some participants may have been in a place to acknowledge and hold this, this may have caused others to retreat and defend against this association.

Elfer (2012) shared nursery managers' reports of experiencing new opportunities following their engagement in the WDGs. Participants reported that opportunities to explore and reframe challenging situations in the WDG developed a "renewed capacity to tolerate discomfort and uncertainty" (p138) within their nurseries. Moreover, participants reported that through thinking about these feelings, they were encouraged to think about the systemic implications for the children within their workplaces.

Elfer (2012) also reported nursery managers experienced “a renewed determination to create time for themselves for reflection and mutual support” (p138). Additionally, nursery managers reported to experience more collaborative working opportunities through “the reduction of competition between individual nurseries” (p138). This latter notion was also shared by Maggs’ (2012) research; whereby teachers reported improved shared communication, “so that all of the people working with child…have been involved in offering their perspective” (p78), where this previously had not occurred.

However, Hulusi (2007) found that not all experiences in the WDGs were found to be equal or equitable. He compared the different outcomes of the first WDG session, resulting in “clear indications that [the participant’s] entry narrative has changed from a regressive to a stable position” (p161), with the second group, where “a slight shift in [the participant]’s regressive entry narrative towards a more stable exit narrative” (p122) was observed.

Whilst Hulusi (2007) states that an array of variables could have led to this, ranging specifically in this context from “the manner by which [the participant] took control of the session” to the “group’s motivation and ability to undertake a range of group functions” (p191), this does cast light on the notion that not all participants are likely to experience the same outcomes, and invites consideration of the application of WDG.

2.5.4 Application and challenges of work discussion groups

Key themes relating to the application of WDGs that posed participants challenge were also reported in the literature. Maggs (2014) shared participants' experiences of operational issues; such as the timing of the session, the additional time that attending WDGs took up, the membership of the group and the boundaries of the discussion, threatened their attendance in the WDGs.

In order for WDGs to be part of a schools' wider strategy of support, participants expressed a desire for the groups to be "incorporated into the school day rather than fitted in where convenient" (Maggs, 2014, p151). This was reflected in Maggs' (2014) observations that successful WDGs required meticulous planning involving "initial contracting, [evaluation of] ongoing functioning… a system of ground rules" (p152), to avoid group members becoming overtly anxious, resulting in anti-task behaviour in the group.

When exploring the contexts of Elfer (2012), Hulusi (2007) and Maggs' (2014) research and application of the WDG method, it is apparent that the conceptualisation of this method amongst researchers highlights some disparity.

Elfer (2012) explicitly discusses the process adopted by the facilitators in the WDG, whilst Maggs (2014) cites use of Jackson's (2008) paper describing the process and considerations of setting up WDG. Both papers share a similar process of WDG derived from Rustin and Bradley's (2008) text and mirror the process adopted in the current research, please refer to '1.3.2 – Work discussion group process'. However, Hulusi (2007) reports the application of Farouk's (2003) process consultation approach.

This poses a challenge on some levels to confidently argue that research into WDGs can hold steady to discrete measures of treatment integrity. However, it is not the intention of the current researcher to define a standard conceptualisation of a WDG, but to acknowledge the model as a social construction, and at best, to ensure the phenomenological essence of work discussion is shared across the previous literature reviewed and the current research posed.

2.6 Conclusion

The current literature details the challenging experiences school staff are currently facing in their educational organisations, and the detrimental impact this is reported to have on staff as individuals. The prevalence of these painful working environments across the research corroborates the ideas discussed in '1.2.1 - National context', highlighting the current complex challenges that schools are facing. Additionally, this poses an appropriate cause for the foundation of this research into exploring the experience of staff engaging in an intervention intended to develop understandings about the meaning of behaviour and the emotional factors that impact work.

The role of exploration and reflection offered through WDG was established consistently across the research. For participants, this seemed to have developed new understandings of the role of reflection within the group and their practice. Engaging in exploration and reflection was also reported by all three researchers, to be considered as a possibility to make sense of the self and others, whist developing a capacity for difference. The value attributed to the opportunity for exploration and reflection; and the juxtaposition this poses to busy and chaotic school life, suggests adopting such an approach would be a welcome and essential intervention.

The research details the varying opportunities participants experienced through their engagement in WDGs from experiences of containment, to renewed capacity to think about and tolerate uncertainty. These experiences go some way to highlight the potential benefits for participants' engaging in WDGs. However, as Hulusi (2007) asserts, not all WDGs are equal or generate the same opportunities. Consequently, further research into this area would be needed to develop understandings of the experiences of engaging in WDGs, before any conclusions could be appropriately postulated about the effect of such groups.

The fundamental aim of this chapter has been to explore and critique the relevant research and synthesise their findings, to present sufficient evidence to substantiate the current object of study. It can be seen that the electronic searches provide no evidence of publications which explicitly connect senior leadership teams with the practice of WDGs in education. Furthermore, whilst the literature provides interesting and insightful information regarding the experiences of participating in WDGs, it is scarce and limited in its offerings. Consequently, the literature review reveals that the proposed aims of the current research would provide insight into one of the vast gaps within the literature regarding work discussion groups in educational contexts.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the study’s three research questions, its epistemological and ontological positioning, qualitative approach and use of IPA methodology. It also describes the research design, including the recruitment of participants, the method of data collection and data analysis. This chapter seeks to highlight the ethical considerations and efforts to promote the validity and robustness of the study.

3.2 Research questions

The study’s aim was to explore the experiences of the WDGs from the perspectives of the individual members of an SLT who took part in it. In order to meet the research aim, it was broken down in to three research questions, outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Research Questions

RQ Code	**Research Question (RQ)**
RQ1	How do participants describe their experience of engaging in work discussion groups?
RQ2	How do participants describe the perceived effect of attending work discussion groups on their thoughts and feelings?
RQ3	How do participants describe the perceived effect of attending work discussion groups on their practice as a senior leader?

3.3 Philosophical underpinnings

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) noted the importance and impact of choosing appropriate research methods; as what, and how, questions are asked, is affected by one's philosophical position (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The ontological and epistemological perspectives, which informed the aims of the research and choices made about the method selection, are presented below.

3.3.1 Ontology

Guba and Lincoln (1998) defined ontology as the philosophical enquiry into the nature of being and reality; the focus being an "attempt to discover the fundamental categories of what exist" (Burr, 2003, p203). Perceptions and constructs of reality can be seen on a continuum from absolute realism through to absolute relativism (Willig, 2008). Within the former, realism asserts that reality is single, objective and separate from human thought, culture and belief. Whilst the concept of relativism suggests that multiple realities exist, which are entwined with the meanings that individuals make about life (Robson, 2011).

This research supported an ontological stance closely aligned with the relativist end of the continuum; believing that individuals construct their version of reality by interpreting their experiences. Meaning is consequently created and mediated through the shared experience and interactions an individual has with others, their environments, language and culture (Bredo, 1994).

3.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is defined as "the philosophy of knowledge. The study of the nature of knowledge and the methods of obtaining it" (Burr, 2003, p202). Epistemology can be influenced by ontological position, and like ontology, can be seen as a continuum from positivism to constructionism (Willig, 2008). Positivism relates to realist ontology, where “the external world exists independently of being thought of, or perceived” (Crotty, 1998, p204).

Due to the aims of this research to explore the experience of attending WDGs from an individual perspective, the epistemology underpinning of this research is more closely aligned to a social constructivist position. Social constructivism has roots in the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1986) where individuals develop their perceptions of reality in relation to their experiences of the world; mediated through history, culture and language, and their interactions with others (Gergen, 1999).

Whilst similar to social constructionism, social constructivism relates more closely to the individual experience of understanding, rather than the social processes contributing to their understanding. Whilst the former plays a significant role in the process of WDGs, analysis of the data is inherently linked to social constructivism and the researchers’ ‘position of empathy’; whereby the focus was placed on reconstructing the participants’ original experiences in their own terms (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Within social constructivism, language plays a crucial element in understanding how and why the individual chooses particular words and narrative styles to communicate experiences, and how these choices affect a listener’s understanding (Burr, 2003). For the purposes of this research, knowledge is perceived as being constructed through human interaction and interpretation.

3.4 Research paradigm

3.4.1 Qualitative approach

Evolving from the positivist and constructionist positions are two research paradigms; quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative methodology, underpinned by a positivist epistemology aims to find generalisations and trends through the quantification of data, to deduce pre-existing concepts of theoretical ideas.
Robson (2011) argued that the qualitative research; underpinned by constructivist or constructionist epistemologies start with data, rather than theory, to then allow concepts and ideas to emerge.

As little research has explored the experiences of SLs engaging in WDGs, there have been no theories generated to explain these experiences and so it would not be possible to utilise a hypothetico-deductive method (Popper, 1959). The focus of this study; to explore experiences, therefore seemed most appropriately fitting with the researcher's desire to employ a qualitative approach to research the phenomenological experience of engaging in WDGs.

3.4.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology draws on philosophical, educational and psychological theory in order to understand the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013). This approach enables the study of several individuals that have shared a similar experience. For the purposes of this study, the phenomenon being explored was the experience of SLs that had engaged in the same WDG.

Phenomenology describes experience as being constructed through interpretation. Therefore, through making sense of our experiences, we create what reality means for ourselves. In order to understand how the SLs' made sense of their own experiences, past and present, it was felt that an existential phenomenological[5] approach would be most appropriate. The researcher felt that this suited the social constructivist epistemological position used in this study.

As phenomenology explores 'essences' within individual experience, there has been debate as to whether this approach is commensurable with social constructivism; where an underlying premise acknowledges that there are interpretations and discourses that shape our reality (Creswell, 2013).

However, Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that epistemology relates to the "subjective processes (and meanings) by which an intersubjective common-sense world is constructed" and the method they considered "best suited to clarify the foundations of knowledge in everyday life is that of phenomenological analysis" (p34). The 'essences' of phenomenology relate to structures of experience, which are essential, and that these are in turn experienced in a socially-constructed way; illustrating the compatibility to the fundamental principles of social constructivism.

Moreover, Landridge (2007) argued that phenomenology can prove highly valuable to psychologists in the exploration and understanding of lived experience. This was further advocated by Creswell (2013), highlighting the importance of gaining deeper insight into a particular common experience. For example, within the current study, understanding more about the experience of SLs engaging in a WDG could be valuable for educational professionals such as school staff, educational psychologists and policy makers in their work with schools. The current study will also include the differences across the SLs’ experiences as well as the commonalities, in order to provide a holistic understanding of their experiences.

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[5] *Existential phenomenology suggests that whilst "we have a self-consciousness and seek after meaning, this is an action-oriented, meaning-making, self-consciousness which engages with the world we inhabit" (Smith et al. 2009).*

3.5 Methodological considerations

Crotty (1998) describes the methodology as the strategy, design or process underlying the choice and use of particular methods which are linked in turn to the desired outcomes of the research. Furthermore, methods can be described more specifically as “the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to the research question” (Crotty, 1998, p3).

Starks and Trinidad (2007) demonstrate the convergence of fundamental approaches in qualitative analysis, highlighting the importance of selecting a method based on the researcher’s theory of knowledge and the research aim. The researcher believes that in order to achieve this, it is important to understand how individuals construct their view of reality whilst also appreciating the influence of the social environment in how this is achieved.

The constructivist positioning of the research loans itself to methodologies that attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that individuals assign to them. Therefore, the researcher explored different methodologies that seek to collect rich and in-depth data from participants, such as grounded theory, narrative analysis, discourse analysis and interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Considerations for these methodologies’ compatibility with the research aims and philosophical underpinnings are discussed in the following sections.

3.5.1 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is an approach with many versions, that intend to examine key social mechanisms in order to develop a theoretical account of a particular phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory places particular emphasis on the symbolic meaning that individuals develop and rely upon in the process of social interaction, and contains both positivistic and interpretive elements (Charmaz, 2006).

Whilst analysis associated with grounded theory fits with a social constructionist view of the world, its approach moves away from the emphasis on idiographic experience and towards understanding at a group level. Therefore, this approach was not seen as commensurate with the research questions, where an in-depth exploration of the individual experiences is central to understand how meaning is constructed from the participants' perspectives (Reid et al., 2005).

3.5.2 Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis has been described as "the study of the storied nature of human experience and human accounts" (Burr, 2003, p203). Smith et al. (2009), describe the key features of narrative analysis as focussing on how individuals' narratives relate to their sense-making (e.g. via genres or structure). When comparing this to the research questions, it was recognised that whilst the sense making aspect of this approach has relevance, the focus on genre or structure appeared less pertinent.

3.5.3 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis has been described as "the analysis of the piece of text in order to reveal either the discourses operating within it or the linguistic and rhetorical devices that are used in its construction" (Burr, 2003, p202). This focus of analysis enables attention to be directed to the implicit subject positions and power relations conveyed by language (Burr, 2003).

Smith et al. (2009) suggest that whilst these discursive approaches have “a stronger and more singular commitment to social constructionism” (p195), this approach is principally reliant on the idea that language constructs reality.

The researcher’s epistemology views linguistics as a crucial element of understanding how and why participants chooses particular words and narrative styles to communicate their experiences, and how this affects a listener’s understanding (Burr, 2003). However, a sole focus on discourse, overlooks the “interpretation of meaning, for a particular person, in a particular context” (Smith et al., 2009, p195) and therefore would not aid the research to meet the desired objective.

3.6 Interpretative phenomenological analysis

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) developed by Smith (1996), is a qualitative research methodology originating from phenomenology and symbolic interactionism; asserting that individuals do not passively perceive an objective reality, but actively interpret their world through narrative generation. “Through a process of interpretive engagement with texts and transcripts”, the aim of IPA is to interpret the meanings individuals make about their lived experiences (Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 1997, p187). Smith et al. (2009) outlined three components of IPA: hermeneutics, idiography and phenomenology.

3.6.1 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics can be described as the questions a researcher asks themselves about how meaning can be interpreted and what methods can be employed to interpret meaning; the theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). IPA attempts to gain insight into a person’s inner world whilst acknowledges that it is unattainable to gain a full insight into a person’s experience and their understandings of these experiences. Double hermeneutics is seen as the analytical process whereby an individual (the researcher), makes sense of another (the participant), making sense of their experience (Smith and Osborn, 2008).

Heidegger (1962) also argued that hermeneutics acknowledges that the individual’s interpretation of their own experience is based on their use of prior experiences to inform their understanding of new ones (Smith et al., 2009). An importance of gaining understanding through lived experience is emphasised; integral to this is the notion of setting aside or ‘bracketing off’ that which is already known. Furthermore, Gadamer (1990) emphasised that researchers’ interpretations are affected by their own thinking, before, during and after conducting their studies. Within IPA, the researcher needs to be aware of when their experience should be ‘set aside’ or realise when the researcher is at risk of researcher bias.

Smith et al. (2009) describe a ‘hermeneutic circle’ where attention to one’s reflexivity as a researcher creates a process of cyclical data analysis. This process endeavours to understand the whole, by inspecting the parts, and the parts by the context of the whole. For example, a word in a sentence helps inform an understanding of the whole sentence, and the whole sentence helps understanding of the use of a particular word.

3.6.2 *Idiography*

Idiography is described to offer “detailed, nuanced analyses of particular, instances of lived experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p37). Exploring the depths of individual experience is intended to be the key to gaining a deeper understanding of the universal experience (Warnock, 1987). This is developed by the depth, instead of the breadth, of data gathering, and the depth required in the systematic data analysis (Smith, 1996). This process compliments the research’s focus on the individual experience, as opposed to a nomothetic study; focusing on the generalisability of the participants’ experience.

3.6.3 *Phenomenology*

Phenomenology is the third component of IPA and has been earlier discussed within the ‘3.4 - Research paradigm’. The research questions involve the exploration of how individuals make sense of and understand their lived experiences; the purpose IPA was created for (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). To explore the SLs’ narratives of their experiences, it is crucial to analyse their embodied experience and the relatedness to the language they use. Figure 1 shows a diagrammatic overview of the research strategy leading to the choice of IPA.

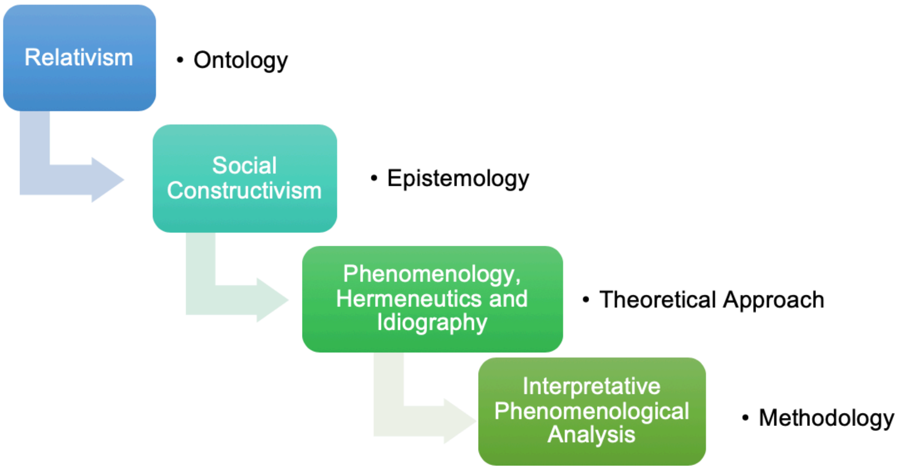

Relativism
• Ontology
Social Constructivism
• Epistemology
Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Idiography
• Theoretical Approach
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
• Methodology

Figure 1. The philosophical underpinnings of the research strategy

3.6.4 Rationale for choosing IPA

IPA was chosen as the most appropriate methodology for the research aim and appropriate fit with the researcher's social constructivist epistemological stance. IPA enables a detailed and nuanced insight into an individual's account of their experience and is therefore idiographic in nature. This is aligned with the study's focus on the individual experience and not on the generalisability of human experience. Therefore, IPA fits with the researcher's social constructivist epistemological stance.

The research questions involve the exploration of how sense-making individuals (senior leaders) understand their lived experiences (of a WDG) and therefore are explicitly phenomenological; consistent with IPA (Smith et al., 2009). In order to explore the participants' narratives of their experiences, considering the participants' relatedness to language and their embodied experience was a fundamental component of analysis.

Smith (1996) stated that symbolic interactionism is fundamental in IPA research, enabling an exploration and interpretation of the conceptual as well as linguistic elements of the participants' narrative. This provides the flexibility to make interpretations on various levels and incorporate psychological theory where relevant (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). By utilising a 'bottom- up' or inductive approach, IPA can unveil a new perspective on a phenomenon (Shaw, 2001); meeting the exploratory purpose of this study.

3.6.5 Criticisms of IPA

In selecting IPA, the researcher also recognised that there would be limitations to this methodology. Willig (2008) argues that language "constructs rather than describes reality" (p5), consequently suggesting that an interview transcript tells us more about the ways in which an individual expresses themselves through language, rather than the actual experiences.

Therefore, language does not express the intended communication of an experience, as each word selected brings forth meaning dependent upon the speaker and listeners' understanding of it. As understanding depends upon native language, dialect, family, education and culture, relying on language as a tool of communications is an imperfect method for gaining an understanding of experience. However, given the constructivist epistemology underpinning this study, it is accepted that pure experience is not accessible, and therefore the most that interviews can hope to provide, will be perspectives of the phenomenon.

An associated critique of IPA considers the participant's ability to accurately communicate their thoughts and feelings through language, in the reflective detail that is sought (Willig, 2013). However, an integral component of IPA is cognition; which invites participants to self-reflect and utilise cognitive faculties such as reasoning and memory, enabling opportunity to explore and elaborate depth within initial narratives (Smith et al., 2009).

In IPA, the researcher takes an active role in supporting the participants' exploration of their experiences and interpreting their responses, but this has received challenge for objectivity and potential for imposing researcher bias (Willig, 2013). Whilst a sample of previous IPA studies have opted to return to participants to seek their views on the initial interpretations (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), it was not practical to return to participants within the timeline of this research.

However, in order to address this, the researcher shared, discussed and developed initial interpretations and codes with the research supervisor and an IPA research supervision group. Additionally, the analysis process details judgements made by the researcher, including the use of reflexivity, which is intended to address this potential criticism.

3.7 Research design

3.7.1 Context of the study

Prior to the study, an opportunity to engage a school's SLT in a WDG was advertised to all local authority schools within the researchers' inner-London borough of work. This included a clear description of the intervention and research intentions, with the confines of the agreement as a 'first come, first serve' basis (Appendix 5).

Once a school was identified, members of the school's SLT attended a 'WDG introductory session' where a clear description of the intervention (Appendix 6), the research and intent to invite participants to interview was shared, followed by a 'practice case' discussion. Following this, the SLT were given two weeks to decide whether they were interested in engaging in a WDG. On receipt of confirmation of their interest, the WDGs were contracted for seven weeks to enable all SLs opportunity to present. Participants who chose to be part of the WDG were advised that they were in no way obliged to engage in the interviews.

Once the WDG sessions were completed to the agreed term, the research consent form was shared with the SLT (Appendix 7), and the research aims, and interview procedures were discussed. Four weeks after the WDG, members of the SLT who had attended at least 80% of the WDG sessions were invited to interview.

3.7.2 Participant recruitment process

The research used a purposive sample; all participants were part of the primary school's SLT that had engaged in the WDG. For the purposes of using IPA to analyse the SL's responses, Smith et al. (2009, p49), advocate that studies should use a "fairly homogenous sample for whom the research question is meaningful".

The homogeneity in the sample of participants enables the researcher to generate an understanding of the psychological variability within the particular group; through the detailed analysis of the pattern of convergent and divergent themes arising in the narratives (Willig, 2008). Whilst this research does not intend to generalise its' findings or promote a generated theory, the homogeneity of the sample's experiences of engaging in shared work discussion group, granted "access to a particular perspective on the phenomena under study [where the research participants]… represent a perspective, rather than a population" (Smith et al., 2009, p49).

3.7.3 Sample size

The sample size depended on the number of participants willing to engage in the study. Six of the seven members of the SLT had attended at least 80% of the WDG sessions, and all six agreed to participate in the study. Smith et al., (2009) recommended that between three and six participants are used in IPA research to enable a "detailed account of experience" (p51) which is idiographic in nature, as IPA advocates, and allows for comparisons to be made across the participants.

3.7.4 Overview of participants

To protect confidentiality and anonymity, participant numbers have been attributed to the male (one) and female (five) participants in order to support anonymisation.

Table 3 gives a brief summary of the participants in the study by age range and time in role.

Table 3. Participants information

Participant number	Age range (years)	Time in role (years)
P1	25-30	2
P2	31-36	4
P3	31-36	4
P4	25-30	6
P5	42-47	4
P6	25-30	1

3.8 Data collection method

3.8.1 The use of semi-structured interviews

The aim of this study was to elicit detailed thoughts, feelings, constructs and narratives of the participants. Semi-structured one-to-one interviews were used, which Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) found in their review of IPA studies are the preferred means of collecting IPA data. The principal challenge of phenomenological interviewing can be enabling participants to express their perceptions and lived experiences openly and clearly. Therefore, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to allow as much flow as possible in the participant’s individual narratives.

Smith et al. (2009) noted that interviews should be like having a conversation with a purpose; where “the participant talks, and the interviewer listens” (p57). However, this does not necessitate the researcher’s role to be passive, and so can be considered to be an experience "where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee” (Kvale, 2008, p1).

According to the method of phenomenology, sensitivity is important within interviews to encourage meanings and feelings to emerge within the participants’ narratives (King, Horrocks & Brooks, 2018). Smith et al. (2009) also noted the importance of rapport between an interviewer and a participant. This was pertinent for the current study to elicit and explore the communication of potentially sensitive narratives for the participants. Interviews could allow participants to feel heard, to offer them space to talk, think and reflect on their experiences and to feel contained.

Some structure was used in the interview process to allow the participants to lead, whilst ensuring the researcher covered certain topics within the interview, and reduce interview bias (Norwich & Kelly, 2004). Using semi-structure interviews also enabled the researcher to modify the line of inquiry to explore responses, underlying constructs and motives that aroused curiosity (Robson, 2011).

3.8.2 Interview procedures

The researcher organised the interviews with participants via email, emphasising the importance of privacy and comfort in the setting. Participants chose to use their classrooms or the leadership room to undertake the interviews. The expected duration of the interview was reiterated when arranging the interview to ensure participants were prepared for the time commitment.

Experience of consultation in the researcher’s role as TEP, supported the use of active listening to unravel the meaning of responses and appropriately shaping follow up questions, non-verbal reassurance, and verbal prompts at appropriate times throughout the interview. As described below, the interview schedule was used flexibly and probes to clarify meaning and prompts to expand descriptions were also used frequently. As such, each interview was unique in terms of the time taken for the participants to feel comfortable to talk at length and the flow of conversation.

- ***Interview schedule***

The interview schedule was developed using an iterative process, aiming to facilitate "comfortable interactions with the participants which will in turn, enable them to provide a detailed account of the experience under investigation" (Smith et al., 2009).

Six questions were developed for the interview schedule, which is in line with Smith et al.'s (2009) recommendations. The questions underwent careful scrutiny in supervision to consider elements such as appropriate order and framing of the questions. The interview structure utilised initial questions that were broader in focus, middle questions that were more specific, and final questions that were open for the participants to lead on what they felt had not been fully addressed or developed within the interview; as advocated by Kvale (1996) (Appendix. 8)

The scheduled aimed to be sensitive, individualised, responsive, flexible, and collaborative. Therefore, the order the questions were posed was affected by the flow of the narrative. The researcher tried not to interrupt this flow wherever possible, so as to encourage the revealing of a more nuanced insight into the participant's lived experience.

- ***Interview briefing and debriefing***

An introductory script was employed to brief participants of the interview process, acknowledging the importance of their voice in describing their personal experience. The aims of the research and a description of how the information elicited in the interview would be audio-recorded, stored, analysed and disseminated, was shared and it was emphasised that their anonymity would be protected.

The flexible format of a semi-structured interview and purpose of the interview schedule was briefly explained, whilst ensuring the participants understood there were no right or wrong answers. The participants were asked if they had any questions and were reminded of their right to withdraw from participation at any point of the interview, or up to two weeks after. Consent forms (Appendix 7) were reviewed and completed by participants prior to beginning the interviews.

Following each interview, the researcher offered each participant some time and space if they felt that it would be helpful for them in any way. It was also reiterated to the participants how the findings would be disseminated generally, and in particular to the local authority's educational psychology service (EPS).

- ***Interview transcription***

The researcher transcribed the initial two interviews and due to time constraints, used a transcription service for the remaining four interviews. However, all transcripts were reviewed by the researcher to ensure an accurate verbatim format including all the 'ums', 'ahs', repetitions and verbal habits such as excessive use of "you know". The research also applied the following codes to all six transcribed interviews as detailed in Table 4.

Table 4. Codes used in the transcription of interviews.

Code	Meaning
…	A pause of three seconds or less
(pause)	A pause of more than three seconds
text	Blue highlight indicates stressed or emphasised speech
text	Pink highlight indicates speech of a faster pace
text	Green highlight indicates speech of a slower pace
[SL]	Indicate a name spoken. Abbreviation used represents relation to the participant (e.g. SL: senior leader)

3.9 Procedures for data analysis

The process of data analysis was iterative and multi-directional; shifting from the descriptive to the interpretive, as well as the individual's personal experience to the shared experience of all research participants (Smith et al., 2009).

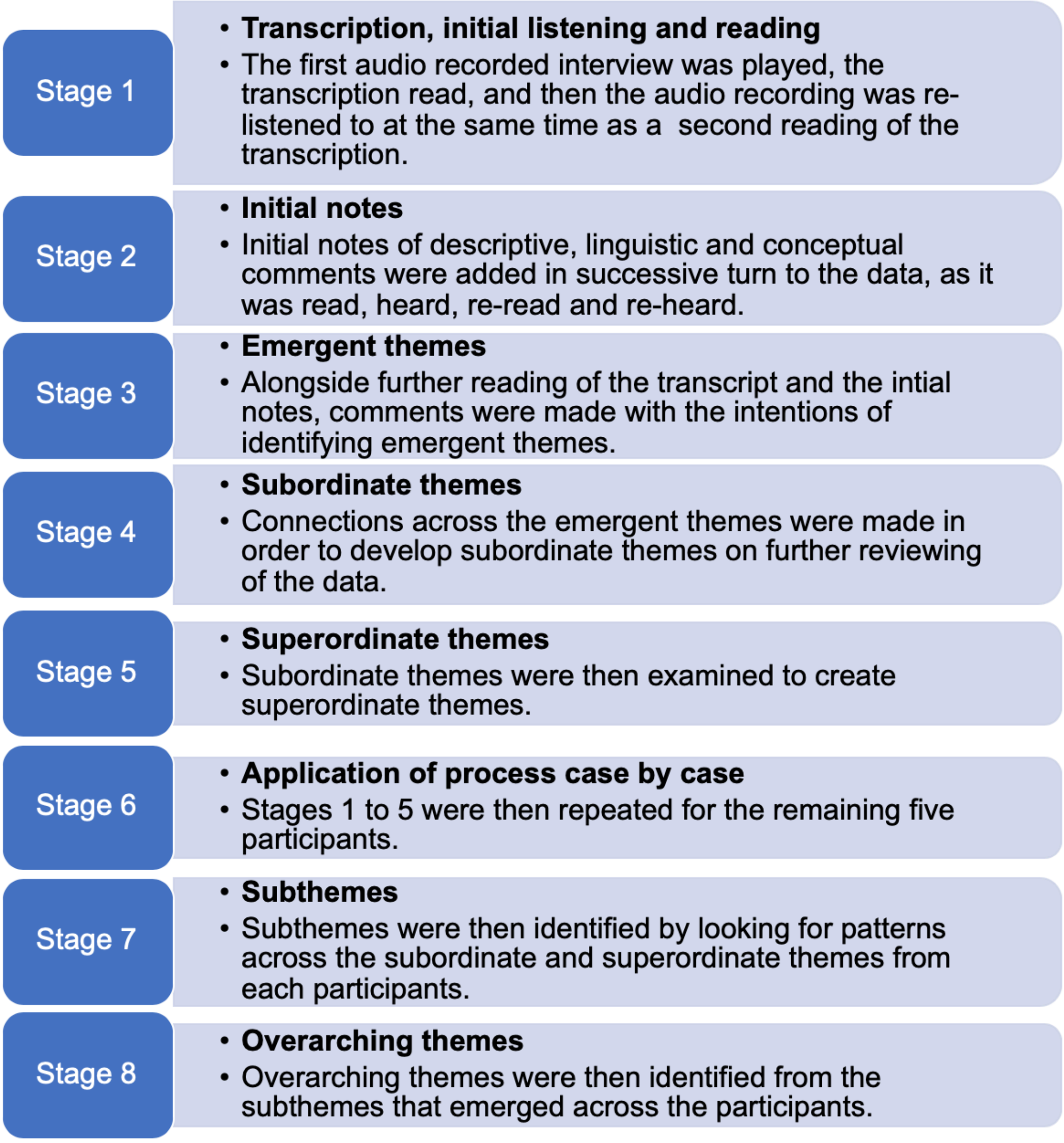
There is significant variation amongst researchers regarding the process for data analysis in IPA (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al, 2009; Willig, 2008). Whilst there is no stipulation that a unified method must be used, this study followed the stages outlined in Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) framework of IPA, splitting the fourth stage of "searching for connections across emergent themes" (p92) into the generation of 'Stage 4: Subordinate themes' and 'Stage 5: Superordinate themes' as outlined in figure 2, p65).

The generation of subordinate themes for each individual participant, enabled the researcher to process and examine the wide-ranging emergent themes in the data. Whilst producing superordinate themes, enabled a greater depth in the conceptualisation of the experiences for each individual participant.

Additionally, the researcher split Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) final stage of "looking for patterns across cases" (p101) to the generation of 'Stage 7: Subthemes' and 'Stage 8: Overarching themes' (as outlined in figure 2, p65).

The development of subthemes from looking back at the subordinate and superordinate themes from each participant, ensured consideration of the nuanced perspective of each individual. Therefore, enabling the creation of overarching themes that were closely aligned with the shared and individualised conceptualisation of experiences from all participants.

An overview of the framework is illustrated below in Figure 2, whilst Appendix 9 contains detailed explanation of how stages of IPA were used in this study with step by step examples for illustrative purposes.



Stage 1

- **Transcription, initial listening and reading**
- The first audio recorded interview was played, the transcription read, and then the audio recording was re-listened to at the same time as a second reading of the transcription.

Stage 2

- **Initial notes**
- Initial notes of descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments were added in successive turn to the data, as it was read, heard, re-read and re-heard.

Stage 3

- **Emergent themes**
- Alongside further reading of the transcript and the intial notes, comments were made with the intentions of identifying emergent themes.

Stage 4

- **Subordinate themes**
- Connections across the emergent themes were made in order to develop subordinate themes on further reviewing of the data.

Stage 5

- **Superordinate themes**
- Subordinate themes were then examined to create superordinate themes.

Stage 6

- **Application of process case by case**
- Stages 1 to 5 were then repeated for the remaining five participants.

Stage 7

- **Subthemes**
- Subthemes were then identified by looking for patterns across the subordinate and superordinate themes from each participants.

Stage 8

- **Overarching themes**
- Overarching themes were then identified from the subthemes that emerged across the participants.

Figure 2. Stages of the IPA Process

3.10 Ethical considerations

Before undertaking the study, ethical approval was granted from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust’s Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 10).

Principles from the British Psychological Society's (BPS) 'Code of Human Research Ethics' (BPS, 2014) was also followed throughout the research, alongside the 'Code of Ethics and Conduct' (BPS, 2018) advocating for ethical consideration of respect, responsibility, integrity and competence.

- ***Informed consent***

As described in previous sections, informed consent was sought from each SL prior to commencing the WDG and was again sought from participants before each interview began (Appendix 7). Smith et al. (2009) note that "informed consent must be gained not only for participation in data collection... but also, for the likely outcomes of data analysis" (p53). Consequently, the participants were informed that their comments would be recorded verbatim within the study and shared with the local authority's EPS for reflection and discussion of the use of WDGs within the borough.

- ***Agency***

Guidelines for working with human participants highlights the importance of acknowledging their autonomy in choosing to take part in, and withdraw from, research participation (BPS, 2014). The researcher made this clear to the participants before and after obtaining consent. The opportunity to withdraw any particular comments was left open until two weeks post individual interview. This was clearly stated on the consent forms (Appendix 7) and was reiterated verbally before and after interview.

- ***Confidentiality***

During each stage of the research, the data remained private and anonymous; no names, dates of birth or identifying information have been stored. Following transcription, all identifiable names were also removed from the data and replaced with participant numbers, which were used throughout the study. The audio files were deleted from the recording device following upload on to the researcher's personal computer in password-protected digital files.

- ***Debriefing of research participants***

The researcher was mindful that in retelling their experience, the participants may inadvertently feel stress or anxiety. Therefore, the researcher advised participants that there would be opportunity to debrief and reflect after interview, if they felt this would be helpful to them in any way. The researcher ensured that there was an additional thirty minutes after interview to debrief, and the participants were reminded of this offer, and chose to either accept or decline it as they saw fit.

3.11 Validity of the study

The discrepancy between the interpretation of concepts of validity and reliability between qualitative and quantitative methods of research seem to principally lie in the ontological and epistemological positions adopted by these methods of research. Morse et al. (2002) report observing a digression from focus on concepts of validity and reliability in qualitative research and propose a return to these notions in order to establish greater academic rigour.

Morse et al. (2002) note that with the application of evaluation criteria for 'ensuring rigour', are inherent challenges; insofar that such criteria often does not achieve what they espouse to evaluate. As such, there is a need for researchers to ensure that validity and reliability are amalgamated into the process of the research in a manner that is consistent with the research design.

Evaluating the quality of qualitative research has proven to be a complicated and contentious process (Elliot, Fisher & Rennie, 1999; Reicher, 2000). Evaluation of the quality of quantitative studies seems to be confidently executed through the assessment of objectivity and statistical generalisability. However, attempts to assess objectivity and statistical generalisability to evaluate qualitative studies would be inappropriate due to the differences between ontological and epistemological positions of quantitative and qualitative research (Yardley, 2008; Tracy, 2010).

Smith and Osborn (1998) suggest that "when considering a qualitative study, rather than looking at sample size, statistical power or participant selection, the work should be measured by applicability of the concepts" (p68). As a standard evaluation tool for use with IPA research does not seem to be readily available, a set of criteria designed to assess the quality of the research was employed.

The researcher adopted Yardley's (2008) principles for validity as they were acknowledged by Smith et al. (2009) for use in evaluating the quality of IPA research. Yardley (2008) stated that validity could be dispended to four key principles: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency, and impact and importance. These are each discussed in turn in the following sections.

3.11.1 Sensitivity to context

The first principle outlined by Yardley (2008), related to sensitivity of the socio-cultural context of the study, established by developing an awareness of pre-existing theoretical and empirical literature and theory. This can be encouraged through using gaps identified in the literature to create appropriate research questions, in order to avoid "re-discovering what is already known" (Yardley, 2008, p237). The study's aims, research questions and methodology were developed following exploration of the literature into the use of WDGs in educational organisations.

The researcher was aware of the duality of role as both researcher and WDG facilitator. In being the WDG facilitator, this allowed for good working relationships to have been formed with the participants prior to interview. Attempts were made to assure participants of the parameters of confidentiality and anonymity, separate but related to those contracted in the WDG. For example, whilst verbatim extracts would be shared from interviews, no specifics of case examples would be cited that may enable a reader to identify the comments of a particular individual. In doing so, the participants seemed to be able to talk openly and freely, whilst acknowledging the separate, but related role of the researcher.

Sensitivity also relates to the interactional nature of data collection, analysis of data and how meaning making is shared. The nature of following the process provided in IPA requires systematic and comprehensive engagement with the data, in order to fully immerse oneself into the subjective meanings and context of the participants' worlds. To illuminate the nuanced experience of participants, divergence within the data has been represented within the findings where possible. Extracts from transcripts are provided throughout the results section, whilst an overview of the process of developing emergent themes and the evolving conceptual framework for the overarching themes have been provided in Appendix 12.

3.11.2 Commitment and rigour

Yardley (2008) discussed approaches to engage with the research area, build confidence and skills in data collection, and data analysis in order to develop commitment and rigour. This has been adopted by developing reliability through sharing, discussing and developing codes in analysis with the research supervisor and having these codes considered and discussed with the research supervision group.

Commitment and rigour have also been fostered through discussing the ontological and epistemological stance of the researcher in order to illustrate the philosophical underpinnings of the research. Furthermore, the process by which the participants were recruited was thoroughly considered to meet the research aims and the homogeneity criterion that Smith et al. (2009) stated was necessary for the validity of IPA research.

3.11.3 Coherence and transparency

Yardley (2008) specified that the principle of transparency incorporates the researcher's reflexivity throughout their study. The researcher attempted to remain reflexive throughout the design, data collection and analysis and discussion phases of the research; discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Smith et al. (2009) argued that there should be a transparent relationship between the philosophical underpinnings of IPA research and the research conducted. In order to exemplify this, examples of the data analysis process at each stage are presented in Appendix 9, to support the study's claims of coherency and transparency. Furthermore, transparency has been promoted through outlining the methodology of the research with as much clarity as possible.

3.11.4 Impact and importance

Yardley (2008) states that the impact and importance of a study are the most significant factors of evaluating a piece of research. The discussion chapter is intended to outline how this study's findings contribute to the body of research in this field; by providing a deeper insight into the experiences of SLs participating in a WDG in their school. Furthermore, the role of the EP was considered alongside implications for how professionals could work with SLs and WDGs.

Whilst the research does not intend to be generalisable to wider populations, the findings of this study may prove helpful for other EPs wishing to consider and utilise supervision and collaborative group consultation through WDGs in diverse settings.

3.12 Robustness

Robson (2011) stated that ‘robustness’ is the extent to which a study has been carried out in a way that can be considered by other researchers to be sensitive, respectable and appropriate. Whilst this study did not intend to be replicated with other samples or in other contexts, it did aim to find insights that could be useful in similar contexts (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The research employed two methods to further endorse credibility: use of an audit trail and the promotion of reflexivity.

3.12.1 Audit trail

Smith et al. (2009) suggested the use of an “independent audit trail [as a] powerful way of thinking about validity in qualitative research” (p183); discussing how this method requires processing the data in such a way that another researcher could follow the chain of evidence that leads from initial documentation through to the final findings report. In order to exemplify this, the researcher has submitted an audit trail of each stage of the research to remain transparent about the thought processes and decisions made throughout the study (Yin, 2013). Appendix 11 is a sample of an analysed interview with initial notes and emergent themes. Appendix 12 are the data trails for all six participants grouped by the final overarching themes.

3.12.2 Reflexivity

Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) argued that a key element to ensuring quality qualitative research is the acknowledgement and consideration for the role of the researcher in bringing their perspectives and interpretations into the construction of meaning. As qualitative research relies upon the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the data, it is crucial that researchers remain aware of their own interpretations, presumptions and biases throughout shaping the process, gathering data and conducting analysis (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

The philosophical roots of IPA explore the complexity of attempting to understand the lived experiences of others. The phenomenological aspect of IPA identifies the need to put aside conceptions of reality or theory, in order to access the true essence of the participants' experience (Husserl, 1970). This is reflected in an effort to approach the research with "an attitude of wonder which is highly empathetic" (Wertz, 2005, p172).

The hermeneutic contribution in IPA research additionally demonstrates that the nature of 'being in the world' means preconceived notions will be formed by our contextualised experiences (Gadamer, 1975). The understanding we acquire from our unique interactions with the world forms the interpretations we are continually making (Heidegger, 1962). Therefore, it is vital to recognise how the subjective views that the researcher brings to the research may affect the process.

The researcher acknowledges that in choosing not to employ a separate interviewer, the quality of the research data may have been compromised. There was an evident conflict between the need to identify and examine issues that arose within the WDGs and the requirement to maintain objectivity of response to the research participants.

However, an independent interviewer would not have been able to follow up questions based upon shared experience of the WDGs. As such, it is arguable that in having a good rapport already established with the participants, the researcher was able to elicit information within a context that was less prone to defensiveness and reservation on the part of the participant. Nonetheless, it may also be argued that the participants may have reserved or moderated their associate negative experiences of the WDG in order to preserve a positive relationship with the researcher.

Finlay (2008) described numerous ways reflexivity can be utilised to provide insight into the intersubjective experience, whilst appreciating the complexity of applying this in phenomenological research. The researcher has made reflexive comments throughout the research regarding relational dynamics and personal experiences through the process of ‘bracketing’ (Husserl, 1970); the term used to describe the attempt to suspend personal views and pre-existing knowledge in order to explore the phenomenon with fresh eyes.

Whether this is entirely possible or optimal for gaining insight into the research has been debated (Finlay, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). The researcher also appreciated that reflection on the natural thoughts, feelings and reactions experienced provided valuable insight into the interpretations made. Therefore, the researcher embarked on a process of “dancing between bracketing pre-understandings and exploiting them as a source of insight... experiencing contradictory and paradoxical pulls” (Finlay, 2008, p29).

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the study’s findings following individual and cross case interpretative phenomenological analysis as discussed in the methodology chapter. This chapter begins by providing a thematic overview of overarching themes that emerged from the six transcripts’ superordinate themes. It then presents each overarching theme in turn, with the comprising subthemes from individual SLs’ superordinate and subordinate themes.

4.2 Overview of overarching and superordinate themes

4.2.1 Thematic overview

This section outlines the findings arising from the data analysis. In recognition of Smith et al.’s (2009) guidance, a ‘case within theme’ approach, as opposed a ‘theme within case’ approach, has been implemented with the view that this will be the most effective method to represent the richness of the data in a comprehensive and systematic manner.

Individual-case analysis generated a range from 148-243 emergent themes, and 33-44 subordinate themes. A description of the process of generating superordinate themes from an original transcript is detailed in ‘Figure 2 in ‘3.9 – Procedures for data analysis’, whilst extracts of the process for individual participants have been included in Appendix 12.

Cross case analysis yielded 44 individual superordinate themes, and subsequently seven overarching themes. The overarching themes were found by looking across the subthemes generated from the six SLs' subordinate and superordinate themes. In line with Smith et al. (2009) any themes that recurred in half the sample or more, were deemed to be an overarching theme so that homogeneity could be claimed, as well as strengthening conclusions and implications for practice.

From the analysis of the data, seven overarching themes emerged; six were present in six of the SL's experiences, with the final theme present in five of the SL's accounts. Figure 3 on page 78 provides a graphic representation of these overarching themes (labelled OT1-7) and the SLs' individual superordinate themes that fed into them. Within the chapter and the graphic representation, each SL was assigned a colour to enable a discernible visual representation of the spread of superordinate themes, contributing to the development of the overarching themes. Participant 1: red, participant 2: yellow, participant 3: pink, participant 4: blue, participant 5: purple and participant 6: green.

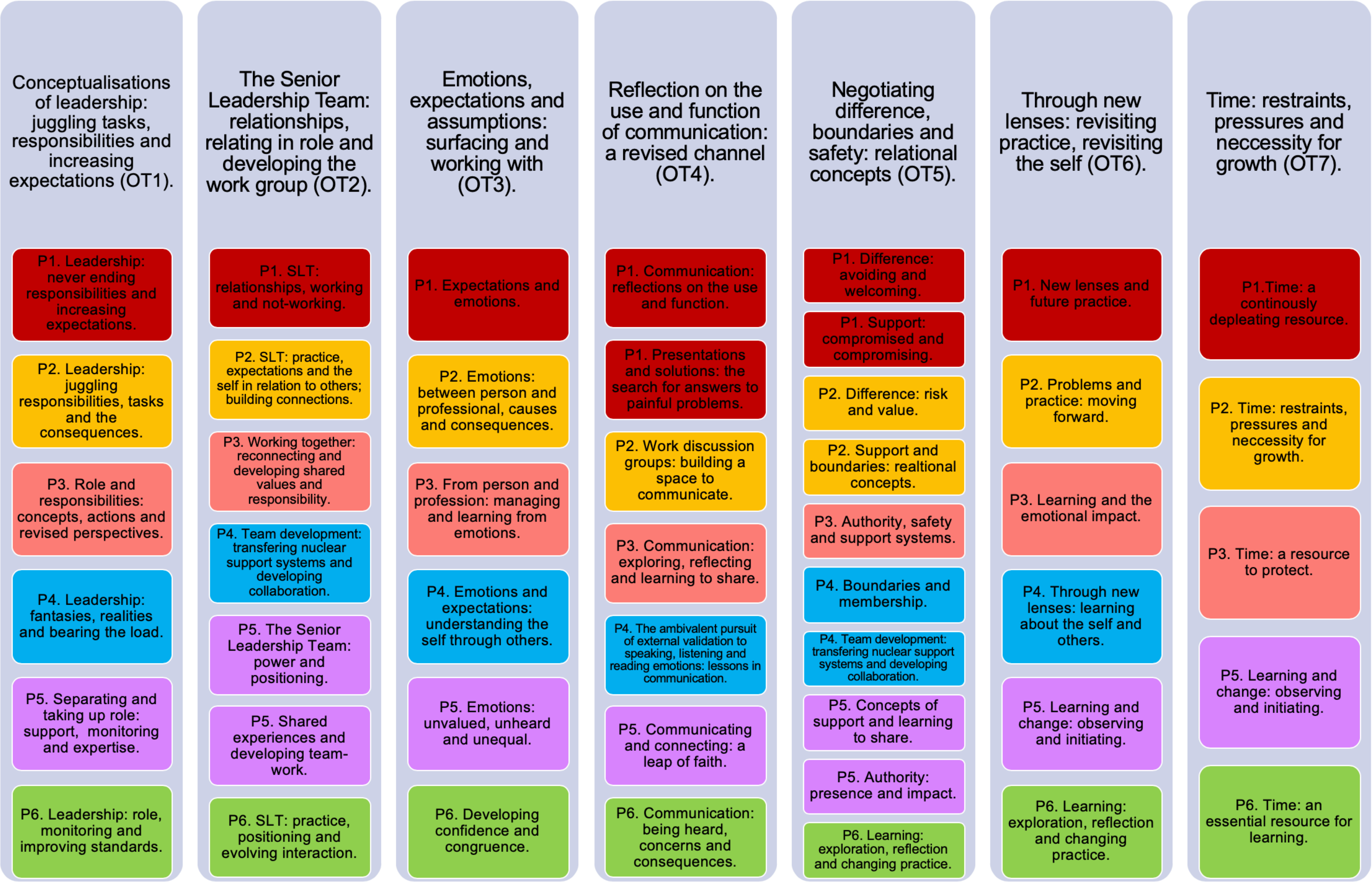
4.2.2 Presentation of analysis

Each overarching theme is presented in turn and discussed through the subthemes from group analysis. The researcher has endeavoured to ensure that the individual voice of each SL has been represented where possible by highlighting points of divergence across their accounts.

In recognition of the criteria provided by Smith et al. (2009), the subthemes formed through the group analysis are represented in the Appendix 12, illustrating how each SL contributed to the overall theme. The subthemes are interrelated, and consequently overlap in their description, demonstrating the hermeneutic process of bringing the parts back into the whole.

Quotations from each SL’s interview will be shared in order to maintain the phenomenological essence from which the researcher’s interpretations have been developed; referenced by a code within the transcript e.g. (P4L104-106) represents a quote taken from line 104-106, of Participant 4’s transcript.

Figure 3. Graphic representation of the overarching themes (OT1-7) and related superordinate themes.



Conceptualisations of leadership: juggling tasks, responsibilities and increasing expectations (OT1).	The Senior Leadership Team: relationships, relating in role and developing the work group (OT2).	Emotions, expectations and assumptions: surfacing and working with (OT3).	Reflection on the use and function of communication: a revised channel (OT4).	Negotiating difference, boundaries and safety: relational concepts (OT5).	Through new lenses: revisiting practice, revisiting the self (OT6).	Time: restraints, pressures and neccessity for growth (OT7).
P1. Leadership: never ending responsibilities and increasing expectations.	P1. SLT: relationships, working and not-working.	P1. Expectations and emotions.	P1. Communication: reflections on the use and function. P1. Presentations and solutions: the search for answers to painful problems.	P1. Difference: avoiding and welcoming. P1. Support: compromised and compromising.	P1. New lenses and future practice.	P1.Time: a continously depleating resource.
P2. Leadership: juggling responsibilities, tasks and the consequences.	P2. SLT: practice, expectations and the self in relation to others; building connections.	P2. Emotions: between person and professional, causes and consequences.	P2. Work discussion groups: building a space to communicate.	P2. Difference: risk and value. P2. Support and boundaries: realtional concepts.	P2. Problems and practice: moving forward.	P2. Time: restraints, pressures and neccessity for growth.
P3. Role and responsibilities: concepts, actions and revised perspectives.	P3. Working together: reconnecting and developing shared values and responsibility.	P3. From person and profession: managing and learning from emotions.	P3. Communication: exploring, reflecting and learning to share.	P3. Authority, safety and support systems.	P3. Learning and the emotional impact.	P3. Time: a resource to protect.
P4. Leadership: fantasies, realities and bearing the load.	P4. Team development: transfering nuclear support systems and developing collaboration.	P4. Emotions and expectations: understanding the self through others.	P4. The ambivalent pursuit of external validation to speaking, listening and reading emotions: lessons in communication.	P4. Boundaries and membership. P4. Team development: transfering nuclear support systems and developing collaboration.	P4. Through new lenses: learning about the self and others.	
P5. Separating and taking up role: support, monitoring and expertise.	P5. The Senior Leadership Team: power and positioning. P5. Shared experiences and developing team-work.	P5. Emotions: unvalued, unheard and unequal.	P5. Communicating and connecting: a leap of faith.	P5. Concepts of support and learning to share. P5. Authority: presence and impact.	P5. Learning and change: observing and initiating.	P5. Learning and change: observing and initiating.
P6. Leadership: role, monitoring and improving standards.	P6. SLT: practice, positioning and evolving interaction.	P6. Developing confidence and congruence.	P6. Communication: being heard, concerns and consequences.	P6. Learning: exploration, reflection and changing practice.	P6. Learning: exploration, reflection and changing practice.	P6. Time: an essential resource for learning.

4.3 Conceptualisations of leadership: juggling tasks, responsibilities and increasing expectations (OT1)

This overarching theme was reflected in all six SLs' accounts of their experiences of engaging in a WDG within their primary school. This overarching theme was comprised of six individual superordinate themes across the participants:

P1: Leadership: never ending responsibilities and increasing expectations.

P2: Leadership: juggling responsibilities, tasks and the consequences.

P3: Role and responsibilities: challenging contexts, raising standards and support.

P4: Leadership: fantasies, realities and bearing the load.

P5: Separating and taking up role: support, monitoring and expertise.

P6: Leadership: role, monitoring and improving standards.

Contributing to the overarching theme, were subthemes relating to 'concepts of role', 'values', 'external expectations and challenging working contexts', 'raising standards', 'supporting others' and 'compromised practice and consequences' (please see Appendix 12, p221 for OT1 thematic map).

4.3.1 Concepts of role

Participants shared descriptions of their roles by reporting the activities and responsibilities that they engaged with during their daily practice; reflecting the various areas of school leadership they spanned. This ranged from engaging in leadership across key stages, subjects and whole school initiatives. Some participants conceptualised their roles as encompassing teaching responsibilities:

> "my role, has many avenues, erm, one part of it is, I am Phase Leader for years 4, 5 and 6… the other aspect of my job, or one other, or another aspect, is erm, English Lead... and then I am a year 6 teacher" (P1L5-17);

"I've been Assistant Head here for three and a half years… so within that I've always been a Phase Leader…I've now got assessments… Erm, and then, I just do a lot of miscellaneous stuff… whilst also teaching (pause) three and a half days a week" (P2L5-30).

However, other SLs did not identify their teaching responsibilities to be part of their 'senior leader role' and so this was not encompassed in their initial descriptions. P3 however, not only acknowledged the absence of teaching responsibilities in her role, but considered the impact that this had on the capacity to take up role as a senior leader:

"being out of class is a luxury, really, when you look at other leadership structures. It's something that I'm able to really utilize and actually… use my time effectively" (P3L22-26).

4.3.2 Values

When reflecting on their roles, SLs explicitly shared how their personal values were intrinsically linked to their practice, as both a motivator and a benchmark for expectations. SLs primarily reported their values to revolve around providing the best opportunities for the children within their school:

"as a senior leadership team, everybody in that room wants the best for the children and the teachers and the parents, and everybody at that school" (P1L558-561).

Additionally, SLs discussed values connected to the desire to bring about positive change for those who were considered 'disadvantaged' either by circumstances related to their home, or related to the curriculum:

"The area that we serve, the percentage of children on pupil premium, free school meals, that is my motivation. That's why I want to teach. That's why I want to lead, as well" (P6L127-131);

"it's also with those children that are what we would class as lower ability within Maths and English, they can have the knowledge with science. Just because they can't actually write an essay, it doesn't mean that they're not good scientists" (P5L94-99).

When reflecting on the personal cost of undertaking their SL roles, motivation was often brought back to personal values:

"I get quite emotional thinking about it in terms of my motivations as to why I initially came into teaching and why that's led me to here, all linked to around the children who need us the most" (P6L123-127);

"I've had people say to me, "Why do you still do it?" I'm like, "Because I want to do it." That's the kind of person I am" (P5L132-134).

4.3.3 Challenging working contexts

SLs reported feeling that the school was situated in particularly challenging working contexts. Participants shared challenging experiences through their working with disadvantaged communities:

"I think in a community like this, where our parents are such a challenge, and we have really… high-profile safeguarding situations going on, it can overcome all of the other things that you talk about" (P3L151-156),

and continuously depleting resources available to access:

"I used to get half a day a week. One week would be science and one week would be Early Years, but …that's not possible anymore" (P5L115-119).

SLs also reported feeling the pressure of external expectations and being the recipients of negative feedback:

"everything you do is kind of, under the microscope…people are very quick to notice the thing you've done wrong…you do ten things well, and people will only pick up on the one thing, the one time you didn't…" (P1L601-608);

"you get the negative bits and what you haven't done, every day, and what's going wrong, and how they're in a bad place..." (P3L166-171).

4.3.4 Raising standards

Intrinsic to the responsibilities of a SL was the concept of maintaining and improving standards. Whilst participants reported a desire to ensure their ‘expertise’ or ‘specialisms’ within their role was acknowledged and utilised:

“within the school, I'm the only one who has got science knowledge outside of an educational background” (P5L41-43),

SLs most frequently reported developing the practice standards of other staff groups, involving their engagement in observation and monitoring others:

“so, I’m responsible for all the TA observations and appraisals” (P2L45-46);

“I've checked medium term plans to make sure that all the skills…[and] the curriculum is being covered as well… make sure that [teachers] are doing what they are supposed to be doing” (P5L72-77).

These activities were reported to be intended to improve practice and ensure efficiency:

“working with them to try and…improve their relationships with our children…their working ethos and things like that” (P2L47-50);

“overseeing and working with lots of different groups of people to ensure that the school runs effectively” (P4L7-9).

However, some SLs, due to the duality of their leadership and teaching roles, reported being the recipients of increasing standards of practice:

“there’s pressure there to (pause) prove that last year was a blip and not a trend” (P1L25-26); “expectations for the Year 6 lessons is that they are always the best that they can possibly be” (P1L82-84)

and reported the consequences of this experience:

“I don’t think, whatever I did would ever be, good enough for, that standard, or whatever” (P2L294-297).

4.3.5 Supporting others

SLs reported that providing support for other staff groups was a key outcome of their responsibilities. Participants most frequently reported to provide support through developing systems and processes for task completion:

"I am their go-to person for things like assessment, and questions around planning" (P1L7-10);

"I support in a lot of the planning, the teaching and learning side. I attend planning meetings and talk to people" (P3L11-13),

or through the provision of practical resources:

"I created documents to support every teacher for every science topic, for every year group" (P5L39-41);

"if they need any support, resources that they might need support with, looking at progression" (P6L107-112).

Notions of supporting others were also discussed in reference to the provision of emotional support:

"it's just ensuring that they are content and happy with what they are delivering, and secure and confident" (P6L93-97).

However, this seemed be at the expense of the SLs themselves:

"I don't ever want to put that additional pressure on them…I feel like, ultimately, that is my job. To take that" (P4L82-86);

"I think sometimes that my downfall is that, regardless of how it affects me…I will do whatever it takes to help other people" (P5L134-139).

4.3.6 Compromised practice and consequences

The interaction between the SLs' various responsibilities and the concepts and values underpinning their practice, led to experiences of juggling an overwhelming number of tasks and responsibilities:

"I've always been somebody that likes to have a to do list and complete it. But that's not possible" (P1L42-43);

"I'm taking on everything, and like it's all this, all my fault. I've got to do this. I've got to do that." (P3L527-530).

SLs considered the consequences of engaging in the juggling act led to compromised practice. Participants shared their experiences of being unable to provide support others needed:

> "I didn't feel like I could give the support that she needed" (P1L75-77); "I feel like it's always really rushed" (P1L81)

and the negative consequences for both parties:

> "you're going to come out of it, both feeling even shitter than you did when you walked in the room" (P2L574-576).

For SLs, this was frequently associated to experiencing disappointment and unsatisfying compromises within their roles:

> "so, there's almost like blurred lines between what we have to do and what we want to do" (P1L561-563);
>
> "you go home quite sad about the fact that you can work 14-hour days, and actually, still, nothing's going to change in the way you would ideally… want it to change" (P3L156-160).

Furthermore, SLs also reported a sense of being pushed to internalise some of these experiences, due to the responsibility associated to their role:

> "we pick up these responsibilities because we're put in to the boxes of, that is your job, you are in charge of X and so, everything that falls in to that is your responsibility" (P1L527-531);
>
> "everybody on different levels is feeling this ultimate, 'this is my role. I've got to sort this out. This is my fault. What have I done to create this?'" (P3L555-559).

4.3.8 OT1 Summary

Within the overarching theme SLs reported their individual experiences of the context in which their working roles, and their experience of the WDG, took place. These experiences involved complex and often contradictory tasks of raising standards with depleting resources, supporting others when overstretched and being motivated by personal values and resources to overcome systemic challenging contexts.

This theme is integral to understanding the constructs discussed in, and consequent experiences of, engaging in the WDG; and acts as a relative temporal baseline for which later comparisons are drawn.

4.4 Senior Leadership Team: relationships, relating in role and developing the work group (OT2)

This overarching theme was reflected in all six SLs' accounts of their experiences of engaging in a WDG within their primary school. This overarching theme was comprised of seven individual superordinate themes across the participants:

P1: SLT: relationships, working and not-working.

P2: SLT: practice, expectations and the self in relation to others; building connections.

P3: Working together: reconnecting and developing shared values and responsibility.

P4: Team development: transferring nuclear support systems and developing collaboration.

P5: The Senior Leadership Team: power and positioning; P5: Shared experiences and developing team-work.

P6: SLT: practice, positioning and evolving interaction.

Contributing to the overarching theme, were subthemes relating to 'espoused practice', 'expectations', 'the group outside the group', 'fitting in', 'shared experiences' and 'working as a team' (please see Appendix 12, p222 for OT2 thematic map).

4.4.1 Espoused practice

Throughout the participants' narratives were reflections on the contradiction of how the SLT felt that they 'should' be practising and what this actually looked like in every day working. SLs shared that they often felt, despite having weekly leadership meetings, the time the SLT spent together was 'procedural', involving the delegation of activities and tasks that would need to be completed:

> "books scrutiny and looking at data" (P4L546-550);

> "a lot of interaction around planning, around delivery, around marking and feedback" (P6L104-107).

This was felt to come at the expense of spending time together for more reflective and collaborative working opportunities:

> "in terms of how we work together and have those opportunities to unpick aspects of… an area of a concern, that, we haven't necessarily put time aside to do before" (P4L520-524).

Further to the perceived lack of space for reflection, and contrasting with ideas that the SLT should be spending time to reach informed and collaborative decisions before acting, participants shared how time was often pressured to form solutions or actions to problems within the SLT:

> "we make these [clicking] snap decisions… I've been told to do some things… on quite a quick turnaround, where I'm a bit like, 'well have we really thought that through?'" (P2L557-562);
>
> "we don't spend enough time thinking about them, in order for us to have any real impact...because, it might be 'actually that's a small priority right now, let's just move on and deal with [something urgent]'" (P4L205-210).

Preoccupied by engaging in reactive decision making meant that P5 perceived a lack of opportunity for early intervention and implementing preventative measures, despite having access to information through early identification:

> "lots of issues that happen later on in the school life have already been brought to the attention down in early years… this is something we need to monitor. Sometimes it's almost like it's not as important as the rest of the school" (P5L188-195).

Participants also shared the desire of developing consistency within the SLT and their practice. This seemed to revolve around developing a shared vision:

> "making sure that we've all got the same vision and we're all working towards the same goals" (P1L11-13).

However, initial ideas of developing a shared vision seemed to be held in a more superficial sense, with developing consistency entailing ‘delivering’ the same message:

“there's a lot of "Oh, I've been told this," or, "[SL] said this," or, "I've got to deliver this back to you from [SL]." But no, we need to be all on the same page” (P3L615-618).

4.4.2 Expectations

Within the SLT, there was reported to be unrealistic expectations placed upon each other. P3 connected the sheer weight of responsibilities in conjunction with high expectations as leading to the development of hyper-critical lenses:

“I think we were so hyper-alert and hyper-critical of everything, that we're not seeing the positives. I think perhaps we were looking for holes in what our leaders were doing” (P3L638-641).

The expectations relayed through these lenses were considered to revolve around task completion, with participants sharing experiences where questioning decisions or actions were the sole focus of the interaction:

“‘oh why hasn’t that been done?’… I followed up with them six times…I don’t understand what more you want me to do?’” (P2L309-314).

For some SLs, this led to developing a constant fear of impending criticism and the assignment of additional work:

“I am now fearful, of every interaction that I have” (P2L276-277); “and you don’t know… what the next twelve things you’re going to be asked to do, what your next failing is going to be” (P2L260-263).

4.4.3 The group outside the group

The difficulties experienced within the SLT were inevitably influential in the process of the WDG. Participants shared that these processes involved transferring anxiety of meeting expectations:

> “when you’re then sat in a room with someone who you literally do fear interactions with because you don’t know what you’re going to be told, not told off for...chastised is the wrong word, but you know, criticised” (P2L298-304),

also influenced how they were able to share within the group:

> “I think I would have been, more vocal within the group, because I would have been less, concerned about (pause) repercussions from it” (P2L327-330),

despite the contracting of boundaries and confidentiality:

> “I was cautious about what I was saying and what my opinions were…I know it was a safe space… but I think where I’ve had so many of these interactions… I didn’t want any more of that” (P2L370-377).

Relationships with members of other staff groups also presented as a source of concern within the WDG. When reflecting on her choice of presentation, P4 raised questions about alliances across staff groups:

> “I wasn't aware if they knew about these problems. I didn't know if they had alliances with [CT]” (P3L342-344),

and acknowledged the potential impact on other members of the SLT:

> “regardless of how professional you are, it's still uncomfortable if you're friends with someone, and you're in a leadership meeting, and someone's saying X-Y-Z about them. That is difficult” (P3L344-349).

4.4.4 Fitting in

Across the experiences shared, participants reported instances of trying to fit in with colleagues in the SLT. The desire to develop a consistency of approach meant that difference was often approached with caution, if at all (please refer to ‘4.7.1 – Difference’ for the evolution of this construct within the group). During the WDG, SLs shared initial experiences of selecting presentation that they felt would be accepted by the other members of the group:

> “I listened to what other people were doing and picked something similar to what people had been doing…I don’t think it was necessarily conscious… Other people were talking about people, that they were finding challenging, like adults…So I kind of felt like, I, ‘I’ll talk about an adult too then’” (P1L429-446).

Similarly, P6 recalled the desire to fit in with the other SL's led to offering similar feedback:

"Probably, just to be part of the gang, I've probably said something similar" (P6L227-228).

4.4.5 *Shared experiences*

Engaging in the WDG was reported to provide the SLs opportunities to see a new, more relatable, side of each other:

"what helped me is…seeing people's vulnerabilities within the different scenarios that they presented" (P6L412-415);

"it did, level the playing field, if that's a statement to say. Even more senior members of the team were also having those internal struggles" (P5L423-427).

For some SLs, learning about others' experiences and how they worked, created an opportunity share in the learning with their colleagues:

"if somebody else is having that, 'I don't know what's happening', then we're all on that same position together" (P5L421-423);

"it was very valuable for me…to feel part of it in terms of some of their vulnerabilities being aired, which helped me with certain people saying that they were nervous, or they weren't sure how to input" (P6L390-395).

Opportunity to reflect on the experiences of other SLs also enabled the group to learn about the shared experiences of working within the school:

"even though you know everybody has their own challenges, until you all say them one week after another, you forget the similarities" (P3L549-552);

"a lot of the feedback was linked to other cases that we'd heard…it was nice to know that actually they were connected (P5L322-327),

and was reported to foster more open and honest sharing:

"I think everybody then did start to relax and get a little bit more, kind of jolly about it [laughs]. More accepting. Actually, also more open" (P5L429-432).

Developing shared experience presented as a valuable opportunity for SLs to reflect on their positions and practice outside of the WDG. Sharing enabled participants to consider their positions in relation to the experience of others' and their presentations:

"actually, what's important to me should be important to [SL]. What's important to [SL], should be important to [SL]" (P3L613-615).

This led to consideration of how the SLT could in the future, generate shared values based on their shared experience. These ideas generally seemed to revolve around developing a sense of shared responsibility to alleviate feelings of isolation and internalised pressure. P3 considered how this looked for the team prior to engaging in the WDG:

"we should be sharing the load, so to speak. We haven't really, in the past" (P3L385-387),

alongside the learning that had taken place for her about the team:

"it was useful and the key thing that came out it was... that it's not yours. You're not on your own. The whole point is that you are a team" (P3L304-308).

4.4.6 Working as a team

Engaging in the WDG, enabled the SLs to voice and explore challenges, that others could identify with:

"actually, seeing people share some of the same vulnerabilities, either within their presentations, or within their feedback, of some of the questions that were asked, or put to presenters, or how you explored with people certain things that we'd just taken at face value" (P6L406-411);

"I feel, very often, that weight on my shoulders but, equally, I think they feel it on theirs and don't necessarily then always feel that that can be shared with us" (P4L527-531).

Sharing these experiences in a safe place in the WDG, seemed to foster a sense of trust within the SLT:

> “the circle kind of made you feel, a bit like, how everyone’s responsible for certain things and how it’s not necessarily about responsibility, but about working together” (P1L531-535).

Having experienced the impact of working as a team in this way, SLs reflected on their practice outside of the WDG:

> “I'd say that some leaders are now possibly more confident to seek others out to discuss… issues that might arise or something that they're finding difficult” (P4L564-569);
>
> “I do think there is a bit more trust” (P1L842-843);
>
> “this is where our sessions in the work discussion group are having an impact, because we're addressing problems in a different way” (P6L613-618).

This led SLs to consider aspects of team working within the WDG that would enable this practise to continue:

> “the importance of having a kind of, safe space to have those kinds of discussions is really valuable” (P1L738-740);
>
> “in terms of how we are listening to others. How we're providing that atmosphere in which we can. That's something moving forward to think about” (P4L253-256).

These ideas were furthered by a shift in the way SLs conceptualised the function of the SLT. This now incorporated ideas of shared values and responsibilities:

> “I suppose letting leaders know that it is OK…if it is important to them, then it is shared and we're all accountable for that, rather than them holding it” (P3L528-527),

and the provision of support beyond completing tasks:

> “their growth, and their development, what they need and want to support them in doing their role, rather than the procedural task of analysing data, and looking at books, and teaching, and learning” (P3L550-556);
>
> “really realizing that we are actually all here to support each other and work as a team. As we go forwards that's what we need to ensure” (P4L598-602).

4.4.7 OT2 Summary

Within the overarching theme participants reported their individual experiences of the relational context in which they interact as SLs, and the experience of engaging in the WDG as part of this team. This theme encapsulates the nuanced understanding each participant had attributed to their experience of being part of the SLT, reflecting the complex dynamics of relationships, expectations and practice; integrated and divided across their journeys of working together.

This theme is fundamental to appreciating the similarities, differences and challenges of relating the ‘self in role’ to multiple others, whilst holding on to previous experience and navigating new terrains of working together.

4.5 Emotions, expectations and assumptions: surfacing and working with (OT3)

This overarching theme was reflected in all six SLs' accounts of their experiences of engaging in a WDG within their primary school. This overarching theme was comprised of six individual superordinate themes across the participants:

P1: Expectations and emotions.

P2: Emotions: Between person and professional, causes and consequences.

P3: From person and profession: Managing and learning from emotions.

P4: Emotions and expectations: understanding the self through others.

P5: Emotions: unvalued, unheard, unequal and developing confidence.

P6: Developing confidence and congruence.

Contributing to the overarching theme, were subthemes relating to 'internal expectations', 'the impact of others', 'alone', 'inadequacy', 'feeling out of control' and 'confidence and congruence' (please see Appendix 12, p223 for OT3 thematic map).

4.5.1 Internal expectations

Throughout their role as SLs, participants reported experiencing varying internal expectations influencing and aroused by their work. This ranged from desires of superhuman attributes, perfection, effecting immediate impact and transformational change. The SLs felt a desire to behave and act as an available and supportive presence for the school. However, these ideas in this working context, manifested as notions of omnipresence and benevolence:

> "being here for everyone" (P4L27-29).
>
> "we're all here to [positively] impact the children and anything you do as a leader is because you want it to have an impact on the children" (P1L622-625).

Internal expectations of ‘perfection’ were also reported to be stirred by emotional drivers:

“I think a lot of that is on myself, in terms of...I know I'm a perfectionist, and a bit of a control freak. I want everything to be OK and good all of the time” (P4L68-71);

“I think that comes with caring a lot about what you do, and sometimes your perfectionist driver wants it done” (P3L81-84).

Intertwined with this, was a desire for immediate results:

“[but] you can't do it then, that's why you have a school development plan… I mean, I want perfection now…just wanting it done now” (P3L83-102),

despite acknowledging the unachievable standard of these expectations:

“I know perfection is actually never quite achievable in life. I do know that” (P3L94-96);

“which then possibly sets up almost an impossible task sometimes because you can't do everything, all of the time, amazingly well” (P4L508-511).

These expectations were further aroused by working with children and families experiencing significant adversity (please see ‘4.3.2 - Values’ for additional narratives sharing the desire for transformational change). This seemed to ignite these internal expectations alongside a desire to create transformational change:

“to make a difference to young people's lives, essentially, is what I want to do, and their parents, when you work in a community like this. Because, it's not just about the child. It's about the community that they live in and the people they have around them” (P3L125-130).

4.5.2 The impact of others

Across their experiences, SLs reported to varying degrees, experiencing a negative emotional impact from external sources. Within their role, participants reported experiences of frequently being the recipients of unrealistic external expectations. P3 shared conflict between being held accountable for external expectations of her role and the concern of how others would respond to her not meeting these:

> "I wasn't sure how they would see me. I just assumed they would see the negative. I just assumed they'd see me as moaning about someone" (P3L339-342).

Participants also reported experiences of being the recipients of negative external feedback (this is also reflected in '4.3.3 - Challenging working contexts'). P4 reflected on the emotional impact of receiving this:

> "[external professionals] confirmed what we thought were things that we needed to work on as a school. Perhaps it's that confirmation of that…but it almost felt like there's been a big black cloud looming over since then" (P4L107-111).

This was reported to lead SLs to be anxious of, and defensive in response to, others' perceptions. When reflecting on her emotions of presenting in the work discussion group, P3 shared she felt:

> "quite anxious. More about peoples' perceptions, of how they would receive what I was saying" (P3L324-326).

This anxiety was reported to later influence responses to other's perceptions:

> "if I feel the 'oh actually, I have done that' it was quite difficult to sit and listen. Then think, "Oh, people will think, I've not done any of this" (P4L223-225).

4.5.3 Alone

Participants reported feeling a sense of isolation roused by the absence of a physical presence of another person:

> "so, I'm also, now (laughs), on my own… I've gone from having a, someone in class, to even today, just teaching one lesson, it is very noticeable being on your own" (P1L60-63),

and feeling isolated by the weight of responsibility:

> "you can feel a little bit at sea sometimes, in the sense that there's so much, you're in charge, not in charge, so much you feel responsible for" (P3L147-150).

Working as part of a team was also reported to evoke feelings of loneliness. P4 contended this was largely down to the lack of sharing:

> "you forget the similarities and everything, and how we don't talk about them much. How we all have them and how we all think it's our job to fix it" (P3L551-554).

However, this was also reflected in efforts to set aside individual challenges, for the sake of fitting in (also seen in '4.4.4 - Fitting in'). P1 embodied this notion when reflecting on the process of choosing a presentation for the WDG:

> "I've been teaching a while, I know the different strategies, I know, I've talked to other people… [student] poses me a challenge everyday but it's not something I would bring to that kind of, forefront" (P1L389-394).

However, despite having been in a position to diversify from the common narrative, P4 reflected on experienced of not being heard:

> "I feel like my voice isn't heard sometimes…It's hard. I always feel it's that battle of constantly trying to get my voice heard within leadership meetings" (P5L209-232).

4.5.4 Inadequacy

Across their experiences, SLs reported to varying degrees, feeling inadequate. Within their role, participants reported experiences of frequently falling short of their internal expectations. Participants reflected on the emotional impact of this:

> "there's so much, you're in charge [of]… so much you feel responsible for. You can feel you're failing every day" (P3L148-151).

This was felt to be increasingly challenging, when failings were observed externally:

> "a child said to me, 'Oh [SL] we don't ever see you anymore. You're just in the office all the time'…that's absolutely the opposite of what I would want them to think because that's not why I'm here" (P4L144-148).

Participants also reported experiences of feeling unqualified for the tasks they were assigned in their SL roles. This involved reflections on their academic training and qualifications:

> "it's very different. I don't think anyone prepares you for it. You do a degree in teaching; you go do a PGCE and you learn about teaching" (P4L158-161);
>
> "I don't have a degree in people (laughs)" (P1L582),

and how their current roles seemed to require more than they felt prepared for:

> "absolutely nothing, nothing, like what I'm doing now" (P4L161-162),
>
> "it's difficult because (pause), like I said, we're not trained professionals in that. Like, I am a teacher, I am trained to teach children, children and adults are very different" (P1L638-642).

However, some SLs reported feelings of a lack of qualification came through the perception of others. P5 shared that for her, this led to experiences of feeling unvalued:

> "I do feel like [my role] is not taken as importantly as it should be…it's almost like that gets forgotten when we're talking about what my role is within the SLT" (P5L153-160).

Concern with perceptions of value influenced how participants were able to share with each other in the WDG. When reflecting on the initial experience of giving feedback to others' presentations, P6 shared:

> "I initially worried about the point I wanted to make. One, how it was going to be perceived. Two, was it going to be valid? Three, almost how it would compare to the other problems that people brought" (P6L185-190).

4.5.5 Feeling out of control

Within their experiences as SLs, participants reported feeling a wide range of challenging emotions. For some SLs it was challenging to conceptualise their emotions. P1 embodied this experience, sharing frequently:

> “it’s hard at the moment, I’m finding things difficult” (P1L35-36); “it’s hard. That’s hard” (P1L48-49); “it’s difficult. It’s not easy” (P1L68-69); “so, it’s tricky. But yeah” (P1L89-90); “managing people is hard” (P1L650-651).

P4 also shared a similar experience of challenge when distinguishing these feelings:

> “erm…exhausting? Last week was hard. Really, really hard. Erm, this week's been better. It's only Monday” (P4L63-65).

SLs reported experiences of feeling overwhelmed, often relating these feelings to the emotional toll of working with others:

> “I'd say, quite draining. In terms (pause), of the barriers they put up every day, it feels a little bit relentless” (P4L44-46);
>
> “I was annoyed, actually, at myself, for getting all caught up in it” (P3L536-537).

However, for some SLs feeling overwhelmed could not be acknowledged until experiencing a breaking-point:

> ‘[SL], [SL], and I met this morning to put a plan in place, moving forward, because last week was (pause) borderline breaking point (P4L65-68);
>
> “I’d had a bit of breakdown on [SL], because the workload had just got to that, impossible point, where I just, I literally didn’t know what I was doing with myself” (P2L76-79).

Participants also reported experiences of feeling stuck in their practice and working contexts. This was reported to manifest in feelings of hopelessness for the future:

> “it’s really difficult, and there’s not an answer about the management of people. It’s always going to be tricky, and it’s always going to be hard” (P1L633-636).

Experiencing these intense emotions led some SLs to attempt to deny these feelings:

> "’oh, no. This is what's going to happen’. As much as you try to switch off from it, it doesn't necessarily always go. It's in the back of your mind. You know that those things are coming up” (P4L136-140),

or fantasize about escaping:

> “the more you become a leader, the more you realise the impact of that. You can’t just have your own bubble and trust me there are times when I wish I just had my own bubble” (P1L598-601).

4.5.6 Confidence and congruence

Through their experiences of engaging in the WDG, participants reported that surfacing these painful emotions, both directly and indirectly through their presentations, enabled SLs to work with their emotions, instead of battling against them. For some SLs this developed an application of a more caring internal lens:

> “it just made me think, I cut myself some slack. As the weeks went on, I cut myself some slack, then I re-c[alibrate]d it” (P3L579-581).

Whilst for others, this developed a confidence to voice their feelings:

> “I became a lot more willing to have my input and share what I really wanted to say” (P6L456-457);
> “it's nice to know that I can still have those conversations even if it is, ‘I know I'm going to go bright red in the face when I say this, but it's got to be said’, and I have said it” (P5L557-561).

This developing sense of confidence was also reported to transfer from their engagement within the WDG, to their practise as a SL:

> “becoming more confident as part of the group, and feeling like I was part of what was going on at this school”;
> “I think it's because I, confidence wise, thought, ‘I can voice my opinion in this group. I can voice it in other situations too’" (P5L576-579).

SLs consequently shared feeling a new found congruence in their interactions and practice:

> “I’m having that ability to voice my opinion… I know we might not agree on things but hopefully… you can see where I'm coming from, and it has actually been fine” (P5L551-557),

which was reported to develop their ideas of themselves as leaders:

> "that was authenticity that I am here because of XYZ. I need to continue with XYZ if that's who I want to be as a leader in any case. It reinforced throughout the sessions that that's what I needed to be doing" (P6L478-482);
>
> "it's opened my eyes and made me more aware of what I can be as a leader, and how I can achieve that…for me, it's been invaluable" (732-736).

4.5.7 OT3 Summary

Within the overarching theme SLs reported their individual perspectives of feeling, acknowledging, sharing and working with, their vast and varied emotional experiences. This theme acknowledges the interrelation between emotions and behaviour, played out consciously and unconsciously; independently, in the SLT, and resurfaced in the WDG. This theme underpins the depths and intricacies of emotions associated to the various actions and implicit messages within the other themes; creating a holding space to consider and reconsider motivations and learning within the group.

4.6 Reflection on the use and function of communication: a revised channel (OT4)

This overarching theme was reflected in all six SLs' accounts of their experiences of engaging in a WDG within their primary school. This overarching theme was comprised of seven individual superordinate themes across the participants:

P1: Communication: reflections on the use and function; P1: Presentations and solutions: the search for answers to painful problems.

P2: Work discussion groups: building a space to communicate.

P3: Communication: exploring, reflecting and learning to share.

P4: The ambivalent pursuit of external validation to speaking, listening and reading emotions: lessons in communication.

P5: Communicating and connecting: a leap of faith.

P6: Communication: being heard, concerns and consequences.

Contributing to the overarching theme, were subthemes relating to 'SLT communication', 'preparing presentations', 'exposure', 'solutions', 'the challenge of listening' 'learning to listen and feeling heard' and 'valuable discussion' (please see Appendix 12, p224 for OT4 thematic map).

4.6.1 SLT communication

Throughout their roles as SLs, participants reported the various mechanisms underpinning their communicative interactions. These varied from finding quick fixes, task feedback and engaging in reactive communication (please see related concepts highlighted in '4.4.1- Espoused practice').

SLs shared that when presented with an issue or problem, their response most frequently involved attempting to find a quick fix:

> “we like to get to solutions, that's XYZ, solution A, go, done. No discussion needed” (P6L497-498).

Engaging in this type of interaction was reported to be habitual. This posed a challenge when engaging in the WDG, where SLs were encouraged to explore and reflect on the situation before considering solutions:

> “I kept going down that solutions roots…I find it really difficult to…think of what I could say that wasn't coming up with the solution” (P5L351-361).

P2 reflected that communication across the SLs tended to involve either feedback on a task completed, or assignment of a new one:

> “[it’s as though] you don’t need someone to check in, with something positive, rather than the ‘have you done, have you done, have you done?’” (P2L748-751); “the only time [SL] comes to my room is to either tell me I’ve done something wrong or that she needs something (P2L764-766).

When comparing responses in the WDG and during their roles as SLs, participants shared observations about their capacity to listen and respond, as opposed to react:

> “suggesting something that hasn't been done or… something's not working. Then I've found I'm always very quick to explain or justify or talk about what has been done or what has worked well” (P4L467-472);
> “[but] to actually be able to take that on and reflect on that… was something I haven't been exposed to before” (P6L251-258).

4.6.2 *Preparing presentations*

SLs reported their experiences of preparing their presentations to share in the WDG. Participants shared that when reviewing the process of selecting a presentation, they most frequently opted to share an observation that was felt to be the:

> “most pertinent at the time, it was the thing I was finding the most challenging” (P1L420-423);
> “that perhaps [were] taking up most of their brain space” (P4L269-271),

or had presented as an ongoing challenge:

> "we had these meaty issues that you know, have been historical problems" (P2L943-945).

SLs shared their experiences of preparing their written presentation. For some participants recording the presentation seemed to initiate the process of reflection:

> "going away and thinking about it and presenting something, that in itself was a good thing to do because as soon as you start to put it down on paper, you start to kind of…make your own kind of connections" (P1L201-206).

Participants reflected on the relationship between presenter and presentation, noting the interrelation between personal feelings and professional circumstances:

> "it's difficult to not take it personally…the minute you are presenting, and people are, question things, it is hard to not take that personally" (P1L227-232);
> "you feel very like it's your personal battle or problem" (P3L309-310).

This was further exacerbated by feelings of guilt when sharing presentations involving other members of staff:

> "that was quite hard for me, and on a personal level, as well. I feel like as a leader, I do have good relationships with my team…It felt like I was…telling somebody off and saying, 'this isn't happening', that for me, was hard" (P5L256-261).

4.6.3 Exposure

When reflecting on their experiences of the WDG, SLs reported feeling a sense of exposure when presenting to the group and sharing their thoughts on others' presentations. These experiences were generally conceptualised when SLs reflected upon their feelings of speaking in front of others:

> "from the whole process, speaking out, in front of more senior members is always a difficult thing" (P5L537-539);
> "even in a room full of people that you know well…there are still those personal (pause), I don't know, inflections… those personal kind of like (pause)

niggles, that are still even there… even when you do feel safe, you can still be made to go into that, like, fight mode" (P2L243-255).

SLs shared experiences of noting difference in when, or how often, other SLs spoke in the group:

"sometimes when the dynamics were slightly different. I thought it was interesting to see other people talk…it was interesting to see how much some people said" (P1L269-276).

This was most frequently attributed to feelings of caution about what they shared and how it would be received:

"it's like people are looking around the room, gauging other people's responses, before they give a response… it almost felt like everyone was looking, "Is this OK to say? Should I say this? Is somebody else going to say it first? Am I along the right lines?" (P5L273-286);

"you don't want to come across as naive, or inexperienced, or that your arguments aren't being backed up with evidence" (P6L403-406).

4.6.4 Solutions

Across the WDG, participants shared the varying attempts to come to and respond with solutions for the presentations shared. P1 reflected the difficulty of experiencing the problem from her presentation as necessitating the finding of a solution:

"it's also really difficult to, not come to a kind of solution. I thought that was really difficult" (P1L168-170); "the difficulty lies in, they are problems, and they do need a solution" (P1L300-301).

However, through the sessions, other SLs had adopted a different perspective to the search for solutions:

"accessing plasters is easy, but they won't really work if, and we shouldn't expect them to, if, you, you don't quite have a handle on what the problem is, it might not be a plaster that's, what's needed" (P6L498-505).

When contemplating the desire for seeking solutions, P4 reflected on the drivers motivating oneself to offer or steer others prematurely towards a solution:

> “we're always, waiting to be the one to speak and to add that, chip in, with what we want to say rather than just let somebody else speak…I don't know whether it's around proving… that I'm capable or proving I can do this job…probably it's part of.. not wanting, to fail I suppose” (P4L230-245).

4.6.5 The challenge of listening

When reflecting on the WDG, SLs reported their experiences of listening in the group. These experiences were most frequently associated to the experience of turning the chair from the group, following their presentation. SLs reported listening to others reflect on their presentations as challenging and novel:

> “it’s difficult because I can, in a normal conversation, I wouldn’t have just sat back and listened” (P1L325-327);
>
> “so, the turning the chair over, that was really difficult. When I think, I think the impression I got was, everybody found it, was similar, in that it was difficult” (P3L215-218).

Maintaining the ‘listening position’ was also reported to evoke feelings of defensiveness some participants:

> “there were moments where you kind of felt like you did need, I did, I felt like I did need to defend what I’d said” (P1L224-226).

However, P6 reflected that feelings of defensiveness were often in a response to not being able to interrupt or interject in others’ reflections, and thus feeling debilitated:

> “you're so used to, when you're discussing a problem that you have brought…almost dominating the discussion… a lot of the time, based on whatever bias you go in with, you might listen to others, but you'll then guide it in a way that you, in your head, had a solution for... so actually, being turned away, not being able to do that…that was probably the difficult part of it…when someone said something that… went against, where you potentially wanted to take that problem, that was maybe the bit that was difficult because you want to turn, you want to get involved” (P6L229-243).

4.6.6 Learning to listen and feeling heard

The SLs reported their feelings towards listening taking a shift. SLs reflected on the process of learning to maintain the listening position:

> "really, you just want to chip in with things, that's the biggest thing, and you're like 'no, I'm just listening... but I just want, no, I'm just listening'" (P2L120-123);
>
> "having the discipline to then not say anything for a bit…the thing that I think came out of it mostly for me, was the benefit of actually listening, really listening, not just fake listening, and wanting to get the right answer" (P1L338-349).

Participants reported experiencing value in listening and being listened to. Listening seemed to invite opportunities to understand and learn:

> "[it] was difficult on one side of it, but also the opportunity to be able to listen was really key" (P4L250-252);
>
> "turning away really allowed me to actively listen. I didn't really believe it until I did it, and then I knew" (P3L195-197),

whilst also offering opportunities to be understood. For some participants this developed a feeling of empowerment:

> "I don't think everyone has the opportunity to just freely speak. I do think it was a really great opportunity…to just...voice it" (P3L444-448); "I felt like it was quite empowering…to feel listened to and to feel heard" (P3L464-466),

whilst for others it engendered a sense of relatedness:

> "it was nice to know that actually they were connected, and people were actually listening and were giving it some thought" (P5L326-328).

SLs also shared their experiences of feeling heard as having their ideas held in mind and explored by the group:

> "that was a really, quite heart-warming experience in just being able to say that you are maybe… thinking about what that person has said" (P6L244-248);
>
> "that was quite therapeutic almost 'cause you sat and you unpicked… and kind of thought about the things" (P2L93-97);
>
> "any comments that I had made in the earlier meetings were accepted and talked about. It wasn't like, 'oh, that was a bit of a silly comment'" (P5L411-415).

Following these experiences within the WDG, participants shared varying reflections of noticing, and actively seeking to apply their listening skills, to their roles as SLs:

"I am listening more. I'm thinking about what's actually being said, how I myself am relating to what's being said, so I'm not thinking about quick fix solutions" (P5L637-640);

"it really gave me the opportunity to listen and actually hear what people are saying. Quite often we don't" (P4L227-229);

"I think this has made me think we need to come together and ensure that leaders feel valued and their voices are heard" (P3L495-497).

4.6.7 *Valuable discussion*

When reflecting on the evolving approaches to communication in the WDG, the SLs reported their experiences of engaging in valuable discussions. SLs shared experiences of seeking to be involved in the generation of ideas through discussion:

"I did find those discussions really valuable" (P1L182-183); "that there were always like ideas that people bounced off, one another…it was good to have that kind of development, and have a proper discussion" (P1L280-283);

"I made a point of contributing because I wanted to offer, my (pause) perspective on something and, you know, bash out those ideas with everyone else" (P2L366-370).

This was further developed by their experiences of exchanging honest feedback. P3 reflected on the process of turning the chair as enabling 'freedom' of speech:

"you read on social cues, but with your back to them, you, as a person in the circle… you would...I feel freer. I hoped that others would feel freer" (P3L223-228), whilst P6 considered this experience developed more congruent, less defensive responses:

"if I'd have been turned inwards and been facing the whole time, I think…I would have responded to questions almost on the spot, without having had the time to have that deeper reflection" (P6L325-330).

Following the WDG, participants shared reflections of their ability to transfer their authentic sharing, to develop their practice and develop the practice of others:

> “how direct and precise are you being with your feedback to them? Is some of the things we're saying to people becoming diluted because we're worried about how it might come across? What we realized is that we might not be giving people these messages, and if they have that message then they'd probably act on it” (P3L296-303).

4.6.8 OT4 Summary

Within the overarching theme participants reported their individual experiences of the various use and intent of communicative interactions. This theme explores the communication required in the different stages of the WDG, and how members of the SLT individually and collectively took different positions and approaches towards them.

This theme illustrates the transfer of the use and function of communication within the SLT group to the WDG, and vice versa, highlighting the challenging task of acknowledging dysfunction to learn and adopt new methods together.

4.7 Negotiating difference, boundaries and safety: relational concepts (OT5)

This overarching theme was reflected in six of the SLs' accounts of their experiences of engaging in a WDG within their primary school. This overarching theme was comprised of ten individual superordinate themes across the participants:

P1: Difference: avoiding and welcoming; P1: Support: compromised and compromising.

P2: Difference: risk and value; P2: Support and boundaries: relational concepts.

P3: Authority, safety and support systems.

P4: Boundaries and membership; P4: Team development: transferring nuclear support systems and developing collaboration.

P5: Concepts of support and learning to share; P5: Authority: presence and impact.

P6: Learning: exploration, reflection and changing practice.

Contributing to the overarching theme, were subthemes relating to 'difference', 'support' 'boundaries' and 'safety' (please see Appendix 12, p225 for OT5 thematic map).

4.7.1 Difference

Throughout their experiences, SLs reported various responses to difference within themselves and across the SLT (please refer to '4.4.4 Fitting In'). Within the SLT practice, and initially within the WDG, difference, or ideas shared that diversified from the common narrative, seemed to be interpreted as a challenge, something to be defended against, or corrected:

> "you feel like you need to back up something because you realise that something has been misinterpreted… you feel like something needs further clarification (P1L163-166);

or something to be ignored entirely:

"we're always or it feels like we're always, waiting to be the one to speak and to add that, chip in, with what we want to say rather than just let somebody else speak" (P4L230-233).

Some SLs shared that offering difference within the WDG was a risk:

"I would have pushed it so much more…I just didn't feel like I could do that to my extreme (pause) because of the fear or repercussions" (P2L495-500);

"There are certain things that I would say just between myself and [SL] that I wouldn't say to the whole group" (P5L702-704).

However, SLs reported that over time, their ideas of, and responses to difference, seemed to undergo a transformation. Participants reflected on their previous interactions when sharing problems, typically involving discussion with the same SLs:

"[I] normally go to certain people, like I'd go to [SL], I'd go to [SL]" (P1L435-456).

Conversely, sharing with others in the WDG was reported to provide opportunities to hear new voices:

"making me realise how everything is connected and how different people can affect the way in which you see something" (P1L748-750);

"we've opened it up to more people and got more perspective in it (P2L468-472); "I think the value of what you did, is that it includes people that doesn't, directly involve, like [SL] didn't have a clue about [presentation subject]. Which was really interesting" (P2L850-854),

and invited the challenge of an ecology of ideas, created through sharing different opinions:

"sometimes you need the light and the dark and the shade in the middle, to actually bring perspectives to situations" (P2L581-584); "it did challenge us, and it did make us think about different things, in different ways, and actually without that challenge, and thinking outside of the box, how do you really move forward with things?" (P2L935-939);

"actually, having your beliefs and your attitudes toward certain things challenged every now and then… that's had quite a big impact on me, both professionally and personally" (P6L542-547).

4.7.2 Support

Across their experiences as SLs, participants reported various responses to accessing support. Within the SLT, accessing support seemed to be indicative of inadequacy:

"it shouldn't be called a support plan; it should be called a development plan. So, psychologically you've already started off, thinking… support means something very different to development" (P2L240-249);

"it depends on who's in the meeting as to who is going to speak…sometimes [SL] gives off this, 'Oh, it shouldn't be a problem now. You should be able to do that'" (P5L276-281).

When support was experienced within the SLT, it was most frequently reported to be confined to small groups:

"you'd have, unwritten kind of people who you know that you could go to and who the conversations you were having, you could be honest and frank" (P1L742-745);

"I have a good support network within [SL] and…the executive head… we all can ensure that we do what we need to do to" (P3L131-141),

or alternatively, accessed through external professionals:

"I'm also fortunate that I now have sessions with someone off site" (P2L234-237);

"having that outside person, you can go, 'whoa'…that isn't maybe a person in the school, it's really beneficial" (P4L181-187).

However, over the course of the WDG, SLs reported reframed concepts of support:

"having that confidence to do that, and knowing that I will come across problems, but sharing them has helped because I know that I can share them… in the future" (P5L521-525); "for me, it's literally like a 'whoosh!', shoulders lightened" (P5L530-532), and considered how these ideas could affect their work with each other (please see '4.4.6 - Working as a team').

4.7.3 Boundaries

When engaging in the WDG, SLs shared various experiences associated to boundaries. SLs reported challenge expressing vulnerabilities or concern in the presence of SLs who they viewed to hold more authority:

> "I think in some meetings, when you've got people with seniority, it's almost looking for acceptance from them" (P5L455-457); "there's a slight 'hanging over our heads' if certain people are in the room, then things won't get discussed in the way that they should (P5L623-626).

Participants who felt they were in positions of authority in comparison to the other SLs also felt that their sharing in the WDG was constrained:

> "frustrating at times because, I suppose, the things that I wanted to talk about couldn't really be spoken about within that team. It wouldn't have been appropriate… with them being in the room that's a little bit more difficult. Impossible, actually." (P4L324-327).

This led participants to contemplate the boundaries of the WDG, alongside the potential opportunities and pitfalls:

> "whether that could be, I don't know, that you almost have a couple of [WDGs] running at the same time…but then on the other side of it if you're going to gel together and work together as an effective leadership team then you all need to be on the same page" (PL642-647).

4.7.4 Safety

SLs reported varying experiences associated to safety within the WDG. These experiences generally compared an absence of safety to developing a safe place with each other. These conceptualisations were navigated through explorations of difference, support and boundaries, but were also considered through reflections of how SLs felt they developed boundaries for safe sharing. Participants proposed application of these concepts to be integral to continuing with the learning journey beyond the WDG:

> "if they feel that they're in a safe environment, then they will feel that they can take risks and grow professionally" (P4L623-626).

SLs reported an awareness of others' cautious sharing (please refer to '4.6.3 Exposure'), and their observed difference in relation to sharing seemed to depend on the number or presence of group members:

> "interesting when there was a smaller session one day, I noticed a couple of those members of staff speaking a lot more freely" (P4L281-284);
>
> "on the flip side of that, [SL] wasn't there… could that have been one of the reasons? Could that 'level playing field' have happened because [SL] wasn't visible? (P5L464-472).

However, when considering how boundaries could mould safer sharing, concepts seemed more closely related to time:

> "definitely value to saying 'we're going to do it once a month, we're going to do it twice a term', whatever it is…sort of close the doors, bring a problem and crack on with it" (P2L477-480);
>
> "when you're put in a room and you've said right, this is our time (pause), then, you know that it's not a burden because we're all there together, and we've set aside time for this" (P1L803-807).

4.7.5 OT5 Summary

Within the overarching theme, SLs reported their experiences of working through individual and shared conceptualisations of difference, support and boundaries. Through challenging the perceived absence and avoidance of difference and attitudes to support, safety was gradually developed and shared, enabling growth, belonging and learning. This theme encapsulates the participants separate and intertwined journeys of approaching and testing the boundaries of accepted norms and practice, enabling the challenging and rewarding learning opportunities that followed.

4.8 Through new lenses: revisiting practice, revisiting the self (OT6)

This overarching theme was reflected in six SLs' accounts of their experiences of engaging in a WDG within their primary school. This overarching theme was comprised of six individual superordinate themes across the participants:

P1: New lenses and future practice.

P2: Problems and practice: moving forward.

P3: Learning and the emotional impact.

P4: Through new lenses: learning about the self and others.

P5: Learning and change: observing and initiating.

P6: Learning: exploration, reflection and changing practice.

Contributing to the overarching theme, were subthemes relating to 'exploring and reflecting', 'learning' and 'revising concepts' (please see Appendix 12, p226 for OT6 thematic map).

4.8.1 Exploring and reflecting

Throughout their engagement in the WDG, participants reported various experiences of exploring and reflecting, individually and with each other. Exploring the SLs' presentations was an integral process of the WDG. SLs shared that engaging with their work in this way, enabled them to value and develop their observation skills:

> "I think that's probably clarified that in my mind more than anything, that actually... it's about 'noticing' sometimes" (P4L384-386).

and develop an awareness of the systemic nature of their presentations:

> "but I think to really spend that time and picking things at a greater level, so for example [presentation], it gives you more time to focus and then think about how life fits for the school" (P4L211-214).

Through working with the observations shared, SLs reported experiences of being able to reflect on new aspects of their presentations. When exploring personal relationships to presentations (please refer to ‘4.6.2 Preparing presentations’), SLs reported a refreshed perspective to their situation:

> “that's quite refreshing and brings a bit of clarity…as to that we can make a difference through the way in which we think and deal with it” (P3L772-775).

Whilst others found considering alternative perspectives as an opportunity to reframe:

> “it’s learning to have almost, the opposite of the cognitive dissonance, in terms they might have a certain view, but by listening and taking on something, so that can be changed or adapted, which is very rare” (P6L381-385).

The processes of reflection and exploration was reported to provide SLs with valuable tools to approach their work in a more measured approach:

> “you pushed, and you rephrased, and you challenged, and I found that really useful to how I frame my thoughts and responses to things” (P3L476-479);
>
> ”taking some of the concepts of the difficult conversations and solving problems in a more rounded way, not always with an immediate solution, definitely has become very, very valuable” (P6L593-597).

4.8.2 Learning

SLs reported various experiences of learning throughout their engagement in the WDG. SLs frequently reported their learning throughout the WDG as challenging. Whilst difficult, SLs shared their experiences as developing understanding and facilitating progress:

> “I can see that to move forward in your thinking, you need to be challenged in certain aspects of it. That's what this is, I think. It's about being challenged; otherwise how do you move forward?” (P3L406-411).

Through engaging in the WDG, participants reported experiencing direct opportunities to learn as both the presenter and member of the group. SLs reported through sharing complex and challenging presentations, they were able to reach new insights:

"it had that impact straight away. I literally took it away, took all of those notes, took all of those ideas, you know, we'd sort of picked out the key, issues I guess relating to it, and strands that needed pursuing and they just fed straight in" (P2L131-137);

"actually, we should be sharing these types of things. Because actually what came out of it was some good, constructive ideas to be played with, which I found for all of the scenarios" (P3L311-314).

SLs also shared various experiences of learning about themselves. When reflecting upon her practice, P1 was able to separate her personal desires and the expectations of her role:

"I know that that's (pause) me, because I know, that I (pause), I know that that's my opinion, rather than my job role" (P1L549-552).

Whilst P5 shared a journey of self-discovery through engaging with her emotions:

"it's just, I, honestly, just, just amazing, sometimes you feel like, this learning journey… I should have kept a diary of my feelings and thoughts as I was going along" (P5L587-591).

Participants also reflected on the role that others played in their learning. Through engaging in the work discussion process with their team, SLs reported having opportunities to learn about others:

"as everyone spoke, I realized that we all, obviously, you know this, but you don't always check in and think about it properly, we're all in the same boat" (P3L560-564);

"it's important that we were able to take the time to find out what's going on for them and what the biggest things, the biggest areas of focus are for them" (P4L261-264),

which was reported to invite opportunities to learn about the self through others:

"it was only through speaking to her I thought but that's how I felt in mine. When she was saying certain things, I was like, but I agree with what they were saying" (P3L402-406);

"I don't know whether it's through seeing behaviour of others but, something made me realize that I'm very defensive [laughter]… I noticed it in someone else… I think, I actually do that" (P4L451-466).

4.8.3 Revising concepts

Throughout their engagement in the WDG, participants reported various experiences of revisiting and revising accepted concepts and practice. SLs reported new observations they had made of the relationships within and across their presentations:

"there is this kind of like, interlocking web and how we've all got kind of, little strands, and all the strands are connected, and how like, if someone is pulling on one, everyone is going to feel it" (P1L708-712).

Building these connections enabled more holistic understandings of their roles as SLs, relating back to the intended positive outcomes for CYP:

"quite a lot of the stuff that came up was about managing people" (P1L658-659); "the reason why everyone was talking about the management of adults, was to support the children" (P1L690-692); "talking about people's wellbeing, because if someone's not happy, then they're not going to be the most effective and it's not going to [positively] impact the children" (P1L696-699).

This was reported to have engendered further revisions to SLs' conceptualisations of their roles in relation to others. P3 shared her transition from bearing the weight of responsibility for 'everything' to developing team working:

"I think it gave me a bit of a reshuffle, and was like actually how am I building capacity? Not how am I taking on everything …I owe it to the people on my team to actually help build them up and facilitate that, and actually work with them" (P3L525-534),

whilst P4 shared the desire to focus on the emotional wellbeing of her colleagues:

"a happy workforce where everyone feels valued, and they feel safe in what they're doing, and they feel supported… then ultimately what they deliver to the children will be better because they're in a good place" (P4L617-623).

SLs also shared experiencing adaptations to their communication and interactions with others since engaging in the WDG. This involved reflecting on the intention of exchanges and enabled a new found ability to create space within their interactions:

> "I've tried recently, certainly, to take a step back from that a little bit and just acknowledge" (P4L472-473);
>
> "think you just need to, when you're making decisions, stop, think, question, and sometimes just let things sit for a bit. Instead of jumping feet first into situations" (P2L962-966),

and consequently, supported efforts of listening to understand:

> "and, I mean, putting in the thought as well? Into those interactions that we are having with people. Do we, when we sit down as a phase team, do we actually listen and notice what they are saying? Are we waiting to chip in with what we lead in the meeting, because this is on our agenda?" (P4L533-539).

SLs also reported the impact of using one's emotions to understand others. This was reported to not only provide a new lens into understanding others:

> "I am quite mindful of how other people are feeling, because of how I'm feeling" (P2L860-862),

but fuelled a desire to further this understanding in the future:

> "focus on different areas of ourselves, our personalities, drivers. I think the impact that that will have will be far greater than more of the procedural, sort of, information and tasks" (P4L606-610).

Participants reported that engaging in the WDG had also enabled the SLT to hold a more hopeful perspective, from a place of 'stuckness':

> "what's come out of this, is people's awareness around how you can move forward with a challenge. I do think we can probnotize things…I think people are used to being stuck in their 'but that's how it is'… I struggle with that on a day-to-day basis. I think that, this process that we've been through as a team has made people realize that actually, there is a way out (P3L748-757).

4.8.4 OT6 Summary

Within the overarching theme participants reported their individual experiences of exploring and reflecting on accepted norms, challenging circumstances and their perspectives and practice. These processes were reported to facilitate a challenging and rewarding learning journey for the SLs, resulting in revising practice and energising ideas for future practice. This theme is contributed to and founded within, all prior themes, and highlights the many complex, intended and unintended learning experiences from engaging in a WDG.

4.9 Time: restraints, pressures and necessity for growth (OT7)

This overarching theme was reflected in five SLs' accounts of their experiences of engaging in a WDG within their primary school. This overarching theme was comprised of five individual superordinate themes across five of the participants:

P1: Time: A continuously depleting resource.

P2: Time: restraints, pressures and necessity for growth.

P3: Time: a resource to protect.

P5: Learning and change: observing and initiating.

P6: 6f. Time: an essential resource for learning.

Contributing to the overarching theme, were subthemes relating to 'time constraints', 'time as a necessary resource' and 'protecting time' (please see Appendix 12, p227 for OT7 thematic map).

4.9.1 Time constraints

When considering every day practice, SLs shared to varying degrees the different ways restricted time impacted their practice. SLs considered that time constraints impeded practice by encouraging a rush when making make decisions:

> "I think we so quickly rush to make a decision that actually sometimes if we stopped, took a step back (pause) and talked about it, we'd probably make very different decisions" (P2L536-539).

This was furthered when reflecting on attempts to consult with others. P6 shared experiences of needing to make decisions in isolation for expedience:

> "Obviously, you do, but that's confined to a time period, or how many things are on your to do list and what your priorities are" (P6L513-516).

In everyday practice, P1 reflected that the boundaries of time could serve as interference when considering approaching others for support:

> "they'd make the time for me, because I'd make the time for them and we would, but (pause) there is that sense of, I don't want to bother them" (P1L796-799)

and when offering support to others:

> "there are time pressures, and when obviously you have your own bubble to sort out, but you're also a leader, you're also having to make sure everyone else's bubble is okay, and it is, it's difficult" (P1L616-620).

The SLs' experiences of the WDG were also impacted by time pressures. They shared initial concerns for engaging in the group on a weekly basis, and considered this approach to be 'idealised', reporting:

> "doing it weekly and everyone having their turn, I think logistically in a school I don't know if you would be able to maintain that, sort of cycle" (P2L473-476);
>
> "when there is so many other time pressures. I was almost like, 'do I really have time to discuss it?' And it's almost like, in an ideal world, I would love to, have those discussions" (P1L181-183).

4.9.2 Time as a necessary resource

When recalling their experiences of engaging in the WDG, the SLs reported the value of time for various processes and experiences. When considering the process of preparing a written presentation, P1 shared that the time invested in writing signified the beginning of the reflective journey:

> "even just spending that time to, and it didn't even necessarily take that long to do, that process probably only took about ten to fifteen minutes, and actually, having a think about it, almost helps to clear your mind" (P1L206-210).

Moreover, time in the WDG enabled opportunity for shared exploration and reflection:

"you need that time for it to sit, before you can actually see the work that's been done, or what your next steps need to be, by the time you've come down from, the emotional intensity of it" (P2L974-978);

"you need to have time to experience something, process it, reflect on it, reframe thoughts" (P3L794-796).

Participants particularly noted the impact of this time on their emotions:

"I became a lot more, I would say, calmer with it. As time went on, I became a lot more willing to have my input and share what I really wanted to say" (P6: 454-457); "I didn't have that anxiety or worry… by the time I presented, I actually felt quite confident" (P6L271-276);

"I mean, for me it's been an enormous learning journey. Quite an emotional roller coaster. The awkwardness, the shyness, the vulnerability at the beginning" (P5L728-731),

and the consequent impact of change over time on the group:

"I think we felt more open with each other as the meetings went on" (P5L415-416).

4.9.3 Protecting time

Across their experiences, SLs reported their desires to protect time. During the WDG, SLs expressed feeling a sense of containment from the time protected for discussion:

"I think, the joy of this, was that we had to stop, we had to pause, and we had to take that time" (P2L446-448).

Experiencing the value of protecting time in this way seemed to fuel a shared desire to protect time to share together in the future:

"I don't know how we'll think as we move forward, but we do need to see how we allow opportunities to have time" (P3L506-508);

"there are elements of it that I know that I can take forward with me. You know, taking time to discuss things" (P2L594-596).

However, when reflecting on the actual and desired replications of aspects of the WDG, the practicalities of protecting time continued to pose as a challenge:

"we had a leadership afternoon on Monday, which was nice. We got a bit of a chance to reflect again (pause) which times like that [laughs] are quite erm, sparse" (P6L119-122);

"I think my question to me, is how do you make that something that can be sustained in a workplace environment where time is so precious" (P2L948-952).

4.9.4 OT7 Summary

Within the overarching theme, SLs reported their individual experiences of the impact of time on their practice, their experience of engaging in the WDG, and the subsequent reflections they had for their future practise. This theme highlighted a conscious and unconscious tension when engaging in the WDG, and interaction more broadly within busy school life. This theme offers further considerations for the future practice and development of work discussion within school systems, in particular with groups facing a multitude of time constraints.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Chapter overview

This chapter will review and discuss the findings of this research into the experiences of SLs engaging in a WDG. The findings will also be discussed in relation to the literature presented in Chapter 2, wider relevant literature and psychological theory. Following this, reflections on the trustworthiness and limitations of the study will be provided. Finally, implications for results of this research to educational psychologists' practice, the research field and dissemination will be discussed.

5.2 Overview of findings

- ***A note on interpretation***

The discussion of the findings marks a shift in the researcher's 'position of empathy'; whereby the focus was placed on reconstructing the participants' original experiences in their own terms, further towards a 'position of suspicion'; applying theoretical perspectives to the findings in order to shed light on the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Adopting a middle position between the above polarities enabled the researcher to "see what it is like from the participants' view, and stand in their shoes" whilst taking "a look at them from a different angle, ask questions and puzzle over the things they are saying" (Smith et al., 2009, p36).

The researcher adopted a systems-psychodynamic lens to interpret the findings; an interdisciplinary field integrating the practice of psychoanalysis, the theories of group relations, and open systems perspectives; concepts of which will be defined and discussed in relation to specific experiences shared by the SLs. However, it is of note that there are undoubtedly many other interpretations that could also have been made through the adoption of the same theoretical framework, as well as through the application of the many other theoretical frameworks available.

- ***Discussion of the findings***

Smith et al. (2009) note that within the inherent nature of IPA research “new and unanticipated territory” often emerge through the interview and analysis process (p113). Incidentally, due to the lack of research into SLs’ experiences of WDGs, the researcher has drawn on additional relevant literature to facilitate understanding of the psychological underpinnings of the findings accrued, through snowballing from the research articles in the literature review, and papers recommended through discussion through supervision and training experiences.

The researcher has amalgamated related overarching and subthemes to present through discussion what has been learned from this research, exploring the experiences of SLs engaging in WDGs. The overarching themes are highlighted at the beginning of each section, and discussion of how each area contributes to answering the research questions is discussed in ‘5.5 - Addressing the Research Questions’.

5.3 Leadership in education

This section will discuss the participants’ perspectives on the context in which their experiences of engaging in the WDG took place. Integral to building this contextual picture were themes drawn and amalgamated predominantly from ‘Conceptualisations of leadership: juggling tasks, responsibilities and increasing expectations (OT1)’, ‘Senior Leadership Team: relationships, relating in role and developing the work group (OT2)’ and ‘Emotions, expectations and assumptions: surfacing and working with (OT3)’.

Participants depicted their experiences of leadership through their internal worlds; comprising of their values and expectations, their external worlds; comprising of challenging circumstances and depleting resources, and the emotional impact of the two.

5.3.1 Internal world: values and expectations

- ***Values***

When reflecting on their roles, SLs frequently cited their personal values as both a motivator and benchmark for practice. Whilst there were similarities and variations in the values expressed across the SLs; from providing students with the best opportunities, implementing positive change for disadvantaged students and providing alternative means for students to experience success, there seemed to be an underlying commonality of a desire to provide positive, far reaching change. Furthermore, these values were heralded to have significant emotional weight on the SLs.

Whilst no known research has discussed the values that SLs associate with their role, when considering the context of their experience of WDGs, similar findings have been found when exploring head teachers’ experiences of their role exclusively. Tucker’s (2012) research into the stresses, pressures and challenges faced by primary school head teachers cited the intrinsic desires of leaders to bring about positive change for students within their schools. These values were found to be multidimensional, taking roots from childhood experiences and familial expectations, social and organisational circumstances and self-belief.

Tucker (2012) reported what was suggested by the narratives of his participants, was that “deeply rooted emotional experience profoundly and continually impacted on the thinking and decision making of those in role” (p188). These findings were supported by previous research into the emotional aspects of primary headship in the UK (Crawford, 2004, 2007, 2012; Nias 1989).

The SLs in the current research did not consciously attribute their values to their personal experiences. However, these findings could be illuminated when applying Klein’s (1946) concept of projective identification; a means that is adopted throughout adult life to communicate experience from deep within an individuals’ psyche. This concept illustrates an unconscious process where parts of self are separated and split off, to be projected into an external ‘other’; that in some way becomes identified with these characteristics.

In this instance, it could be observed that the students of the SLs’ school are cast into the role of the external ‘other’, and therefore take up the projected matter. This could be seen to manifest as the SLs’ perceptions of the students’ experiences of disadvantage, their perceived need for the best opportunities and requirements of alternative means to experience success.

- ***Internal expectations***

Tucker (2012) found that his participants’ individual trajectories were used as a framework to understand their current work. This was reported to be problematic, as these internal models were evidently at odds with the environment they were currently working in. This was also represented in the current research, where personal values were used to set the parameters of the expectation SLs’ placed upon themselves in role.

SLs reported experiencing varying internal expectations influencing and aroused by their work, ranging from desires of deic attributes, the pursuit of perfection, to the desire to effect immediate impact and transformational change. These findings were also supported by previous research exploring the role of primary school head teachers (Maguire, Wooldrige & Pratt-Adams, 2006; Pratt-Adams & Maguire, 2009; Webb & Vullinamy, 2008).

Similarly, Tucker (2012) reported a “phantasied omnipotence” (p194) within his participants’ narratives through experiencing personal satisfaction when children were doing well due to aspects of self that had been invested in their development. However, this was coupled with a continued striving to invest more of their personal resources, in other situations, despite no avail. This was also represented within the narratives of the SLs’ experiences in the current research.

When applying Klein’s (1946) concept of projective identification to this aspect of experience, it could be seen that striving to repair problematic circumstances becomes an attempt to repair aspects of self. These reparative attempts became absolved of realistic professional limitations and saw the pursuit of participants to fix impossible tasks, no longer linked to the reality of the presenting situation (Tucker, 2012).

5.3.2 External world: working context, rising standards and receiving negative feedback

- ***Challenging contexts***

When reflecting on their roles, SLs reported experiences of working with challenging systemic pressures; relating to catering for students from disadvantaged communities, working with depleting resources and receiving negative feedback.

Echoing this, Tucker (2012) observed that following the “collapse of entire industries and secure employment prospects, schools have perhaps taken on greater significance and therefore have become more pressurised and loaded with anxieties of the government, communities and parents alike” (p205). This coupled with the diminishing local services available to support families and schools, was reported to leave head teachers feeling as though they were shouldering anxieties on behalf of the wider professional network and community.

When considering the context of participants’ experience of WDGs, similar findings have been reported when exploring other staff groups’ experiences. Elfer (2012) found nursery managers reported experiencing a lack of financial resources, which led to staff within their organisations to undertake additional tasks for very little to no pay. However, access to depleting resources also seemed to manifest in a lack of time and support from others, internal and external to the organisation (Hulusi, 2007; Maggs, 2014).

- ***Rising standards and increasing expectations***

Whilst grappling with the challenging contexts of their working worlds, SLs reported a fundamental responsibly of their role incorporated maintaining and improving standards of their own work and that of their staff. This was reported to involve undertaking observations and monitoring of staff, whilst being observed and monitored themselves.

Similarly, Hulusi (2007) found that NQTs in his research felt that the expected standards of work were a particular struggle in their working contexts, citing concerns of submitting lesson plans for monitoring and keeping up with the setting and marking of homework. Whilst, Elfer (2012) reported nursery managers experienced significant challenge adhering to the expectations placed on them by others. Such as struggling adhering to the government's narrow educational outcomes, required curriculum planning, and parents' expectations of the nurseries to offer additional hours.

Furthermore, SLs within this research reported that within the SLT, unrealistic expectations were also placed upon each other. These expectations mirrored the expectations places on other staff groups; relating to task completion and overly critical observations.

Jacques (1955) identified how individuals in groups could unconsciously create social defences to enable members to avoid painful conflicts while simultaneously providing serious obstacles to an organizations' ability to function. The defences, identified by Klein (1946), such as denial*;* pushing certain thoughts, feelings and experiences out of conscious awareness as they have become too anxiety-provoking to hold*,* and splitting*;* the polarising division of concepts in order to avoid the anxiety of internal conflict*,* can manifest themselves in organizational life as avoidance and selective blindness.

When applying this notion to the current research, it could be seen that the overly critical observations reported by some SLs were unconscious efforts to defend themselves from anxiety. Developing unattainable standards ensured that 'good enough' was out of reach, enabling attention to be placed on bureaucratic tasks and activities that avoided thinking about the conflict between internal desires for practice and the emotional impact aroused from the external working context.

- ***Negative feedback***

Across their experiences, SLs reported being the recipients of challenging feedback. These included frequent interactions with others; external and internal to the SLT, where the reporting of falling short of expectations, and the questioning of decisions or actions were the sole focus. For some SLs, this resulted in the development of a constant fear of impending criticism or assignment of additional tasks.

Hulusi (2007) found for NQTs, the fear of receiving negative feedback led to hiding their mounting workloads, deceiving others, and fear of being isolated as punishment for their perceived underachievement. Whilst Elfer (2012) reported that nursery managers also experienced stresses sourced directly from their working environments, these were reported to involve issues with the practice of other members of staff.

Maggs (2014) also found that the challenging experiences teachers faced were often reported to be inherent to the school's working context. Staff in this school were so avoidant of receiving negative feedback a "culture of coping" (p71) had developed within their schools, whereby it was not permitted to share challenging experiences or seek support. Similar findings were echoed in some SLs' experiences of seeking support; in very small groups of through external professionals as discussed in '5.4.2 – Support and boundaries'.

5.3.3 Internal and external worlds: an organisation in the mind

The application of Hutton, Bazalgette and Reed's (1997) concept of the "organisation in the mind" (p2) can be applied to the SL's experiences of their working context, in order to make sense of the significance of these experiences influencing their engagement in the WDG. Using this concept, attention can be directed to understanding how the external world; where the school is situated, was experienced by the SLs, by considering the internal picture they presented about the school, and how this picture, related to the school as a whole.

Organisation in the mind is defined as “what the individual perceives in [their] head of how activities and relations are organised, structured and connected internally. It is a model internal to oneself, part of one's inner world, relying upon the inner experiences of interactions, relations and the activities engaged in, which give rise to images, emotions, values and responses, which may consequently be influencing approaches to management and leadership, positively or adversely” (Hutton, Bazalgette & Reed, 1997, p114).

In this research, the SLs defined their internal model through expressing their values as striving to affect wide-reaching change and implementing the best quality of practice possible. These values set the parameters of the expectations placed upon themselves in role, requiring the investment of significant personal resources. This working process illustrates the internal foundation of their organisation in mind.

Additionally, maintaining an organisation in mind can lead to the avoidance or suppression of more uncomfortable aspects of their experience (Hutton et al., 1997). SLs depicted their working context as an under-resourced school, catering for disadvantaged communities with depleting resources, whilst trying to meet increasing expectations of others. The experience of stress is therefore connected to the external world, despite their internal desires to bring about perfect practice and far reaching change.

The avoidance or suppression of the more challenging aspects of their experiences; not meeting the impossible standards set upon themselves, consequently effected working cultures that the SLs unconsciously produced in the organisation (Hutton et al., 1997). This was reported to involve the practice of observations and monitoring of tasks to improve practice standards within the school. However, this monitoring process seemed to highlight existing and exacerbate further problems, which in turn created more stress for the SLs.

However, integral to the concepts of organisation in mind, is the external reality of the school, beyond the SLs' conceptualisations. There is a wealth of research and literature documenting the challenging circumstances schools nationally are finding themselves situated in, citing cuts to funding, increasing difficulty accessing external support services, and increasing anxiety from children, parents, professionals and policy-makers alike (Brown 2012; Partridge, 2012; Roffey, 2012; Salter-Jones, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

The interaction between the SLs' organisations in mind and the organisation in the external world, cold be observed to form a destructive cycle of efforts to mobilise increasing investment of personal resources into impossible tasks of 'fixing' or 'rescuing' the school and its' inhabitants. This cycle is particularly difficult due the interrelation of the individual, group and systemic pressures converging without discernible or realistic boundary and fitting all too comfortably with the community's expectations (Tucker, 2012).

5.3.4 Emotional impact

SLs' reported a conscious awareness that the processes they engaged with in the school were not effective to meet the task required. SLs reported experiences of conflict between their internal and external worlds, and feelings of defeat through their experiences of engaging in compromised practice, and feeling inadequate, alone and out of control.

Considering the emotional impact of the SLs' experiences of leadership, paints a context of experiencing varying degrees of stress. These findings are supported more generally by a wealth of research and literature into the emotional wellbeing of staff in educational settings, predominantly highlighting the experience of stress (Brown 2012; Partridge, 2012; Roffey, 2012; Salter-Jones, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). However, the experiences participants relayed in this study reveal the nuance of their narratives, and the consequent foundation of the experience when engaging in the WDGs.

- ***Espoused and compromised practice***

Throughout the SLs’ narratives were reflections on the contradiction of how they individually, and how they reported the SLT as a group, felt they ‘should’ be practising and what this actually looked like in every day working. The interaction between the SLs’ various responsibilities and the concepts and values underpinning their practice, led to experiences of juggling an overwhelming number of tasks with unsatisfying consequences. Experiences varied from comparisons of adopting procedural over reflective practice, pressured time leading to unconsidered action, a lack of early intervention despite early identification, and delivering consistent messages despite an inconsistent ethos.

Tucker (2012) applied Freud’s (1970) notion of amentia; a collective illusion, to illustrate the collusive contract of upwards mobility for all students through education, the education system proclaims, despite this being incredibly unlikely to achieve. This notion acknowledges national agendas to provide annually progressive improvements of academic outcomes where all children are expected to meet standardised targets. Tucker (2014) reported “the circumstances and limits of their work are not recognized by the defined task, and because of this many of them will continually fail or will distort practices to meet official targets” (p264).

A sense of keeping up with the façade of espoused practice, was mirrored in other previous research. Elfer (2012) reported that nursery managers expressed striving to emit constant positivity through fear of acknowledging any difficulty in the workplace might “trigger a spiral of despair” (p135). Whilst Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) reported that teachers expressed within the schools, there was a sense of maintaining the status quo of silence regarding experiencing challenge.

- ***Feeling inadequate, alone and out of control***

Across their experiences, SLs reported feelings of inadequacy from the impact of falling short of expectations, and aroused feelings of being unqualified and unvalued. Alongside this, SLs reported experiencing varying degrees of loneliness as a consequence of holding responsibility for others, fitting in and engaging in group working.

Previous research also found that school staff reported feelings of loneliness (Elfer, 2012; Hulusi, 2007). For nursery managers, this was also linked to being responsible for others generating a perceived need to resist confiding in their colleagues (Elfer, 2012). Whilst NQTs reported feeling a need to conceal their emotions from others, for fear of chastisement or alerting others to insufficient practice (Hulusi, 2007).

Research exploring the emotional aspects of leadership in education found school leaders made conscious efforts to control their emotions in order to maintain “the boundaries of what is, and what is not, appropriate emotional display” (Crawford, 2007, p96). These boundaries were reported to be formed by conceptualisations of socially acceptable behaviour.

Hoffman Downes (2013) reported school leaders expend considerable efforts to maintain “the social face of leadership [at the expense of] stress, fatigue, emotional dissonance and the loss of a sense of self in a form of disappearing" (p149). This may shed light on the relationship between the loneliness the current study's SLs reported to experience within the SLT and their conscious efforts of emotional dissonance.

Within their experiences as SLs, participants reported feeling overwhelmed, stuck and engaging in conscious denial. Similarly, Hulusi (2007) linked NQT's feelings of overwhelming shock and loss as an emotional response that mirrored pupil-teacher interactions. Hulusi (2007) interpreted this mirroring as an example of the primitive feelings that stress within the workplace can evoke in adults.

The application of Bion's (1967) concept of containment can be applied to the SLs' emotional experiences of their working context, in order to make sense of the significance of these experiences influencing their engagement in the WDG. Bion (1967) asserted that one aspect of parental function was to be that of a container; a thinker with the capacity not only to care about, but also to think about, their dependent's experience.

Bion (1967) drew heavily on the concept of inter-subjectivity, noting that emotions constantly pass between people and that sometimes experiences are too painful to tolerate due to the feelings associated with them. This requires the 'container' (carer or senior leader) to hold the projected feelings of a dependent (baby, student or colleague), try and make sense of them, and return them to their source in a more manageable form, rather than interpreting them as a trigger for reactive and punitive action.

In Bion's (1985) notion of 'container-contained', he extended the initial principle of containment to suggest that the container themselves must also feel a sense of containment, in order to contain the unbearable feelings of the dependent. When applying this concept to school environments, feelings of staff containment consequently shape the organisational holding environment, with the potential to increase or decrease the capacity to think, to reflect, and consequently act with a more considered approach (Elfer, 2012; Hulusi, 2007; Maggs, 2014; Tucker, 2012).

Anxieties; internal and external to the school, if not contained, can produce powerful and primitive emotions which although frequently unconscious, still have a powerful impact on school culture and the staff within. When applying this lens to the SLs' experience of their working role, an absence of containment seems evident in their narratives; leaving anxieties to be internalised, and consequently evoke the reported feelings of inadequacy, isolation and stress.

5.3.5 Summary

SLs expressed values of striving to affect wide-reaching change and implementing the best quality of practice possible. The values expressed by SLs set practise standards which were reported to require continuous and significant investment of personal resources. Previous literature has also found staff in educational organisations typically report an over-investment of personal resources in order to complete their assigned tasks.

SLs depicted their experiences of leadership in challenging contexts, whereby external expectation and standards of practice were felt to be increasing alongside diminishing internal and external resources. These challenges were reported often to be mirrored by and reflected within the SLT, resulting in vast and varied emotional experiences to be played out both consciously and unconsciously, individually and as a group.

Both implicit and explicit narratives of experiencing painful emotions make clear links to stress induced by undertaking leadership roles in educational organisations. Whilst the narrative of stress in education has been clearly documented by research and literature, the findings from this research shed light on the nuanced experience of these particular SLs and the impact of working as part of this team; contributing consciously and unconsciously to their working environment.

- ***Answering the research questions***

This section sets the context of the WDG, whereby integral themes in the participants' narratives highlight the constructs of leadership and consequent experience of their roles. This is imperative to understanding how participants' experienced engaging in the WDGs and illuminate why certain experiences may have occurred (RQ1). Furthermore, understanding the SLs' perspectives of their thoughts, feelings and practice in their roles offer insight that acts as a relative temporal baseline for which later comparisons are drawn (RQ2, RQ3). The findings in relation to the research questions will be discussed in further detail in '5.5. – Addressing the research questions'.

5.4 Leadership and work discussion: the intersection

This section will discuss the SLs' experiences of various elements of established working cultures that seemed to directly hold influence on the experience of engaging in the WDGs. Integral to building this concept were themes drawn and amalgamated predominantly from 'Senior Leadership Team: relationships, relating in role and developing the work group (OT2)' and 'Negotiating difference, boundaries and safety: relational concepts (OT5)' and 'Time: restraints, pressures and necessity for growth (OT7)'.

- ***Group outside the group***

The challenges within the SLT were inexorably influential on the experiences of the WDG. Participants shared that these experiences concerned the transferring of anxiety, fear of ulterior alliances and the uncertainty of the consequences of sharing.

Building directly on Jacques' (1955) notions of unconscious social defences in groups providing obstacles to an organizations' ability to function, as introduced in '5.3.2 - External world', Menzies-Lyth (1997) extrapolated these ideas in her work on institutional defences against anxiety. Through her observations of nursing staff, Menzies-Lyth (1997) established that the organisation can raise unconscious defences against anxiety related to the primary task.

These anxieties in turn manifest within work practices, having a powerful influence on work culture. Central to this notion was the belief that within helping professions, a lack of emotional containment can create greater individual and systemic stress, distorting the primary task of the organisation through an increased reliance on organisational defences (Menzies-Lyth, 1997). The defence structures observed were inherently based on Bion's seminal work on 'Experience in Groups' (1961).

Bion (1961) observed that when any group of people meet to complete a task, there are two configurations of mental activity presented simultaneously: 'the work group'; where group members are actively engaging in the work needed to progress towards the initial outcome, and 'basic assumption mentality'; where group members act out unconscious preoccupations, preventing work group mentality from occurring. The latter functioning was observed to occur when groups feel under stress and have been defined to fall in to categories of 'basic assumption dependency', 'basic assumption pairing' and 'basic assumption fight/flight' (Bion, 1961; Menzies-Lyth, 1997).

Within this research, the individual defensive structures SLs conveyed when discussing their practice, could be understood simultaneously as a collective defensive formation operating within the school. As such concepts of ‘basic assumption group mentality’ will be applied to the themes that participants used to represent their experiences of the intersection between the SLT and the WDG; group identity, concepts of support, boundaries and safety, and time.

5.4.1 Group identity: fitting in and avoiding difference

Across their experiences, participants reported instances of trying to fit in with colleagues in the SLT. The desire to develop consistency amongst group members meant that difference was often avoided entirely or approached with caution.

In their reflections on organisational consultative work, Mosse and Zagier Roberts (2019) applied Gustafson’s (1976) interpretation of this ‘pseudo-mutual’ group functioning where “everyone must be ‘equal’ and ‘equal’ means identical” (p153) to understand the unconscious pressures apparent on group members to blur the differences between them “as if safety lies only in oneness” (p152).

Mosse and Zagier Roberts (2019) observed the submerging of individuality is often the price of belonging and could be experienced by group members as oppressive. In the current research, the consequence of tailoring behaviours in order to fit in with the group, amongst other things, was the negative association made to difference. Within the SLT, difference, or ideas that diversified from the common narrative, seemed to be interpreted either as a challenge, misinformation or misinterpretation.

This has clear implications for the engagement in the WDG. For some SLs the unconscious constraints associated with the formation of group identity extended to the type of presentations shared, whilst for others this involved offering feedback of a similar nature to their colleagues.

5.4.2 Support and boundaries

Within the SLT, accessing support was conceptualised to be indicative of inadequacy; resulting in supportive systems to be confined to small groups, or through accessing external professionals. Furthermore, SLs shared various experiences associated to challenges posed by perceived boundaries of sharing. These varied from notions of authority as constraining and authority as constrained. Associations of these findings have been reported in the previous literature through the ‘cultures of coping’ (Elfer, 2012; Hulusi, 2007; Maggs 2014) as discussed in ‘5.3.2 External world’.

These shared associations could be interpreted as the group engaging in ‘basic assumption mentality: dependency’; where the primary task is contrived solely to provide for the satisfaction of the needs and wishes of its members. Authoritative members “serve as a focus for a pathological form of dependency” (Stokes, 2019, p21), relied upon on to sustain the dynamic adopted by the group, to avoid anxiety, and not to face them with the demands of the group’s real purpose. Consequently, preventing thinking and the possibility of work taking place (Bion, 1961).

The notions associated to support, and the perceived boundaries of sharing expressed by the SLs in their working context posed a challenge to engaging in WDGs where a fundamental intention is to develop and provide a supportive space through mobilising group members to support each other to tolerate frustration, face different perspectives of reality, recognize differences among group members and learn from experience.

5.4.3 Time: restraints, pressures and necessity for growth

- ***Time constraints***

SLs frequently referenced how their restricted time provoked a rush to make decisions and prevented support within their practice in school. This had clear implications for engaging in the WDG; not only as another time-consuming activity to engage in, but also as a pressure to arrive at desired individual outcomes. Some leaders reported reflecting during the initial group meetings, whether or not they could afford the time committed to engage in the WDGs.

The working context of school environments are acknowledged to be under increasing demands and expectations, consequently limiting time to engage in tasks. These experiences have also been reported in previous research on the use of WDGs in educational contexts. Maggs (2014) discussed the operational issues shared by participants such as the timing of the session and the additional time that attending WDGs took up, as possible threat to the continuation of the groups.

However, this conceptualisation of time constraints could also be indicative as ‘basic assumption mentality – fight-flight’ group defence mechanisms; where the functioning of the group creates unresolved mental conflicts in order to either fight or flee the primary task by rejecting it to engage in off-task, and safer, activities (Bion, 1961). Applying this concept to the current research, it could be suggested that creating an environment whereby there would not be time to reflect and explore the challenges experienced would enable avoidance of engaging with the challenging and painful emotions evoked in these experiences.

- ***Time as a necessary resource for learning***

However, participants also acknowledged the necessity of time to enable reflection and the building of safe spaces for sharing. This seemed to pose conflict between their desires to understand and explore presenting concerns and contain the emotional experience of work, with the unconscious risk of engaging in an activity requiring abandonment of many practices contrived to protect the SLs from engaging with anxiety.

Stokes (2019) describes when working with groups experiencing stress “there is little capacity to bear frustration, and quick solutions are favoured…a questioning attitude is impossible; any who dare to do so are regarded as either foolish, mad or heretical. A new idea or formulation which might offer a way forward is likely to be too terrifying to consider because it involves questioning cherished assumptions, and loss of the familiar and predictable which is felt to be potentially catastrophic” (p23).

However, Simpson and French (2006) when exploring the concept of ‘thoughtful leadership’, assert that maintaining and developing the capacity for leaders to think requires the ability to contain the pressures that cause dispersal into thoughtless activity. Leaders also need the capacity to recognise and work with difficult thoughts in a way that faces challenges to their organisations. As such, despite the initial challenges and operational qualms, the commitment of engaging in the WDGs prevailed, the experiences of which are discussed in the following section.

5.3.4 Summary

SLs expressed the continuity of the challenges faced within the SLT in their experiences of the WDG. This has been interpreted as a repeating pattern, of overlapping conceptions that come to a point of intersection in the separate but intrinsically related nature of the SLT and the WDG. This influence of the conceptualisations extended over group identity, concepts of support, boundaries and safety, and time; and therefore, had clear and explicit implications for engagement in the WDGs.

Whilst the narratives of unconscious group processes affecting stressed working groups has been well documented by research and literature, little previous research has explored these experiences in the field of leadership in education. The findings from this research highlight the particular experience of these SLs engaging in a challenging school culture, and the consequent impact of working as part of this team.

- ***Answering the research questions***

This section highlights themes in the participants' narratives regarding the constructs of school working and consequent unconscious rules and behaviours adopted when engaging in new tasks. These experiences are imperative to understanding how participants' experienced engaging in the WDGs and illuminate why certain experiences may have occurred (RQ1). Furthermore, understanding the SLs' experiences relating to group function provides insight into the significance attached to the development and change of these accepted norms for the SLs in this team (RQ2, RQ3). The findings in relation to the research questions will be discussed in further detail in '5.5. – Addressing the research questions'.

5.5 Work discussion groups

This section will discuss the participants' explicit experiences of engaging in the WDG. Integral to building this picture were themes drawn and amalgamated predominantly from ‘Reflection on the use and function of communication: a revised channel’ (OT4), ‘Through new lenses: revisiting practice, revisiting the self’’ (OT6) with inclusion of key sub themes from ‘Senior Leadership Team: relationships, relating in role and developing the work group (OT2)’ and ‘Emotions, expectations and assumptions: surfacing and working with (OT3)’.

Participants depicted their experiences of the WDG through sharing their unexpected experiences of learning, the effects of listening and being listened to, engaging in reflection and exploration and revising their conceptualisations of their role and the SLT.

5.5.1 Learning: an unexpected challenge

Following the discussion in ‘5.4 – Leadership and Work Discussion’, it is somewhat predictable to find that during participants’ initial descriptions of engaging in the WDG, learning was reported to be found challenging. Whilst the interpretations of these findings are intrinsically linked to SLs’ perceptions of their working context, it is important to recognise that these experiences both influenced and were aroused through, the WDG. When exploring SLs’ experiences of engaging in the WDGs, the challenge of learning seemed to underpin their experiences of preparing presentations, feelings of exposure and the desire for quick fix solutions.

- ***Preparing presentations***

SLs reported the relationship between the presenter and presentation was of great significance; highlighting the importance placed on preparing and sharing presentations. This was further reflected in participants’ experiences of opting to share problems that they had been grappling with over a significant time period and were a source of preoccupation.

Using WDGs in this way had also been found in Elfer's (2012) research, whereby "the issues [nursery managers] brought for WD were the ones that had proved most problematic and intractable" (p135). Moreover, the personal relationship that SLs shared with their presentations highlighted the emotional enmeshment felt to bear through the lack of containment and opportunity to reflect existing within current practice.

- ***Exposure***

Consequently, when reflecting on their experiences of the WDG, some SLs reported feeling a sense of exposure when presenting to the group and sharing their thoughts on others' presentations. Sharing presentations with the group requested an activity that seemed to be at odds with the unconscious school culture of being seen to be coping and avoiding discussing experiences of challenge. As such, it was considered to be a great risk to share experiences or feedback with each other, that would potentially highlight personal or professional shortcomings to colleagues.

Similar findings have been reported in Ellis and Wolfe's (2019) action research into the experience of engaging in WDGs across three alternative provisions from the narratives of the group facilitators. Findings revealed a "marked pulling back from group members… [who were] 'not ready'… nor able to participate in case presentation" (p7). Ellis & Wolfe (2019) related this finding to high levels of stress and anxiety within the provisions themselves evoking engagement in basic assumption mentality amongst group members (Bion, 1961).

- ***Solutions***

SLs shared the varying attempts to come to and respond with solutions for the presentations shared in the WDGs. However, the search for solutions seemed to be fuelled by the emotional weight of the presentation on the presenter, indicative of unconscious individual and group processes.

Similar findings were discussed in Maggs' (2014) research, where participants expressed frustration with not being provided a direct 'solution' to their presentations, despite this not being the primary task of the WDG. Maggs' (2014) intention was to promote "some acknowledgement of the sense that working with SEBD was an inherently challenging process, both at a practical and emotional level, but that through sharing information through WDGs, one might derive some sense of containment from one's peers and resolution of difficulties" (p121).

Furthermore Jackson's (2008) paper describing the application and development of the work discussion method within educational settings, discussed teachers' hopes of the provision of "a menu of magical solutions to solve any problem" (p66) and therefore placed emphasis on the importance of WDG facilitators to clarify their own role and task. These notions can be directly linked to Menzies Lyth (1979) who asserted "the acknowledgement and working through of such feelings is not easy, although it is an important part of staff support and primary task performance to do so" (p230).

- ***The challenge of listening***

When reflecting on the WDG, some SLs reported their experiences of listening in the group as challenging; arousing feelings of defensiveness and debilitation. These experiences were most frequently associated to the experience of turning the chair from the group, following their presentation.

Similar findings were reported in Ellis and Wolfe's (2019) research where participants were observed to "talk over each other and lacked both coherence and clarity in their comments. Participants seemed to find it very difficult to hear anything that other colleagues had to say" (p7). This difficulty in listening was linked to the group functioning within a basic assumption mentality; not in a position of "readiness" (p7) to engage with the primary task (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019).

- ***Defence against learning***

Bion (1962) argued that in order to be in a position to learn, one needs to hold a capacity to consider what one might not already know; where links need to be made and where further information or thinking may be required. Waddell (2002) defined this concept as a, "capacity that resides in the more complex and arduous process of 'getting to know' something, supported by being able to tolerate both the sense of infinity (that there is always something more to know) and of doubt (that is being able not to know)" (p115).

However, when applied to the experiences described by SLs, their relationships to their presentations, the fear of exposure and the desire to find quick fix solutions, made learning initially, an unbearable task. Furthermore, the absence of spaces to think and learn about their practice in school were overwhelmed by the need to appear knowledgeable at the expense of discovering more. This sheds further light on the denial of the unknown and the culture of copying as described in '5.3.2 - External world'.

Jackson (2008) found during the early phase of a WDG's life, it is not uncommon for staff to be cautious about what and how they share, out of a fear that they will be exposed, ashamed and open to the criticisms of others. Jackson (2008) links this to the idea that "learning is not simply a pleasurable experience, as it takes us out of the realms of what is known and familiar, into what is unknown and, as yet, unfamiliar. And, as we all know, the unknown generates anxieties" (p70).

5.5.2 Learning: from listening and being listened to

Through engaging in the WDGs, SLs reported a discrete emphasis on the learning undertaken through developing their capacity to listen. Their experiences also incorporated feeling heard and developing an awareness of shared experiences.

- ***Learning to listen and feeling heard***

The participants reported a dramatic shift in their relationship to listening. The SLs reported making a conscious effort to actively listen to the feedback of others and relate their ideas to what others had shared.

Participants' relationship to listening was also transformed through their experiences of feeling heard. Previous research has also found teachers reported feeling listened to through engaging in WDGs (Maggs, 2014). This feeling was linked to the development of emotional security with members of the group through the provision of a space where expression of difficulties and challenges could be aired.

As per the finding of the current research, whilst this approach was reported to contrast with the initial desires for the provision of "immediate solutions…where possible, rather than to encourage thinking about any difficulties that arose" (p125). Findings indicated that participants did find the group helpful. This was also supported by Jackson's (2008) research reporting 93% of staff found engaging in WDGs to be supportive.

- ***Shared experiences***

In this research, engaging in the WDG provided the SLs an opportunity to learn about and from each other, and connect on a relational level. These findings are supported by previous research where participants reported recognising shared experiences between each other through engaging in the WDGs (Elfer, 2012; Hulusi, 2007; Maggs, 2014). However, this included divergence of participants' experiences from the normalising of experiencing problems (Maggs, 2014), and the retreat and defence against an association of shared experience (Hulusi, 2007).

Hulusi's (2007) findings may bear reflection of the current research participants' early experiences of engaging in the group. This is likely due to Hulusi's (2007) findings relating to participants engagement in only two WDG sessions, and as indicated in '5.4.4 - Time', this is a relatively short period to engage in safe collaborative discussion with other work discussion members.

5.5.3 Reflection and exploration: learning of the self and others

SLs reported through engaging in the WDGs, novel opportunities to reflect, explore, learn from and about, the self and others. Additionally, this seemed to develop more honest and collaborative discussion.

- ***Exploring and reflecting***

Participants reported various experiences of exploring and reflecting, individually and with each other throughout their engagement in the WDG. These experiences included exploration of observed relationships, reframing ideas and developing new skills.

Previous research has directly acknowledged participants engagement in this type of learning as novel. Maggs (2014) reported that teachers expressed that "WDGs had created a space for thought and reflection where this had been absent" (p78). Whilst nursery managers directly related reflective experiences to exploring emotion; considering the experience of WDG as "a collective power of a committed group of professionals to enable thinking about, rather than avoidance of, difficult emotion" (Elfer 2012, p135).

- ***Learning***

Through engaging in these processes in the WDG, SLs reported various experiences of learning. These experiences were typically reported as engaging with challenge, learning through their presentations, learning about the self and others.

Opportunities to learn about the self through engaging in WDGs has previously been reported through the discussion of presentations and focus of feedback in the group (Jackson, 2008). However, despite adopting a similar approach in this study, learning about the self-appeared to be a key factor for all SLs. Whilst this was not a specific intentional agenda of the WDG, this learning may be reflective of the absence of space to think about one's role and tasks in relation to the self, and how this interaction can develop certain responses from the individual (Tucker, 2012).

Elfer (2012) also found engaging in WDGs offered participants opportunity to make sense of the self and others. For example, when reflecting on shared expectations that the nursery managers felt they "were often expected and often expected of themselves, to be omnipotent" (p135), the group provided opportunity to discuss, rather than avoid these notions, and question and modify their approaches to practice.

- ***Honest and collaborative discussion***

SLs, when reflecting on the evolving approaches to communication in the WDG, reported various experiences of developing collaborative ideas and exchanging honest feedback. The intensity felt of these experiences may reflect that the members of this WDG were already an existing ‘team’. This enabled participants to make comparisons of their perceptions about the collaborative and honest nature of discussions and exchanges prior to, during and following engaging in the WDGs.

Experiences of developing more honest or congruent feedback have also been found in previous research. Nursery managers engaging in WDGs reported exploration and reflection enabled the development of a capacity for difference (Elfer, 2012). The focus in these WDGs enabled capacity to consider why and how conflictual difference emerged within their settings without the need to assign blame or judgement (Elfer, 2012).

- ***Containment***

The developing capacity to engage in reflection, exploration and learning reported by SLs seems to be indicative of a developing sense of emotional security and feeling contained (Bion, 1985).

Hulusi (2007) reported recording of his WDGs offered a unique insight into the processes within the group that seemed to enable NQTs to experience containment. This was demonstrated by observing the group attend to an initially unmanageable presentation, help manage the presenter’s concern through facilitating and enabling thinking to occur, resulting in enabling the processed presentation to be introjected by the presenter (Hulusi, 2007).

Much of the previous research into WDGs corroborate these findings, by attending to reports of feeling contained (Elfer, 2012; Maggs, 2014; Jackson, 2008) or through the researchers’ observations and interpretation of the group functioning (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Jackson 2008).

5.5.4 Revised concepts: the self and the team

SLs observed the adoption of new approaches, their developing confidence and congruence within their individual practice, and their perceptions of the development of team work across the SLs, both within and outside of the WDG.

- ***Confidence and congruence***

Through surfacing challenging and often painful emotions, both directly and indirectly through their presentations, SLs reported engaging in the WDG enabled them to work with their emotions, instead of denying or rejecting them. This was reported to develop a new found congruence within their practice and having this accepted and encouraged by the group, led to an increasing sense of confidence.

Jackson (2008) also found that staff reported developing a deeper understanding about the meaning of behaviour and new ways of engaging with challenging or disruptive pupils, which led to a perceived increase in confidence and decrease in feelings of stress.

- ***Working as a team***

Engaging in the WDG, enabled the participants to share and explore challenges that others could identify with, fostering a sense of trust within the group. Experiencing this, empowered SLs to revise the function and purpose of the SLT. This incorporated the development and nurturing of trusting supportive relationships, shared responsibility and the desire to protect a shared space for continued thought and refection.

Elfer (2012) also reported nursery managers experienced “a renewed determination to create time for themselves for reflection and mutual support” (p138) and engaged in more collaborative working opportunities through “the reduction of competition between individual nurseries” (p138). Maggs’ (2012) research also highlighted this experience in teachers’ reports of improved communication, “so that all of the people working with child…have been involved in offering their perspective” (p78), where this previously had not occurred.

Jackson (2008) discussed this concept further, highlighting that as group members develop their thinking and understanding not only in relation to their own specific presentations, but in relation to a much wider range of issues, this can lead to a culture of peer support developing amongst members ensuring that the work of the WDG takes place increasingly in the wider culture and context of the school.

- ***Revised concepts***

SLs reported experiences of revisiting and revising accepted concepts and practice. This included a perceived increase in the capacity to think more holistically and reflect on their experiences and interactions, develop reflexive communication, protect time for each other, and support their own and others’ emotional wellbeing.

Previous research has also found participants to report developments of a “renewed capacity to tolerate discomfort and uncertainty” (Elfer, 2012, p138), and through thinking about emotions and feelings evoked in the self, enable thinking about the systemic implications for the children within their workplaces (Elfer, 2012).

5.5.5 Summary

SLs reported that learning within the WDG was challenging. This was largely felt to be expressed due to the requirements of the task; reflection, exploration and surfacing and working with emotions, were at odds with the practise instilled within the group to protect themselves from the challenges of their roles.

However, through engaging in the WDGs, SLs shared experiences of feeling heard, and developing an awareness of shared experiences. These experiences were reported in tandem with participants placing a discrete emphasis on the learning undertaken through developing their capacity to listen, trust and reflect.

SLs reported that engaging in the WDGs offered novel opportunities to reflect, explore, learn from and about the self and others, consequently developing more honest and collaborative discussion. Participants also attributed the adoption of new approaches, the development of congruence and confidence within their individual practice and across the SLT; both within and outside of the WDGs, to their experiences of engaging in the WDGs.

- ***Answering the research questions***

This section discusses the direct experiences of the WDG. Essential themes in the participants' narratives highlight the challenges and opportunities available through engaging in work discussion. The experiences conveyed are vital to understanding how participants' experienced engaging in the WDGs (RQ1), and the perceived impact on SLs' thoughts, feelings and practice, during and after the groups had finished (RQ2, RQ3). The findings in relation to the research questions will be discussed in further detail below.

5.6 Addressing the research questions

- ***How do participants describe their experience of engaging in work discussion groups (RQ1)?***

SLs reported that learning within the WDG was both a challenging and rewarding learning experience. Reported experiences of challenge were predominantly felt to be expressed due to the requirements of the task of work discussion; reflection, exploration and surfacing and working with emotions, being at odds with the practise instilled within the school culture to protect staff from the challenges of their roles.

However, through engaging in the WDG, participants placed significant emphasis on the learning they had undertaken through developing their capacity to surface and reflect on the emotional underpinnings of behaviour and interaction, and the impact that this had on their observation and communicative approaches. Through learning both implicitly and explicitly about these processes, the participants reported the WDG offered novel opportunities to reflect, explore, learn from and about the self and others.

- ***How do participants describe the perceived effect of attending work discussion groups on their thoughts and feelings (RQ2)?***

The SLs reported that prior to their engagement, and at the start of the WDGs, their experiences of leadership were preoccupied by managing the challenging contexts, increasing external expectations and standards of practice with diminishing internal and external resources. These challenges resulted in various emotional experiences to be played out both consciously and unconsciously, individually and across the SLT. Participants shared narratives of experiencing painful emotions linked to the stress induced by undertaking a senior leadership role.

However, through engaging in the WDG, SLs shared experiences of feeling heard, reflecting on their interpretations of the challenges they faced alongside surfacing and exploring their emotional responses attributed to them. Participants reported a sense of emotional security, feelings of containment, acceptance and a renewed confidence. Consequently, these experiences were reported to develop a sense of trust and belonging within the SLT, instilling a desire for future investment in the support and development of the relational foundations built through engaging in work discussion.

- ***How do participants describe the perceived effect of attending work discussion groups on their practice as a senior leader (RQ3)?***

The participants reported that prior to participating in the sessions, their practise as SLs focussed on procedural or bureaucratic tasks, observing, monitoring and increasing the output of other staff groups and maintaining the image of cohesion, unity and calm; despite often feeling at odds with these notions. Consequently, practice was also reported to be impeded by a preoccupation with developing group identity, and unhelpful associations to support, and concepts of boundaries and safety.

However, through engaging in the WDG, participants shared experiences of developing observation skills, developing holistic approaches to conceptualising their experiences, and responding to work with what they conceived to be more measured approaches.

This was reported to be directly transferred into practice, with participants sharing experiences of being able to move forwards from challenging and unsatisfying positions they had taken up and were put into. Participants reported having a renewed capacity to think with and support others, revise conceptualisations of their role, concepts of support and others' practice.

5.7 Reflections on the research

Through the process of conducting this research, I have reflected on the journey of this project by keeping a research diary and engaging in multiple forms of supervision. The process of engaging in this research has been a challenging one, with invaluable opportunities for learning about the processes of conducting research, the research topic and about myself as a practitioner and researcher.

My experience in primary school education prior to embarking in training to be an educational psychologist has afforded me opportunities of whole class teaching and subject and project-based leadership. Within these roles, I experienced the impact of stress on myself and the impact of the stress of others, born and perpetuated by the experience of working in schools. Across my previous roles I have experienced both the containing and considered support from SLs, and the sense of abandonment and isolation of being left to my own devices to manage challenging working contexts and implement whole school initiatives with an overworked and stressed staff group.

Having undertaken the research, I can see that some of my personal experiences are reflected in the findings of this study, alongside the overwhelming degree of stress amongst the SLs, and the significance of surfacing, acknowledging and containing the emotional content within the problematic observations presented. Reflecting back on my work in schools, I can see how the provision of containment and opportunities to reflect on my practice are inherently interwoven with my most valued experiences, despite being situated in challenging and personally demanding circumstances.

Some aspects of the research journey stand out in my mind as particularly notable. Through facilitating the WDGs, I was in a position to experience alongside the participants their challenge and resistance to engaging with the primary task of the group. Through accessing specific supervision for this role, I was able to reflect and explore my own experiences alongside what these experiences indicated for the group. Additionally, I was fortunate to be part of their journey of developing capacity and trust to surface challenging emotions related to their experiences of work. This enabled an unparalleled experience of being part of the transition of basic assumption to work group, that has given me invaluable learning into the developmental stages of group communication and containment.

Whilst undertaking the research, I was encouraged by listening to the SLs' individual perspectives of the challenge and growth through engaging in the WDGs. I had not engaged with the SLs on an individual level and this gave me opportunity to hear and understand in detail the experiences behind some of the interactions I had observed within the groups. Moreover, many of the SLs shared during interview, that the interview process itself had given them space to consider further their learning within the group and re-motivated a determination to ensure space for reflection and team development were continued in their practice.

A consideration during my analysis and write up of my results was whether the exploratory orientation of my research was still appropriate to my findings, which at times perhaps appear to have taken a more explanatory or evaluative stance. However, Robson and McCartan's (2016) argue that all research tends to give some explanation for their findings regardless of the purpose. Smith et al. (2009) support this notion, asserting that interpretation of findings is necessary in order to promote understanding. Whilst I have tried to convey the story of the SLs' experiences of engaging in WDGs, there is still much to understand about the experiences of this group in education more generally, and in addition to the experience of engaging in work discussion.

5.8 Research trustworthiness and limitations

To ensure the trustworthiness of this research, Yardley's (2000) evaluative criteria as cited in Smith et al. (2009) as a means of ensuring validity and reliability in IPA research was adopted; full details of how the researcher has applied these criteria can be found in '3.11 Reliability of the study'. However, there are some limitations of the study that are highlighted when utilising these criteria, and as such, will be discussed in turn.

- ***Sociocultural setting***

Within Yardley's (2000) principle of 'sensitivity to context', she states the social context of the relationship between the participants and researchers are of crucial relevance. She states that often "speech [is not] a revelation of internal feelings, beliefs or opinions, but as an act of communication intended to have specific meanings for and effects on particular listeners" (p220-221).

The current researcher, therefore, was mindful of the duality of her role as both WDG facilitator and researcher. This is discussed in detail in '3.12.1 Reflexivity'. This limitation may be somewhat mitigated by the encouragement of the facilitator and willingness of participants within the WDG, to acknowledge when elements of the discussion felt more or less helpful or challenging to experience. Having this rapport pre-established, the researcher hoped this would enable the sharing of narratives that were less prone to reservation or defensiveness.

- ***Researcher's influence of participants' actions***

Yardley's (2000) states that the design of any study should incorporate consideration of the general and specific effects of the researchers' actions. When planning and conducting the interviews, the researcher was careful to adopt an interview style that aimed to welcome and enable insight into the participants' experiences without bringing the researchers' own interpretations into the interview process. This was actioned through the use of various strategies as outlined in '3.8.2 Interview Procedures' to ensure credibility within the interview process.

Throughout the interviews, the researcher avoided re-framing participants' responses in recognition that this would have been an imposition of personal interpretations or potentially a form of intervention. This was something that the researcher was very mindful of due to the duality of researcher and WDG facilitator roles; the latter of which involved asking explorative, clarifying and circular questioning with the very intention of reframing or exposing alternative narratives. Aware that this approach would be unfamiliar to the participants, the researcher emphasised the separate but related experiences of the WDG and the interview, acknowledging the different roles, approaches and boundaries.

- ***The balance of power in the research***

Within Yardley's (2000) principle of 'sensitivity to context', she states that the balance of power within research holds a "crucial ethical dimension" (p221). This research has been of interest to the researcher's EPS training placement, and the researcher in role as TEP and WDG facilitator accessed supervision for the WDG from the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP). However, the supervision contracted between the facilitator and PEP enabled assurance of confidentiality and therefore mitigated influence of this dynamic into the WDG, and consequent research. Furthermore, the research was undertaken in a primary school that was not allocated to the TEP's school allocation, enabling a more indirect link between the school and the EPS.

The duality of the role of the researcher and WDG facilitator was explicitly communicated to the participants' prior to engaging in the groups. Alongside this, whilst the researcher has facilitated other WDGs prior to this one, it was emphasised that engaging in WDGs for research was a novel approach for the facilitator, and that the process within its entirety would take a considered, but fundamentally exploratory form. It was hoped that with this emphasis, participants would not feel an imbalance of power during the WDG or at interview to the detriment of either experience.

- ***Reflexivity***

When reflecting on the researchers' position with the study, attempts have been made to ensure sensitivity to values, interests and preconceptions of the researcher as such variables have clear potential to influence the interpretation of the findings (Willig, 2013).

The researcher's personal interest in the application of systems psychodynamic theory has consequently led to the interpretation of participant's experiences through this lens. Whilst it could be plausible to interpret the participant's experiences through an alternative psychological framework in order to generate a different interpretation, it could be equally plausible that another researcher applying the same systems psychodynamic lens may have developed interpretations favouring components of experience that the present researcher has not.

However, the researcher ensured that the systematic process offered by IPA was utilised, ensuring as far as possible that the participants' articulated experiences remained the axiom in any discussions of the data. This was facilitated by the researcher sharing, discussing and developing initial interpretations and codes with the research supervisor and a research supervision group. This enabled application of psychological theory to be implemented through inductive as opposed to deductive approaches during interpretation.

Additionally, following and returning to Yardley's (2000) criteria throughout the design and implementation of this study, and providing data to allow for an independent audit to be carried out, it is hoped that the transparency of the approach to research demonstrates that "the account produced is a credible one, not that it is the only credible one." (Smith, et al., 2009).

- ***Importance and utility***

Yardley (2000) states that the "the decisive criterion by which any piece of research must be judged is, arguably, its impact" (p223). Considering this criterion leads one to recognise the tension between the idiographic nature of IPA research and the generalisability of the findings to the population beyond that of the participants in this study.

The research aim; to explore the experience of SLs engaging in a WDG, does not intend to yield enduring or universal causal principles. However, it is hoped that through providing a rich and comprehensive account of participants' experiences in this study, "the goal to provide local knowledge – that is to address a specific problem or question" (Marecek, 2003, p63) has been achieved.

Despite this, it is clear from the existing literature that the lived experience of SLs engaging in any form of supportive space in scarce; and given the context of rising national stress for this group, any information pertaining to SLs and their experience, should be of note for stakeholders invested in developing more considered opportunities for support for these professionals.

5.9 Research implications and dissemination

5.9.1 Implications for senior leaders

In March 2019, the Education Secretary announced the formation of an expert advisory group to consider how teachers and school leaders can be better supported to deal with the pressures of their working roles (DfE, 2019). Whilst this research, as previously discussed, is not intended to be generalisable, it may inspire ideas for further consideration in light of the experiences offered regarding leadership in education prior to support, and the experiences during and following engagement in WDGs. As such, the researcher intends to share a written summary of this research with the advisory group.

5.9.2 Implications for educational psychology practice

Documented explicitly and extensively in previous research of the use of WDGs in educational contexts, are implications pertaining to the structure and setting, timing and duration, location, membership, size and facilitation for consideration when implementing WDGs (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Hulusi 2007; Hulusi & Maggs 2017; Jackson 2002, 2005, 2008; Maggs 2014).

The implementation of this research was planned in light of the implications discussed in this literature base, and as such, findings from this research either corroborate the literature, or avoided issues experienced in previous literature entirely by applying the learning from the experiences described, as explored in the discussions of the research findings.

The researcher intends to share a written summary of this research with the Principal Educational Psychologist within the EPS and will be presenting the research to the EPS during a team meeting. This is intended to enable opportunities for further discussion of the role of the EP and EPS in the provision of support for SLs and SLTs, and the use and facilitation of WDGs.

- ***Support for senior leaders and senior leadership teams***

As reported through the findings, the SLs in this research reported experiencing stress within their roles, which led to unconscious adoption and formation of behaviours that were detrimental to the primary task of their roles. This instilled working cultures that were reported to impact themselves and their colleagues.

SLs, due to their positions in educational organisations to promote and implement organisational change, are privy to a substantial measure of institutional and professional knowledge, and as practitioners and participants in work discussion groups, are in a situation that enables active exploration and testing of hypotheses that are formulated (Rustin, 2008). Furthermore, working with SLs provides opportunity to extend Hulusi and Maggs' (2015) suggestion of "containing the containers" (p1) by a further step; encouraging a whole school approach to reflective and supportive practice.

Through the findings of this research, following engagement in the WDG, SLs reported a desire to transfer their experiences of the group to their practice with each other outside of the group, and to their practice with other staff groups. Given that almost all of the research into the use of WDGs in educational contexts advises support from SLs to protect and promote the operation of the WDGs, it could be suggested that in order to recognise the value of engaging in such groups SLs may benefit from engaging in this experience themselves.

- ***The use of work discussion groups***

Supportive groups for educational professionals have been implemented by educational psychologists for decades. These have taken various forms and with a range of intended objectives and outcomes.

This research proposes through the experiences reported by the participants of this study, that WDGs offering a specific provision where “experience [can] be sensitively thought about, and practices questioned in a way that is attentive to underlying emotion and individual experience” (Elfer, 2012, p133), can be a helpful method of working with staff in educational organisations to manage stress, and think more reflectively about the experiences of what is conceptualised as everyday school life.

5.9.3 Future Research

- ***Senior leadership teams***

Whilst research and literature into leadership in education is both expansive and vast, studies concerning ‘leadership’ generally focus on information pertaining to head teachers exclusively. The research into the lived experience of SLs and SLTs in schools continues to hold a relatively vacant research base. Given the findings of this research and recent research highlighting experiences of stress related to this group (ESP, 2018), there appears to be rationale and space for research involving participants of this demographic.

- ***Work discussion groups***

The research into the use and experience of WDGs in schools also has a small research base. Previous research has explored the experiences of nursery managers (Elfer, 2012), teachers (Hulusi, 2007; Jackson, 2002, 2005, 2008), teachers working with children with special needs (Ellis & Wolfe 2019; Maggs, 2014), and now SLs. However, the nature of the research undertaken enables further research with these groups to be appropriate. This could also explore the experiences from other staff group perspectives and the experiences of the facilitators.

In addition to this, research could take steps into the tentative evaluation of these groups to consider lasting change in reflective practice and the effects on the staff and children working directly with participants of these groups.

5.10 Conclusion

This research aimed to explore SLs' experiences of engaging in a WDG within their primary school. To do this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six SLs who had been involved in the group. The research was conducted within a social constructivist ontology and epistemology and the interview data was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis.

This gave rise to seven overarching themes: ' Conceptualisations of leadership: juggling responsibilities, increasing expectations and re-thinking role (OT1)', 'Senior Leadership Team: relationships, relating in role and developing the work group (OT2)', 'Emotions, expectations and assumptions: surfacing and working with (OT3)', 'Reflection on and the use and function of communication: a revised channel (OT4)', ‘Negotiating difference, boundaries and safety: relational concepts (OT5)’, ‘Through new lenses: revisiting practice, revisiting the self (OT6)’ and ‘Time: restraints pressures and necessity for growth (OT7)’.

The themes were found to be inter-related and the impact of stress and group dynamics and function, had a strong influence over the other themes. With regards to previous literature, this study supports findings that containment, developing supportive organisational culture and engagement in reflective practice offered through work discussion, are integral to not only developing and promoting thought to challenging experiences, but to developing practice and relations between staff.

These experiences were however, reported to initially come as a relative cost to the individuals within the group and the SLT as a whole. Namely, the challenge of moving from positions of ‘knowing’ to positions of ‘uncertainty’, which were reported to involve moving through safe and unsafe territory. However, the study has also revealed a rich variety of perspectives from participants expressing desires to seek further opportunities of this kind and ensure that time is protected to maintain and continue to develop the type of sharing and reflection fostered within the WDG.

The results of this study were discussed in relation to wider theoretical frameworks relating to systems psychodynamic theory. In particular, the findings were considered in relation to participants’ use of adaptive and maladaptive defence mechanisms.

Implications for EPs include provision of support for SLs and the unique contribution using WDGs in educational settings can offer. Implications for SLs include the importance of accessing protected, appropriately facilitated, space to consider their individual practice, and reflect and develop their working as an SLT. Suggestions for future research include further research into the experiences of senior leaders, senior leadership teams and work discussion in education.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Theoretical underpinning of work discussion groups

- ***Psychoanalysis***

The principal assertion by Freud (Freud, 1920; Halton, 1994; Solms, 2015) that an individual has an unconscious mind and that this can shape, to an extent, their behaviour is a fundamental principle of psychoanalysis. In its most basic form, Freud's premise is that experiences from our past (infancy and childhood) can exert an influence on present functioning that is below our conscious awareness.

However, when confronted by painful emotional experiences (that may unconsciously represent past experiences), anxiety can be triggered (McLeod, 2009). To manage this anxiety, defence mechanisms of various types are deployed (McLeod, 2009). These defences might include displacement, idealisation, denigration, denial, repression and many others (see Vaillant and Vaillant, 1986, for a full exposition), coupled by the related processes of splitting, projection and projective identification (Klein, 1946; Hinshelwood, 1994; Pellegrini, 2010).

Bion's theory of the "container–contained" relationship (Symington & Symington, 1996, p. 50) is another fundamental principle of psychoanalysis. This describes the parent, manager or organisation's ability to hold the projected feelings, make sense of them and return them to their source in a digestible manner, rather than interpreting them as a trigger to often quite reactive and punitive action. Containment consequently shapes the organisational holding environment (Stapely, 2006), with the potential to increase or decrease the capacity to think, to reflect, and to be slightly freer from unconscious processes.

Klauber (2008) describes the WDG model as "the epitome of the application of psychoanalytic ideas" (2008, pxix), whereby psychoanalytic ideas can be brought into conscious awareness, and so acknowledged by the worker in a meaningful way (Obholzer & Zagier Roberts, 1994).

- ***Group Relations***

Group Relations theory, emerging through the work of Bion (1961) and Lewin (1947) postulates that groups can be conceived of as discrete entities, different in form and function from the individuals comprising them. Furthermore, groups operate on two levels: gathering together to complete a task; the ‘work’ group, or a ‘basic assumption’ group. This latter constitutes the same members as the work group, but manifests in behaviours that are designed to alleviate group anxiety and may well run counter to the aims of the work group.

Additionally, Bion postulated the theory of ‘transference’ and ‘counter-transference’ where he used of his own feelings; his ‘counter-transference experiences’, to infer what might be at play in the group (Fraher, 2004). This theory encourages attention to be paid to discern what feelings belong to the facilitator and what to the system, and to consider the meaning of what is projected into the former, thereby allowing it to be used as ‘intelligence’ about what is at play in the organisation (Armstrong, 2005).

The second theoretical root of group relations comes from the work of Lewin (1947). Lewin developed a theory of fields and forces by exploring the way groups behave, how others experience them, and also observe group-as-a-whole behaviours in the ‘here-and-now’, demonstrating that the group could be an intelligible field of study (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; Coch & French, 1948).

- ***Open Systems Theory***

Rice (1953) ‘Open Systems theory’ has clear integration with psychoanalytic and group relations theory through its ideas concerning organisations, boundaries and tasks. Rice (1953) describes organisations as open systems; taking in elements from outside themselves, transforming them and then releasing them.

However, organisations such as school often present themselves as closed for example, through the use of a hierarchical diagram with the head at the top and little or no reference to the student population. This fails to capture the dynamic through flow of a system and denies the existence of the emotional and psychological dynamics at play.

In order to effect a transformation of inputs into outputs, a permeable ‘boundary’ around the system is needed. A great emphasis is placed on leadership as a boundary activity, deciding what is allowed into a system, where it will go to (through delegation) and monitoring the flow of inputs and outputs.

Additionally, Rice coined the ‘primary task’; “the task the system must carry out in order to survive” and to which all sub-systems must be aligned (Roberts, 1994, p. 29). Clarity of primary task ensures the highest level of output, yet this is not always easy to ensure, especially in the messy business of managing human beings. Together, these theories are utilised not only to consider the material being brought to the group, but how ‘ground rules’ and ‘processes’ taking place within the group.

Appendix 2. Literature review: search strategy

- ***Search strategy & results***

Using the Search Strategy identified in Table 5, the following databases were searched: PsychINFO, Education Source, ERIC, PEP Archive, SocINDEX, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, EBSCOhost, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, MEDLINE, Health Business Elite and CINAHL.

Table 5. Search Strategy

SLR	**Search Strategy**	
Search IDs	S2.1	S2. 2
Search Terms (Boolean “OR”)	“work discussion group*	“education”
		“school”
		“schools”
	“work discussion groups*	“nursery”
		“nurseries”
Total	134	8,071,424
Boolean “OR” Cross-Search	S2.1 **AND** S2.2= 23	

After implementing this search strategy, the following limiters were applied. The impact of the limiters is detailed in Table 6.

Table 6. Search Limiters

Search Limiters Applied	**Number of articles excluded**	**Research Papers Remaining**
1. English Language	1	23
2. Published between 2007 – 2019	7	16

Appendix 3. Literature review: inclusion and exclusion criteria and application

Table 7 details the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to all research papers that the original search strategy found.

Table 7.

	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1.	Empirical papers	Use of secondary data sources
2.	Peer reviewed	Editorials or Book reviews
3.	Research relates to the experience of a Work Discussion Group in an educational organisation.	Research relates to the experience of a Work Discussion Group in an organisation that is not a Nursery, School, 6th Form or College.
4.	Research relates to school-based staff's experience of a Work Discussion Group in an educational organisation.	Research relates to non-school-based staff's experience of a Work Discussion Group in an educational organisation.

- ***Application of exclusion criteria***

The following exclusion criteria was applied to the research papers generated from the original search strategies. The numerical effect this had on the original search can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Excluded Articles

Reason for Exclusion	Exclusion Code	Number of Studies Excluded
Use of secondary data sources	A	1
Editorials or Book reviews	B	3
Research relates to the experience of a Work Discussion Group in an organisation that is not a Nursery, School, 6th Form or College.	C	3
Research relates to non-school-based staff's experience of a Work Discussion Group in an educational organisation.	D	2
Non-empirical paper	E	4

The following studies have been excluded from the systematic literature reviews based upon the above exclusion criteria. For details of individual studies excluded, please see Table 9.

Table 9. Excluded articles

Excluded Articles		
Article		**Reason for Exclusion**
1.	de Rementeria, A. (2011). How the use of transference and countertransference, particularly in parent-infant psychotherapy, can inform the work of an education or childcare practitioner. Psychodynamic Practice: Individuals, Groups and Organisations, 17(1), 41-56. doi:10.1080/14753634.2011.539351	D
2.	Elfer, P., Greenfield, S., Robson, S., Wilson, D., & Zachariou, A. (2018). Love, satisfaction and exhaustion in the nursery: methodological issues in evaluating the impact of Work Discussion groups in the nursery. Early Child Development and Care, 188(7), 892-904.	E
3.	Elfer, P., Dearnley, K., & Wilson, D. (2019). Work Discussion in English nurseries: reflecting on their contribution so far and issues in developing their aims and processes; and the assessment of their impact in a climate of austerity and intense audit. Infant Observation, 21(2), 189-203.	A
4.	Ho, D. (2007). Mentoring. Work discussion groups in clinical supervision in mental health nursing. British Journal of Nursing, 16(1), 39-46.	C
5.	Ho, D. (2007). Work discussion groups in clinical supervision in mental health nursing. British Journal Of Nursing (Mark Allen Publishing), 16(1), 39.	C
6.	Jackson, E. (2015). Work discussion groups as a container for sexual anxieties in schools. In D. Armstrong & M. Rustin (Eds.), Social defences against anxiety: Explorations in a paradigm. (pp. 269-283). London: Karnac Books.	E
7.	Lisman-Pieczanski, N., & Blessing, D. (2011). News from Washington DC: Infant and young child observation program. Infant Observation, 14(2), 224-226. doi:10.1080/13698036.2011.583442	B
8.	Lubbe, T. (2014). Some considerations of the role of food in community work. Psycho-analytic Psychotherapy in South Africa, 22(1), 70-91.	C
9.	McLoughlin, C. (2010). Concentric circles of containment: A psychodynamic contribution to working in pupil referral units. Journal of Child Psychotherapy, 36(3), 225-239. doi:10.1080/0075417X.2010.524772	E
10.	Moore, M. (2018). Work discussion as a method for supporting peripatetic teachers of vulnerable children. Infant Observation, 21(1), 88-97.	E

11.	Serpieri, S. A., & Giusti, P. (2007). Education "on the Road": Working with Adolescent Dropouts in an Experimental Project. International Journal on School Disaffection, 5(1), 11-15.	D
12.	Shulman, G., & Green, V. (2008). Editorial. Journal of Child Psychotherapy, 34(1), 1-4. doi:10.1080/00754170801945097	B
13.	Williams, M. H., Rhode, M., Rustin, M., & Williams, G. P. (2012). Enabling and inspiring: A tribute to Martha Harris. London;: Karnac Books. Harris Meltzer Trust.	B

Following screening for quality using an adapted version of Walsh and Downe's (2006) evaluation tool, the following three papers were excluded. Decisions for justification are recorded next to each individual paper in Table 10.

Table 10. Excluded papers following appraisal

	Article	**Reason for Exclusion**
1.	Ellis, G., & Wolfe, V. (2019). Facilitating work discussion groups with staff in complex educational provisions. Open Journal of Educational Psychology, 4.	• Researcher is reporting the perspectives of the facilitators of the WDG; not the educational staff engaging in the group.
2.	Hulusi, H. M., & Maggs, P. (2015). Containing the containers: Work Discussion Group supervision for teachers—A psychodynamic approach. Educational and Child Psychology, 32(3), 30-40.	• Researchers seem to be reporting secondary data. • No detail of analysis used for data. • Transparency and reflexivity of the research approach is not prevalent.
3.	Jackson, E. (2008). The development of work discussion groups in educational settings. Journal of Child Psychotherapy, 34(1), 62-82. doi:10.1080/00754170801900191	• Researcher is reporting secondary data. • No detail of analysis used for data. • Transparency and reflexivity of the research approach is not prevalent.

Appendix 4. Literature review: critical appraisals

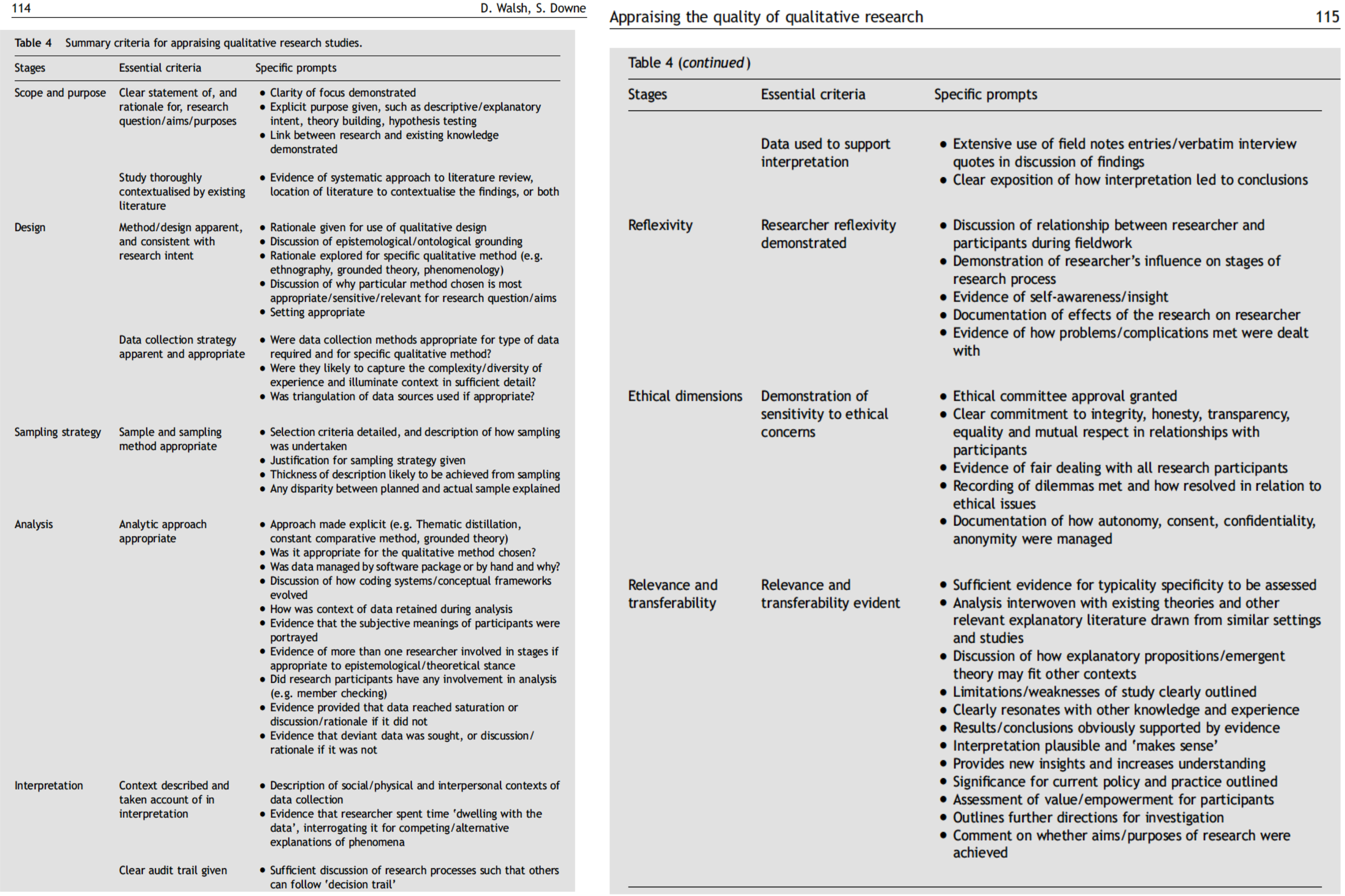

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Table 4 Summary criteria for appraising qualitative research studies.

Stages	Essential criteria	Specific prompts
Scope and purpose	Clear statement of, and rationale for, research question/aims/purposes	• Clarity of focus demonstrated • Explicit purpose given, such as descriptive/explanatory intent, theory building, hypothesis testing • Link between research and existing knowledge demonstrated
	Study thoroughly contextualised by existing literature	• Evidence of systematic approach to literature review, location of literature to contextualise the findings, or both
Design	Method/design apparent, and consistent with research intent	• Rationale given for use of qualitative design • Discussion of epistemological/ontological grounding • Rationale explored for specific qualitative method (e.g. ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology) • Discussion of why particular method chosen is most appropriate/sensitive/relevant for research question/aims • Setting appropriate
	Data collection strategy apparent and appropriate	• Were data collection methods appropriate for type of data required and for specific qualitative method? • Were they likely to capture the complexity/diversity of experience and illuminate context in sufficient detail? • Was triangulation of data sources used if appropriate?
Sampling strategy	Sample and sampling method appropriate	• Selection criteria detailed, and description of how sampling was undertaken • Justification for sampling strategy given • Thickness of description likely to be achieved from sampling • Any disparity between planned and actual sample explained
Analysis	Analytic approach appropriate	• Approach made explicit (e.g. Thematic distillation, constant comparative method, grounded theory) • Was it appropriate for the qualitative method chosen? • Was data managed by software package or by hand and why? • Discussion of how coding systems/conceptual frameworks evolved • How was context of data retained during analysis • Evidence that the subjective meanings of participants were portrayed • Evidence of more than one researcher involved in stages if appropriate to epistemological/theoretical stance • Did research participants have any involvement in analysis (e.g. member checking) • Evidence provided that data reached saturation or discussion/rationale if it did not • Evidence that deviant data was sought, or discussion/rationale if it was not
Interpretation	Context described and taken account of in interpretation	• Description of social/physical and interpersonal contexts of data collection • Evidence that researcher spent time 'dwelling with the data', interrogating it for competing/alternative explanations of phenomena
	Clear audit trail given	• Sufficient discussion of research processes such that others can follow 'decision trail'
	Data used to support interpretation	• Extensive use of field notes entries/verbatim interview quotes in discussion of findings • Clear exposition of how interpretation led to conclusions
Reflexivity	Researcher reflexivity demonstrated	• Discussion of relationship between researcher and participants during fieldwork • Demonstration of researcher's influence on stages of research process • Evidence of self-awareness/insight • Documentation of effects of the research on researcher • Evidence of how problems/complications met were dealt with
Ethical dimensions	Demonstration of sensitivity to ethical concerns	• Ethical committee approval granted • Clear commitment to integrity, honesty, transparency, equality and mutual respect in relationships with participants • Evidence of fair dealing with all research participants • Recording of dilemmas met and how resolved in relation to ethical issues • Documentation of how autonomy, consent, confidentiality, anonymity were managed
Relevance and transferability	Relevance and transferability evident	• Sufficient evidence for typicality specificity to be assessed • Analysis interwoven with existing theories and other relevant explanatory literature drawn from similar settings and studies • Discussion of how explanatory propositions/emergent theory may fit other contexts • Limitations/weaknesses of study clearly outlined • Clearly resonates with other knowledge and experience • Results/conclusions obviously supported by evidence • Interpretation plausible and 'makes sense' • Provides new insights and increases understanding • Significance for current policy and practice outlined • Assessment of value/empowerment for participants • Outlines further directions for investigation • Comment on whether aims/purposes of research were achieved

Figure 4. Walsh & Down, Qualitative research appraisal guidance

- ***Elfer, 2012: application of Walsh & Down appraisal guidance***

Elfer, P. (2012). Emotion in nursery work: Work discussion as a model of critical professional reflection.	
Yes No Unclear	Comments
🟩 **Context**	• Elfer’s research involved the engagement of nine nursery managers in an audio-recorded WDG for a period of nine sessions. The WDGs were facilitated by the researcher and a colleague with “group relations training[6]” (p133), who were accompanied by a Senior Advisor from the Local Authority (LA). During each WDG, two nursery managers were invited to share their written presentations to the group. • Following response to arising clarifying questions from one of the facilitators, the presenting nursery manager sat aside from the group discussion; listening but not contributing, whilst the rest of the group discussed the presentation and their individual perspectives on it. After approximately fifteen minutes, the presenting manager was asked to resume the group discussion and comment on what they had heard, or share any thoughts provoked. The facilitators “sensitively drew the attention of the group to possible underlying emotion in the discussion and aspects that appeared to have been avoided in discussion” (p133). • Each WDG was recorded and, the facilitators and the LA Senior Advisor recorded independent notes of their personal assessment of the process and progress of the group.
🟩 **Scope and purpose**	• Aim: to evaluate WDG as model of professional reflection for Nursery Managers. • Purpose: to report the emotional content of WDG presentations and share the Nursery Managers’ evaluations of the WDG. • Research and existing knowledge: Link between Nursey work and emotional labour, emotional labour requiring reflective space, reflective space enabling both emotional containment for staff and opportunity to apply theory to practice. • Study contextualised through existing literature: discussing application of WDG to various groups (p132) and highlighting scope to develop further research into WDG processes and outcomes. • It is of note that the researcher has cited his own previous work in this area, when positioning this study in the gap of existing literature and making claims of the potential interrelated functions of WDGs for nursery managers. Although not explicitly stated, this rationale suggests there may already have been a theory developed prior to undertaking this research. This suggests the adoption of a more deductive approach to grounded theory, questioning adherence to Glaser and Strauss (1967)’s emphasis that the researcher should have “no preconceived ideas” (p143) when collecting and analysing data.

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[6] Group Relations theory has been developed by the work of Bion (1961) and Lewin (1947) postulates that groups can be conceived of as discrete entities, different in form and function from the individuals comprising them. A description of this is available in Appendix 1.

Design	• 9x WDGs were audio recorded. • 6x Nursery Managers were interviewed (one-month post WDG); LA Senior Adviser interviewed five/six months post WDG. • Nursery Managers recorded' monthly diaries of 'prominent events of issues in their Nursery' (x65 collated). • WDG Facilitators and LA Senior Advisers' WDG recorded independent session notes after each WDG. • Data analysed through Grounded Theory and triangulated to generate themes.
Sampling strategy	• 6 Nursery Managers interviewed, from a possible of 9 Nursey Managers involved in the WDG – unclear as to why 3 weren't interviewed. • South East, UK.
Analysis	• The Work Discussion Groups were recorded, transcribed and coded through Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006), examining the content of WDG: "(1) What issue is being presented for discussion both in content and the form of presentation? (2) How is the issue elucidated by the initial explorations of the group? (3) How does the group discussion evolve, change, progress as it proceeds? What conclusions/outcomes are reached? (4) Is there any evidence of the presenter feeling assisted in managing the issue, development of the way the presenter is thinking about the issue, or development of the way the group is thinking?" (p134). • Results of the initial analysis were triangulated with the facilitators' WDG notes and the nursery managers' monthly diary entries. During this second stage of the process, the researcher reports coding was guided by the following three questions: "(1) What are the main issues/events identified in the diary for this month? (2) What data are there about the way these issues/events are presented that are indicative of management style? (3) Are there any data that demonstrate or suggest a link between what the manager has written in the diary and what has been discussed and thought about in the WD group?" (p134). • Nursery Manager interviews were then coded for comments relating to process and outcomes of WDG. • Three data sets brought together to triangulate and identify shared themes.

Key Findings	• Nursery Managers experiences of the WDG: • (i) The collective power of a committed group of professionals to enable thinking about, rather than avoidance of, difficult emotion and its impact on professional practice: WDG enabling the discussion of challenging and emotionally stirring work. • (ii) The pressure to be positive for fear of a spiral of despair: WDG enabling exploration of desire to create cheerful environments through omnipotent expectations and suppression of negative emotions expressed by adults and children. • (iii) The emotional experience of being a manager: satisfaction but also guilt and loneliness: WDG enabling sharing of conflicting emotions about asking staff for more work, and not being able to confide in colleagues. • (iv) Conflict between the differing tasks and expectations of nursery – financial viability, nursery education, day care and family support: WDG enabling opportunity to share conflicting contextual financial demands and meeting the standards/expectations of others. • (v) Split communication, split thinking: WDG enabling the exploration of split views encouraging staff to be able to integrate polarising thoughts and positions. • Nursery Managers evaluation: • Comforting reality of shared experiences of challenges and reduced competition • Reframe negativity and therefore approach to dealing with this in the Nurseries. • Renewed determination to invest in time for reflection and mutual support.
Interpretation	• Interviews with Nursery Managers are reported, whilst interviews with LA Senior Advisor is reported to be through ‘meeting’ and ‘telephone’. • National contexts of Nursery working, and in some instances of Education more broadly have been explored extensively, within introduction, results and discussion. • Researcher has used own, co-facilitator’s and LA Senior Advisor’s session notes to triangulate with findings from interviews.
Reflexivity	• Relationship to participants: Research acknowledges convolution of research and WDG Facilitator roles in participants’ hypothetical struggle of not being able to voice negative experiences. • Research suggests this duality of role did not appear to be a problem due to ability of Nursery Managers to voice in WDG if something had not been helpful.
Ethical dimensions	• Sampling through approaching Nursery Managers who previously expressed interest in engaging in WDG. Nursery Managers were given a month to consider involvement in the research, with assurance of voluntary nature. • Research commissioned and undertaken through Froebel Research Committee. • Nurseries represented by mangers, and Local Authority have been anonymised.

Relevance and transferability	• Small sample size of six participants limit generalisability; although this is not necessarily intention of the research. • Researcher acknowledges the specific transferability of findings, drawing back to the particular aims of the WDG and highlighting the unreasonable expectation for this to be a ‘panacea for structural weaknesses’. • Limitations of research explored, noting specifically about the content of discussion during the WDG: this seems to link to apparent disconnect between explicit discussion of children and the actual discussion involving concerns predominantly relating to “problematic or upsetting situations to do with staff rather than issues to do with children directly” (p143). • Application of theory throughout analysis and also evident when considering potential limitations.

- ***Hulusi, 2007: application of Walsh & Down appraisal guidance***

Hulusi, H. (2007). A Narrative Analytic Exploration of the Effects of Work Discussion Groups on the Concerns Raised by Newly Qualified Secondary School Teachers.

Yes No Unclear	Comments
🟩 **Context**	• Hulusi's research involved the engagement of five NQTs in secondary schools in two audio-recorded WDG sessions. The WDGs were held for forty-five minutes after school and were facilitated by the researcher. At the beginning of each WDG, voluntary presentations were welcomed, whilst the researcher tried to ensure equal opportunity for presentation across the two sessions. • The researcher reports to have led the group through Farouk's (2004) process consultation approach within the WDG. This permitted approximately fifteen minutes to each of the following stages in turn: 'description and clarification'; where the NQT presenting their concern to the group spoke freely about their issue. Whilst this occurred, other group members were supported by the consultant to ask only clarification questions in order to develop a clear narrative of the presentation. • Following this, the 'reflection' stage was implemented; involving group members freely asking questions intended to take the description further in to an exploration of other narratives for the concern. Group members also drew on examples from their personal experience to highlight similarities or differences. The third stage of 'personal theory generating' was implemented following this; whereby the group's task focussed on the generation of possible hypothesis for the concern. The final phase of 'strategy generating' was then implemented; involving the group offering suggestions that the presenting NQT may or may not take up. • Hulusi shares that the facilitator's role fluctuated across the phases, but was typically related to either 'task' functions': "activities that maintain group focus on the solution finding framework" (p58) or 'maintenance functions': "activities that are focused on attending to dynamic aspects of the groups functioning" (p.59) as outlined in Farouk's (2004) model of process consultation.
🟩 **Scope and purpose**	• Aim: to explore the effect of participation in work discussion group on the narratives of NQTs and explore the usefulness of narrative analysis in monitoring consultee change during EP interventions. • Purpose: researcher explicitly states the intention of the research to be an exploration. • Research and existing knowledge: Links the research documenting little to no support for teachers and reported increasing stress in education.

Design	• The researcher has explored different consultation groups in secondary schools, the psychological approaches that underpin them and discusses the developing "EP model" of process consultation has emerged that is "uniquely different" to traditional models of consultation (p19). • The researcher compares the use of 'passive' and 'issue focused' groups; their purposes, aims and outcomes, to position the use of WDG as akin to Farouk's group process consultation. • Researcher justifies the use of qualitative research due to exploratory intentions to elicit unique and subjective knowledge noting ontological position as social constructionist. • Use of Narrative Analysis; necessary in order to be able to answer the research question and discussion of how this approach links with social constructionist position. • Two WDGs undertaken in a familiar setting for the participants and were audio recorded: is it unclear as to whether this would have generated sufficient data to capture the complexity/diversity of experience and illuminate context in sufficient detail.
Sampling strategy	• The researcher has used a purposive sampling approach, noting that the school approached the EP to support their work with NQTs. The researcher argues that this process reflects the "applied nature of EP practice and represents the most effective application of EP resources" (p219). • 5 NQTS teaching in secondary schools; the researcher states that the participants are from the same secondary school and references the EP time allocated to this school, however in an extract shared in the findings, one of the participant's states, "yeah, I'm gonna join your school M1".
Analysis	• Explicit reference and discussion of the use of Narrative stanza analysis (McLeod and Balamoutsou, 2000): although justification is based on the fact that this methodology has not been used before as opposed to appropriate fit for the primary research intention. • Narrative analytic strategy is applied solely to the presenting teacher's narrative, whilst thematic analysis is used to analyse the consultant and group activity. • Data is essentially managed by hand as opposed to software due to the interpretative nature of analysis. • The researcher reports using a three-stage model of analysis. • Research argues that deviant data was not sought as recording group sessions was considered to be sufficient.

Key Findings	• In both Work Discussion Groups, the presenting participants' entry narratives were regressive and linear; revolving around powerlessness and loneliness, betrayal and guilt, impending isolation and hopelessness. Hulusi reports the Work Discussion Group supported the presenting participants to delineate their narratives and develop their thinking, to leave with stable exit narratives. • Hulusi reports that these changes were due to the consultant and group's activities within the Work Discussion Groups. • The researcher mapped the consultant's activities through the process consultation framework adopted; noting utilisation of gate-keeping, initiating, modelling, encouraging others to share, exploring their hypotheses, summarising the discussion, elaborate and consensus test activities. • The researcher discussed the group's activities through the various functions the group adopted across the Work Discussion Group. The researcher reported that the participant's entry narrative resonated with the group at both individual and group levels. This was reported to be due to shared experiences, and communicated in both aggressive or anxious reactions, and empathy and pragmatic responses. • Hulusi reported the group functions also facilitated the change in the presenting participant's narrative. These were reported to be through sharing experiences, consensus testing, exploring their emotional reaction to the presenter's narrative, offering protective or supportive language, gate-keeping, and exploring alternative narratives. • Hulusi illustrates the process of his findings through multiple extracts of transcript. The researcher concludes that whilst in the first session, the group supported the presenting participant to explore his thinking around the concern he raised in a systematic and supportive framework, in the second session, the group supported the presenting participant by providing him with a containing space for his anxiety. • The researcher contrasts the outcomes of the Work Discussion Groups for participants. The first group resulting in "clear indications that his entry narrative has changed from a regressive to a stable position" (p161). whilst in the second group seemed to result in "a slight shift in M2's regressive entry narrative towards a more stable exit narrative" (p122). • When contrasting the group processes across the two Work Discussion Groups, the researcher reported that there was clear evidence that both the consultant and the group had undertaken activities supporting the shift in narrative in the first group. However, during the second group, group functions were less apparent, whilst the consultant's activity was relatively high. Hulusi reports that this potentially due to the nature of the second presenters' manner and approach of presentation.

Interpretation	• The researcher has provided an extensive detail of the process applied to analyse the data. Additionally, full transcripts of the Work Discussion Groups have been submitted to aid transparency of the systematic narrative analysis of data. • Throughout each theme of the presenter's entry and exit narrative, consultant activity and group activity, example extracts from Work Discussion Group transcription have been provided. This consequently provides some exposition of how interpretations made have led to the conclusions shared.
Reflexivity	• The researcher discusses his relationship to the participants through his working role as a Senior EP linked to the school. He recognises the focus on this particular group (NQTs) was a request from the school, but this is somewhat mitigated by the researcher's conceptualisation of typical EP practice. Does this go far enough to fully explore the potential power dynamics at play? • The researcher has also discussed his 'professional position', 'personal beliefs' and 'reflexive conclusions' in a 'critical reflexive account' (p123).
Ethical dimensions	• The researcher's thesis was undertaken at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, in affiliation with the University of Ethics requiring a submission of a research approval to the Ethics committee and granting of approval prior to undertaking research. • The researcher has specifically discussed the ethical considerations the researcher poses (p117). • The researcher has deliberately restricted the sharing of detailed information about the participants acknowledging the dilemma of balance between ethics and disclosing contextual information of participants (p.92). • The researcher emphasises that attendance at the WDG was through a strictly voluntary basis resulting in the initial WDG attendance at 5/5 and 4/5 at the second; and discussed the reminding participants of their right to withdraw at the start of both WDG sessions.

Relevance and transferability	• Explicitly references the use of Farouk's (2004) process consultation model within the Work Discussion Group and use of his phased model to make interpretations of the data; it appears that Hulusi's approach to the Work Discussion Group is of notable difference to what the present researcher's conceptualisation of a Work Discussion Group is. • Hulusi asserts that "a major function of the WDG is its ability to respond to individual needs for being heard or particular narratives being held regardless of the phase in which they occur. The experience of this research suggests that asserting an overly rigid model with a consultee or group who are anxious can be unhelpful and a potential barrier to consultee feelings of containment and group member's motivation to contribute" (p209-210). • Challenges posed by adopting a case study of two, to make generalisations of the findings. Whilst the researcher states that "it was not the purpose of this research to make broad claims based on the findings" (p215), this does not seem consistent with the secondary aim of the research to "explore the usefulness of narrative analysis in monitoring consultee change during EP interventions" (p69). • Whilst there is a clear and considered narrative analytic approach to the participants' entry and exit narratives, how this is used in conjunction with the thematic analysis of the consultant and groups' activity it difficult to ascertain.

- ***Maggs, 2014: application of Walsh & Down appraisal guidance***

Maggs, P. (2014). An interpretive phenomenological analysis of primary school teachers' experiences of work discussion groups in their work with children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.	
Yes No Unclear	Comments
🟩 **Context**	• Maggs' research involved interviewing five teachers who had previously been involved in WDGs from two separate mainstream primary schools in a South London borough. The researcher describes the context of both schools as catering or a diverse population with regards to culture, ethnicity, financial access educational needs and behavioural needs. • Seven teachers in each of the mainstream primacy schools had previously engaged in half termly WDGs. These took place for forty-five minutes and formed part of a 'working lunch'. Maggs reported that the WDGs followed Jackson's (2008) model of WDGs (as described in '1.3.2 – WDG process'). Maggs reports that the shared primary task of the WDGs was to "discuss an issue relating the child in order to promote further understanding and to provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on their responses to working with SEMH needs" (p50). • Whist attendance at the WDGs was reported to be on a voluntary basis, Maggs reported ensuring that capacity never exceeded seven group members, and others were permitted to join on the basis of first attendance, and then on a first come first serve basis. The groups were facilitated by the researcher and SENCO of each respective school.
🟩 **Scope and purpose**	• Aim: to explore primary school teachers' experiences of engaging in Work Discussion Groups focusing on their work with children with SEMH needs. • Focus: to elicit the experiences of teachers with regard to the support that they perceived in their work with children and young people with SEMH and their experiences of the Work Discussion Groups to promote insights into this area. • Link: research has been positioned in line with research reporting the increasing number of children and young people in mainstream education experiencing SEMH needs and the absence of support teachers receive to process the emotional impact of this work on their own wellbeing. • The researcher discusses a historical overview of consultation and peer group support in schools. • Systematic literature review undertaken of supervision for teachers working with children with SEMH needs.

Design	• The researcher states that the use of a qualitative approach is in the interest of exploring meanings and interpretations, as opposed to hypothesis testing. • The research has been positioned with a constructivist approach as he asserts the research intention is "exploring the teachers' sense of their own reality. The researcher does not seek either to prove of disprove that WDGs are an effective means of supporting staff in their work, rather to explore teachers' experiences of their use and any changes in practise that arise as a result" (p18-19). • The study utilised an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as the researcher reports that this approach acknowledges the challenge of accessing and deriving meaning from a participants' thoughts and beliefs without being influenced by the researcher themselves. • Data was collected through the recording and transcription of semi-structured interviews of five participants.
Sampling strategy	• Maggs states using a convenience, purposive sampling method from a pool of teachers who had previously accessed Work Discussion Groups facilitated by the researcher. • The researcher adopted this approach due to the financial and time constraints that would have used to apply a random sampling technique yet reports that all participants involved had made me recent referrals of CYP with SEMH needs. • From a potential pool of fourteen participants the researcher reports paying close attention to the homogeneity of the sample of participants, enabling five teachers that were fully qualified, had taught for a minimum of two years in primary schools in South London and had referred CYP with SEMH needs to the EPS over the course of their engagement in the Work Discussion Groups, to be approached for interview.
Analysis	• The researcher makes explicit reference to the use of Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) approach to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. • The researcher discusses reading and rereading the individual transcripts to immerse himself into the participants' world. This suggests that both the context and the subjective meanings of the participants would have been retained. • The researcher reports that wherever possible, he sought to represent divergent views within the findings. • Maggs provides the transcripts of each interview alongside the emergent codes that he developed. • The researcher provided a full list of the participants' emergent themes, enabling a clarity of how the conceptual frameworks evolved. • Maggs reports that he shared with the participants their transcripts and the resulting themes, despite this not being a requirement of the IPA process.

Key Findings	• The researcher reported three superordinate themes to have emerged from the data. The first theme Maggs reported was “Experiences of SEBD in schools” (p67). Within this theme, Maggs reported the following subordinate themes comprising the superordinate theme: experiences of limited support for SEBD, experiences of a culture of coping with SEBD and experiences of an external perspective. • The second theme Maggs reported was “Experiences of Work Discussion Groups” (p67). Within this theme, Maggs reported the following subordinate themes comprising the superordinate theme: experiences of valued aspects of WDGS and experiences of obstacles to WDG – dynamics within the group. • “Experiences of Work Discussion Groups – operational factors” (p67) was the third theme Maggs reported emerged from the data. Within this theme, Maggs reported the following subordinate themes comprising the superordinate theme: experiences of challenges for WDGS – structural issues, and experiences of the role of the facilitators.
Interpretation	• Maggs reports undertaking a pilot interview with a volunteer participant, which led to the development of themes for the following four interviews. No information is offered about the contexts of the interviews. • Throughout each theme, example extracts from the interviews or are provided. This consequently provides some exposition of how interpretations made have led to the conclusions shared.
Reflexivity	• Maggs explicitly discusses his relationship with the schools of the participants through his capacity of the EP role. He notes his relationship with both schools has spanned over four years resulting in well established relationships with their SENCOs and headteachers. • Additionally, he reports to have established good working relationships with the participants prior to the research. • Maggs reports assuring the participants of the measures undertaken to provide confidentiality and anonymisation. • Maggs also discusses the efforts to ensure awareness of how his perspectives and motivations have influenced his attitude to the research and interpretation of the data. • The researcher discusses his position to the research through reflecting on both his attitude and opinion of Work Discussion Groups, and from his personal experience of, and engagement with, colleagues who have been experiencing significant challenge whilst supporting children and young people with SEMH needs.
Ethical dimensions	• The research was proposed to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust’s Research Ethics Committee, and the granted approval has been made available within the research. • Maggs highlights that the research conforms to both the British Psychological Society’s Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) and the ‘Code of Human Research Ethics’ (2010). • Fully informed consent obtained; both in verbally and in written form and providing participants several opportunities to withdraw their participation in the research. • Maggs documented how confidentiality and anonymity were managed through ensuring that information regarding the teachers, their school and the CYP discussed within the group were anonymised and unidentifiable within the research.

Relevance and transferability	• Adopting IPA within the research places clear restrictions on transferability of findings. The researcher acknowledges this and reports that the findings report a “brief snapshot teachers’ perceptions of WDGs taken on a particular day, albeit within certain clearly specified contexts” (p143). Furthermore, Maggs relates this proposed limitation back to the research aim, pointing out that it was never the intention to generalise findings or draw grand theories. • Maggs consistently applies theory and contextual grounding to the findings shared, and this is also evident when considering potential limitations. This enables a clear and insightful exploration in to the experience of teachers’ engaging in Work Discussion Groups, consequently meeting the intended outcome of the research.

Appendix 5. Recruitment letter

Senior Leadership Team Work Discussion Group

I am undertaking a Doctorate course in Educational, Child and Community Psychology at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. My research is an exploration of school leaders' experiences of Work Discussion Group.

What are Work Discussion Groups?

Work discussion groups are a forum in which staff are offered a unique and essential opportunity to share any concerns, difficulties or challenging issues preoccupying them in their work. These issues are then discussed together as a group, facilitated by either one or two members of the Educational Psychology Service.

What can I hope to get out of the Work Discussion Group?

The primary aims of work discussion groups are to enable staff to develop a deeper understanding about:

- Underlying meanings of children, young people and families (CYPF) behaviour and communication (including nonverbal communication)
- Psychological factors that impact on learning, teaching, working with and caring for troubled and challenging CYPF
- The ways in which CYPF can impact on staff at an emotional level and how this in turn can impact on the way staff engage and work with their CYPF
- The ways in which adverse past experiences can hinder the development of future good experiences and relationships.

When would the groups take place?

The group would take place for an hour, weekly for a pre-agreed number of sessions. The number of sessions will be negotiated depending upon the size of willing and interested members of the Leadership Team (with no nominated authority or leadership responsibility for any other potential group member).

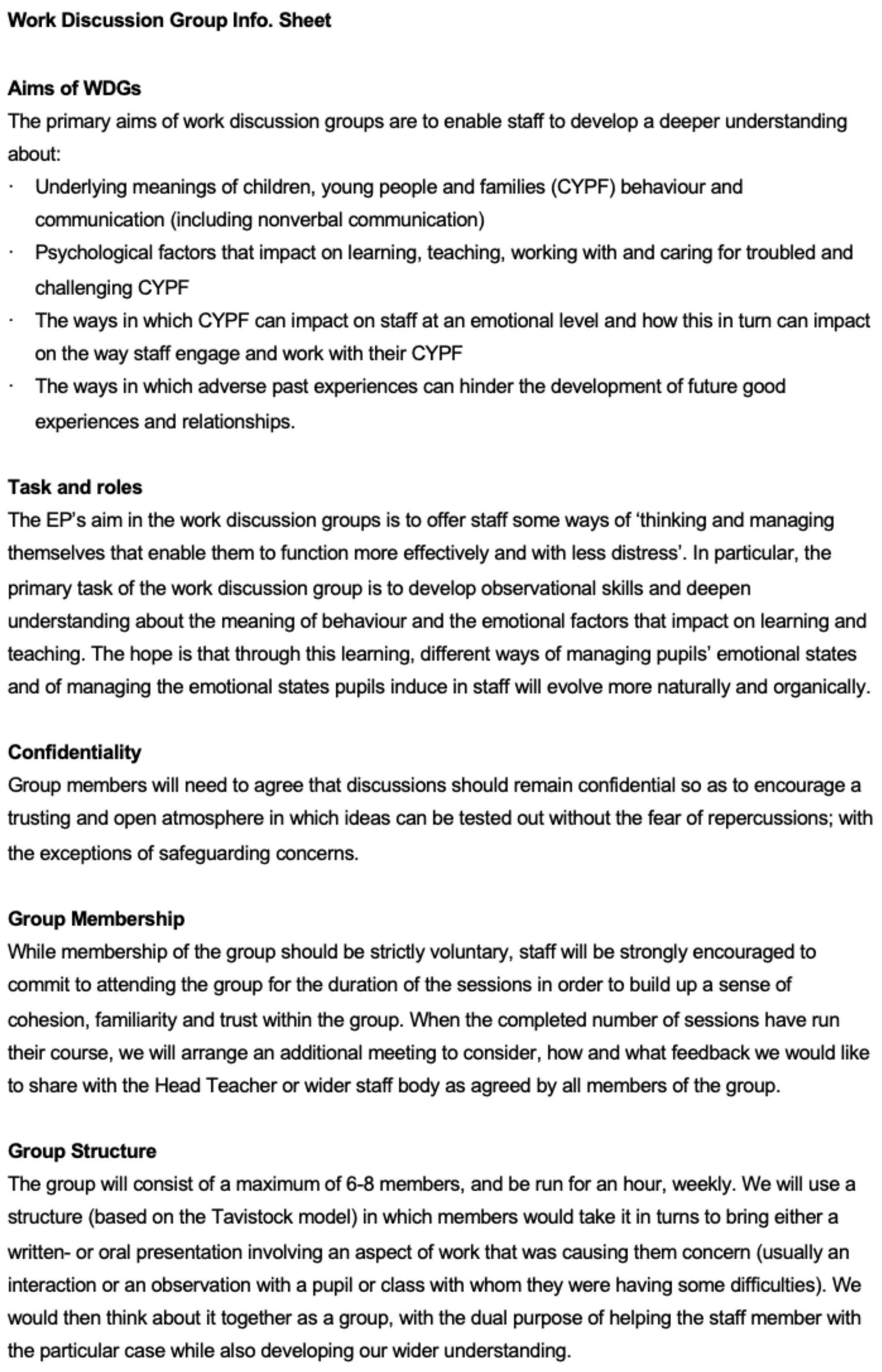
What happens next?

Following the completion of the Work Discussion Groups, it would be my intention to interview willing members of staff that participated in the group. At this point, information will be shared about the details and process of the interviews.

Interested?

If you are interested in finding out more information about Work Discussion Groups, please contact me on the details provided above at your earliest convenience.

Appendix 6. Work discussion group information sheet



Work Discussion Group Info. Sheet

Aims of WDGs

The primary aims of work discussion groups are to enable staff to develop a deeper understanding about:

- Underlying meanings of children, young people and families (CYPF) behaviour and communication (including nonverbal communication)
- Psychological factors that impact on learning, teaching, working with and caring for troubled and challenging CYPF
- The ways in which CYPF can impact on staff at an emotional level and how this in turn can impact on the way staff engage and work with their CYPF
- The ways in which adverse past experiences can hinder the development of future good experiences and relationships.

Task and roles

The EP's aim in the work discussion groups is to offer staff some ways of 'thinking and managing themselves that enable them to function more effectively and with less distress'. In particular, the primary task of the work discussion group is to develop observational skills and deepen understanding about the meaning of behaviour and the emotional factors that impact on learning and teaching. The hope is that through this learning, different ways of managing pupils' emotional states and of managing the emotional states pupils induce in staff will evolve more naturally and organically.

Confidentiality

Group members will need to agree that discussions should remain confidential so as to encourage a trusting and open atmosphere in which ideas can be tested out without the fear of repercussions; with the exceptions of safeguarding concerns.

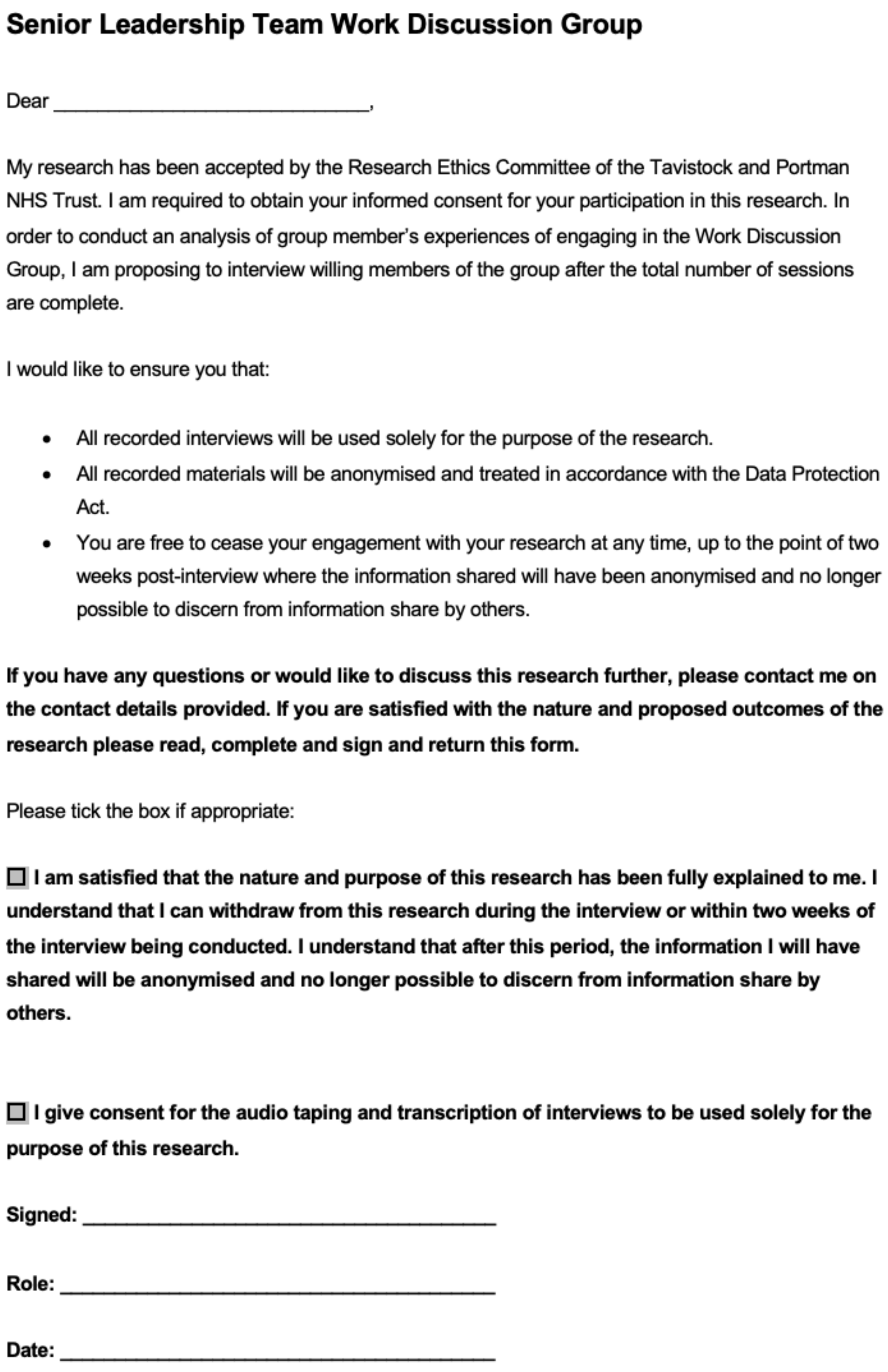
Group Membership

While membership of the group should be strictly voluntary, staff will be strongly encouraged to commit to attending the group for the duration of the sessions in order to build up a sense of cohesion, familiarity and trust within the group. When the completed number of sessions have run their course, we will arrange an additional meeting to consider, how and what feedback we would like to share with the Head Teacher or wider staff body as agreed by all members of the group.

Group Structure

The group will consist of a maximum of 6-8 members, and be run for an hour, weekly. We will use a structure (based on the Tavistock model) in which members would take it in turns to bring either a written- or oral presentation involving an aspect of work that was causing them concern (usually an interaction or an observation with a pupil or class with whom they were having some difficulties). We would then think about it together as a group, with the dual purpose of helping the staff member with the particular case while also developing our wider understanding.

Appendix 7. Consent form



Senior Leadership Team Work Discussion Group

Dear ________________________________,

My research has been accepted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. I am required to obtain your informed consent for your participation in this research. In order to conduct an analysis of group member's experiences of engaging in the Work Discussion Group, I am proposing to interview willing members of the group after the total number of sessions are complete.

I would like to ensure you that:

- All recorded interviews will be used solely for the purpose of the research.
- All recorded materials will be anonymised and treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act.
- You are free to cease your engagement with your research at any time, up to the point of two weeks post-interview where the information shared will have been anonymised and no longer possible to discern from information share by others.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this research further, please contact me on the contact details provided. If you are satisfied with the nature and proposed outcomes of the research please read, complete and sign and return this form.

Please tick the box if appropriate:

☐ **I am satisfied that the nature and purpose of this research has been fully explained to me. I understand that I can withdraw from this research during the interview or within two weeks of the interview being conducted. I understand that after this period, the information I will have shared will be anonymised and no longer possible to discern from information share by others.**

☐ **I give consent for the audio taping and transcription of interviews to be used solely for the purpose of this research.**

Signed: ____

Role: ____

Date: ____

Appendix 8. Interview schedule

Interview Schedule

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my research into senior leader's experiences of engaging in WD. As stated on the consent from which you read, this interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Your name and identity and the school details will be anonymised so you will not be personally identifiable in any part of the study. I want to reiterate that participation in the study is completely voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any point during, and up to two weeks after the interview. This is because after this point, the data will have been anonymised, analysed and grouped into themes so individual contributions would be very difficult to extract. Can I check that you are happy to be interviewed and for the interview to be audio recorded and transcribed?

Warm-up

Before beginning the interview, I would like to get some personal details from you if that's ok. This is so that I can get a picture of the profile of participants.

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been a senior leader?
3. How long have you been working in this school?

Main body

I have a list of roughly six questions to ask. These are open ended, so I hope they allow you to discuss your thoughts and feelings around your experiences of engaging in the WDG. My hope is that through this we will be able to understand more about the current experiences of leadership in schools and the experience of engaging in work discussion groups.

1. Please can you start by telling me about your role as a Senior Leader in the school?

2. Can you tell me how you experienced the structure of the WDG, for example preparing a case, presenting, turning your chair away, feedback, others' presentations?

3. What were your thoughts and feelings about taking part in the WDG?

4. In what ways, if any, has your participation in the group affected you personally and/or professionally?

5. From your perspective, in what ways if any, has the participation in the WDG affected the SLT?

6. Do you have any information or experiences you would like to add?

Appendix 9. Outline of IPA stages

Stage 1: Reading and listening to the interviews

The first transcribed interview was read several times, whilst listening simultaneously to the recording. This allowed the researcher to notice any particular emphasis on a word, change of pace or tone, and significant pauses. Smith et al. (2009, p.82) described the aim of this stage as ensuring that the participant remained the central focus of analysis and the “propensity for ‘quick and dirty’ reduction and synopsis” is decelerated. Table 11. is an exemplar of a section of an interview transcript.

Line #	**Transcript**
522	What are the ones that I potentially need to think deeper about,
523	and take, take away? Not it just be an exercise of writing ideas
524	down, taking lots of notes, doing lots of inward thinking, and
525	keeping things intrinsic and internal. Actually, having meaningful
526	discussions and almost wanting other people to play devil's
527	advocate to my point of view, in my view, just to get that difference
528	of opinion. I use the word ‘dissonance’ quite a lot, just because I
529	think that really captures the feeling and like, learning struggle. I
530	think you actually used it in the group in relation to a presentation.
531	By actually having my dissonance and my beliefs challenged, I
532	have found that really, really healthy.

Table 11. Transcript example from P6.

Stage 2: Initial notes

During this stage, whilst the transcript was re-read, the audio recording re-heard, and both simultaneously read and heard several times, three forms of notes are taken. To aid note taking, each transcript was formatted into a table with columns for the three forms of comments: descriptive, linguistic and conceptual on the right of the transcribed interview in the centre, and a column for the emergent themes on the left of the page, as suggested by Smith et al. (2009). The final table can be seen in Table 15.

- ***Descriptive comments***

The initial form of note taking involved summarising and commenting on the content of what the participant had said. These notes focused solely on the explicit meaning of the participant’s articulation. These were noted on the right of the text in blue. These were the first of the three forms of initial notes recommended by Smith et al. (2009). Table 12 is an exemplar of the descriptive notes recorded against transcript.

Transcript	Descriptive notes
What are the ones that I potentially need to think deeper about, and take, take away? Not it just be an exercise of writing ideas down, taking lots of notes, doing lots of inward thinking, and keeping things intrinsic and internal. Actually, having meaningful discussions and almost wanting other people to play devil's advocate to my point of view, in my view, just to get that difference of opinion. I use the word 'dissonance' quite a lot, just because I think that really captures the feeling and like, learning struggle. I think you actually used it in the group in relation to a presentation. By actually having my dissonance and my beliefs challenged, I have found that really, really healthy.	Thinking deeper' as 'taking lots of notes, doing lots of inward thinking' and 'having meaningful discussions' to invite 'that difference of opinion.' 'Dissonance' as the 'feeling' and 'learning struggle'. 'Dissonance and beliefs challenged' as 'really healthy'.

Table 12. Descriptive notes example from P6.

- ***Linguistic comments***

The second form of note taking focused on the linguistic used. The researcher added comments explored the language choice, pronoun use, tone, repetition, pauses and pace. These were written on the right of the text in green. Table 13 is an exemplar of the linguistic notes recorded against transcript.

Transcript	Descriptive notes	Linguistic notes
What are the ones that I potentially need to think deeper about, and take, take away? Not it just be an exercise of writing ideas down, taking lots of notes, doing lots of inward thinking, and keeping things intrinsic and internal. Actually, having meaningful discussions and almost wanting other people to play devil's advocate to my point of view, in my view, just to get that difference of opinion. I use the word 'dissonance' quite a lot, just because I think that really captures the feeling and like, learning struggle. I think you actually used it in the group in relation to a presentation. By actually having my dissonance and my beliefs challenged, I have found that really, really healthy.	Thinking deeper' as 'taking lots of notes, doing lots of inward thinking' and 'having meaningful discussions' to invite 'that difference of opinion.' 'Dissonance' as the 'feeling' and 'learning struggle'. 'Dissonance and beliefs challenged' as 'really healthy'.	Use of 'inward thinking', 'intrinsic' and 'internal': becoming lost in one's own thoughts, ideas? Emphasis and repetition of 'really' 'healthy': evoking connotations to relating to wellbeing, nourishment?

Table 13. Linguistic notes example from P6.

- ***Conceptual comments***

Conceptual comments were the third form of note taking, focussing on a more interrogative level of reflection on the participant's experience. These were noted to the right of the text in orange. These comments were created from looking analytically at the implicit meanings of what the participant was saying. Table 14 is an exemplar of the conceptual notes recorded against transcript.

Transcript	Descriptive notes	Linguistic notes	Conceptual notes
What are the ones that I potentially need to think deeper about, and take, take away? Not it just be an exercise of writing ideas down, taking lots of notes, doing lots of inward thinking, and keeping things intrinsic and internal. Actually, having meaningful discussions and almost wanting other people to play devil's advocate to my point of view, in my view, just to get that difference of opinion. I use the word 'dissonance' quite a lot, just because I think that really captures the feeling and like, learning struggle. I think you actually used it in the group in relation to a presentation. By actually having my dissonance and my beliefs challenged, I have found that really, really healthy.	Thinking deeper' as 'taking lots of notes, doing lots of inward thinking' and 'having meaningful discussions' to invite 'that difference of opinion.' 'Dissonance' as the 'feeling' and 'learning struggle'. 'Dissonance and beliefs challenged' as 'really healthy'.	Use of 'inward thinking', 'intrinsic' and 'internal': becoming lost in one's own thoughts, ideas? Emphasis and repetition of 'really' 'healthy': evoking connotations to relating to wellbeing, nourishment?	Thinking deeper' as developing understanding of situation and position to it, in addition to taking on board the different viewpoints that may be available: embracing relativism? 'Dissonance' as a reflection of sitting with multiple perspectives; sitting with uncertainty. 'Learning struggle': learning as not always easy or pain-free.

Table 14. Conceptual notes example from P6.

Stage 3: Emergent themes

During the next stage of analysis, the researcher explored the transcripts for emergent themes. This involved reducing the data volume generated from the transcription and notes into a column of emergent themes; noted in black to the left of the original transcript. Each emergent theme was related and referenced to the particular line in the transcription, which articulated that theme. This process ensured that themes represented the complexity, patterns and interconnections from the initial notes and transcript.

As Smith et al. (2009) suggest that "themes are usually expressed as phrases which speak to the psychological essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual" (p92). Therefore, the emergent themes aimed to reflect the researcher's interpretations of the participant's' statements. Some of the emergent themes were paraphrases, especially of the conceptual notes, whilst others were taken verbatim from the initial notes.

The researcher aimed to apply the hermeneutic circle when identifying the emergent themes. The hermeneutic circle was described by Smith el al. (2009) as the process of interpreting the part in relation to the whole; honouring that which is expressed in any particular utterance, and interpreting the whole in relation to the parts; holding in mind the gestalt of the interview in its entirety. The table below is an example of an emergent themes referenced to excerpts and initial notes. Sample from P4 have also been provided in Appendix 11.

Emergent themes	**# Line**	**Transcript**	**Descriptive notes**	**Linguistic notes**	**Conceptual notes**
WDG encouraging deeper thinking through reflective and reflexive practise. Learning to sit with cognitive dissonance. Incorporating difference as 'healthy'.	527 528 529 530 531 532 533 534 535 536 537 538 539 540 541 542 543 545 546	What are the ones that I potentially need to think deeper about, and take, take away? Not it just be an exercise of writing ideas down, taking lots of notes, doing lots of inward thinking, and keeping things intrinsic and internal. Actually, having meaningful discussions and almost wanting other people to play devil's advocate to my point of view, in my view, just to get that difference of opinion. I use the word 'dissonance' quite a lot, just because I think that really captures the feeling and like, learning struggle. I think you actually used it in the group in relation to a presentation. By actually having my dissonance and my beliefs challenged, I have found that really, really healthy.	Thinking deeper' as 'taking lots of notes, doing lots of inward thinking' and 'having meaningful discussions' to invite 'that difference of opinion.' 'Dissonance' as the 'feeling' and 'learning struggle'. 'Dissonance and beliefs challenged' as 'really healthy'.	Use of 'inward thinking', 'intrinsic' and 'internal': becoming lost in one's own thoughts, ideas? Emphasis and repetition of 'really' 'healthy': evoking connotations to relating to wellbeing, nourishment?	Thinking deeper' as developing understanding of situation and position to it, in addition to taking on board the different viewpoints that may be available: embracing relativism? 'Dissonance' as a reflection of sitting with multiple perspectives; sitting with uncertainty. 'Learning struggle': learning as not always easy or pain-free.

Table 15. Emergent themes example from P6.

Stage 4: Subordinate themes identified

The next stage involved clustering the emergent themes into subordinate themes. To do this, the emergent themes were copied and pasted into an excel spreadsheet, and then grouped into related themes following four techniques as suggested by Smith el al. (2009).

- ***Contextualisation***

The researcher utilised Smith et al. (2009)'s technique of 'contextualisation', whereby temporal, narrative and cultural components were identified within the data analysis. This included noting and grouping occasions where particular events or processes were discussed, in particular experiences explicitly of the work discussion group (formatted in orange) or experiences of their role in school (formatted in blue). This is exemplified in Table 16 below.

The researcher chose not to develop the contextualised emergent themes into subordinate themes as this felt it would be applying a deductive approach to analyse the data. However, this process aided a more nuanced understanding of conceptualisations of experiences within the subordinate themes that did emerge.

- ***Abstraction***

After grouping a collection of related emergent themes, applying 'abstraction' enabled the concept that appeared to underpin the theme to become the subordinate theme. For example, in P2's transcript, the subordinate theme of 'time as a resource' was created to explain the phenomenon underpinning a set of emergent themes as highlighted in the table below.

Time as a resource

113 Time needed to separate emotional reaction and considered response.
145 Other SLs as needing time to reflect.
111 Value attributed to time to think.
112 Time enabling considerate information processing.
124 Desire to create protected time in the future.
188 Desire to sustain WDG in time pressured environment.

Table 16. 'Time as a resource' subordinate theme

- ***Subsumption***

The second technique 'subsumption', was used when a subordinate theme is directly developed out of the title of an emergent theme. For example, P1's subordinate theme of 'burdening others' came directly out of language used in two of the emergent themes and best represented the group of related themes, as highlighted in the table below.

Burdening others
228 Burdening others by sharing (out of WDG).
229 Compromising discussion to minimise negative impact.
242 Fear of burdening others with emotional load of problem.
243 Fear of using other's time for own problems.

Table 17. 'Burdening others' subordinate theme

- ***Polarisation***

Through using the technique of 'polarisation', the researcher clustered emergent themes which has an oppositional relationship. For example, the subordinate theme in P5's transcript of 'support' encompasses her expression about her differing beliefs related to support as evident in the table below.

Support
72 Seeking support as indicating incompetence.
96 Problems as a nuisance.
97 Difficult admitting problems as an SL.
130 Confidence to ask for support from SLs.
131 Proactively seeking support.
132 Relief in the ability to ask for support.

Table 18. 'Support' subordinate theme

The process of grouping emergent themes into subordinate themes took time and careful consideration. The techniques used to group the themes together were not mutually exclusive and therefore, the researcher used all of the techniques above to generate the subordinate themes, which Smith et al. 2009) advocated for being able to push the analysis to a "higher level" (p99).

Stage 5: Superordinate themes identified

The next stage involved clustering the subordinate themes into superordinate themes. To do this, the subordinate themes were grouped together within the excel spreadsheet, to enable developing conceptualisations of experienced to come through. This process involved repeating the techniques identified in stage four. This has been exemplified in the screenshot of the excel workbook for P5 in Figure 5.

Stage 6: The process repeated for each transcript

The next stage involved the repetition of stages 1-5 for each of the other five interview transcripts. Each transcript was analysed in isolation so that the individuality of each participants narrative would be honoured, novel themes would be encouraged to emerge, and the idiographic nature of IPA would be retained (Smith et al., 2009).

However, not cross-referencing a new transcript with previously analysed transcripts proved to be a difficult principle to attain as there were frequent occasions where comments reflected comments made in other transcripts. Although this was expected to happen given the nature of the phenomena being explore was the same work discussion group that all participants attended.

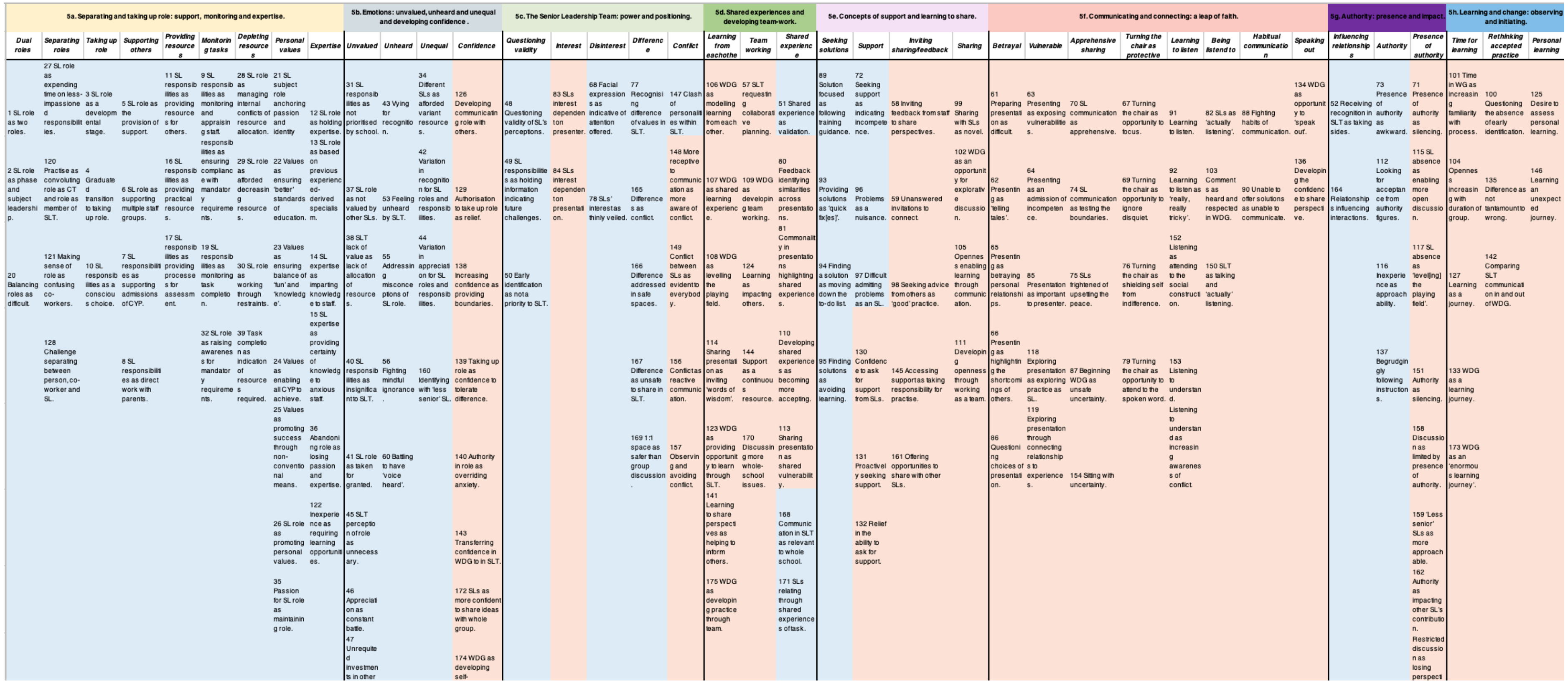
At times the researcher was consciously aware that this was happening and noted these associations during the analysis for deeper consideration at the next stage of analysis. However, it is also likely that this would have occurred at an unconscious level too. Therefore, the researcher tried to remain mindful of the potential for this to happen, and to bring to conscious awareness wherever possible.

Stage 7: Subthemes identified

The next stage involved searching for patterns across cases. The superordinate and subordinate themes for all transcripts were combined and arranged into clusters of related themes. In general, a subtheme category was made, when at least half the interviews contained subordinate themes relating to the subtheme. The theme map for each overarching theme is presented in Appendix 14, and visually demonstrates the contribution of each participants' superordinate themes, subordinate themes and the clustered subthemes.

Stage 8: Overarching themes identified

The final stage involved identifying overarching themes, which best represented a cluster of subthemes. This stage posed significant challenge as the overarching themes needed to encapsulate the essence of the subthemes in a manner that was concise, clear and grounded in the participants’ narratives; but also, sufficiently abstract to conceptualise and explain the participants' experiences. This stage went through several processes of arranging and rearranging, before evolving to become the final version.



5a. Separating and taking up role: support, monitoring and expertise.								
Dual roles	Separating roles	Taking up role	Supporting others	Providing resources	Monitoring tasks	Depleting resources	Personal values	Expertise
1 SL role as two roles.	27 SL role as expending time on less-impassioned responsibilities.	3 SL role as a developmental stage.	5 SL role as the provision of support.	11 SL responsibilities as providing resources for others.	9 SL responsibilities as monitoring and appraising staff.	28 SL role as managing internal conflicts of resource allocation.	21 SL subject role anchoring passion and identity	12 SL role as holding expertise.
2 SL role as phase and subject leadership.	120 Practise as convoluting role as CT and role as member of SLT.	4 Graduated transition to taking up role.	6 SL role as supporting multiple staff groups.	16 SL responsibilities as providing practical resources.	responsibilities as ensuring compliance with mandatory requirements.	29 SL role as afforded decreasing resources.	22 Values as ensuring 'better' standards of education.	13 SL role as based on previous experienced-derived specialism.
20 Balancing roles as difficult.	121 Making sense of role as confusing co-workers.	10 SL responsibilities as a conscious choice.	7 SL responsibilities as supporting admissions of CYP.	17 SL responsibilities as providing processes for assessment.	19 SL responsibilities as monitoring task completion.	30 SL role as working through restraints.	23 Values as ensuring balance of 'fun' and 'knowledge'.	14 SL expertise as imparting knowledge to staff.
	128 Challenge separating between person, co-worker and SL.		8 SL responsibilities as direct work with parents.		32 SL role as raising awareness for mandatory requirements.	39 Task completion as indication of resources required.	24 Values as enabling all CYP to achieve.	15 SL expertise as providing certainty of knowledge to anxious staff.
							25 Values as promoting success through non-conventional means.	36 Abandoning role as losing passion and expertise.
							26 SL role as promoting personal values.	122 Inexperience as requiring learning opportunities.
							35 Passion for SL role as maintaining role.	

5b. Emotions: unvalued, unheard and unequal and developing confidence .			
Unvalued	Unheard	Unequal	Confidence
31 SL responsibilities as not prioritised by school.	43 Vying for recognition.	34 Different SLs as afforded variant resources.	126 Developing communicating role with others.
37 SL role as not valued by other SLs.	53 Feeling unheard by SLT.	42 Variation in recognition for SL roles and responsibilities.	129 Authorisation to take up role as relief.
38 SLT lack of value as lack of allocation of resources.	55 Addressing misconceptions of SL role.	44 Variation in appreciation for SL roles and responsibilities.	138 Increasing confidence as providing boundaries.
40 SL responsibilities as insignificant to SLT.	56 Fighting mindful ignorance.	160 Identifying with 'less senior' SL.	139 Taking up role as confidence to tolerate difference.
41 SL role as taken for granted.	60 Battling to have 'voice heard'.		140 Authority in role as overriding anxiety.
45 SLT perception of role as unnecessary.			143 Transferring confidence in WDG to in SLT.
46 Appreciation as constant battle.			172 SLs as more confident to share ideas with whole group.
47 Unrequited investments in other			174 WDG as developing self-

5c. The Senior Leadership Team: power and positioning.				
Questioning validity	Interest	Disinterest	Difference	Conflict
48 Questioning validity of SL's perceptions.	83 SLs interest dependent on presenter.	68 Facial expressions as indicative of attention offered.	77 Recognising difference of values in SLT.	147 Clash of personalities within SLT.
49 SL responsibilities as holding information indicating future challenges.	84 SLs interest dependent on presentation.	78 SLs' interest as thinly veiled.	165 Differences as conflict.	148 More receptive to communication as more aware of conflict.
50 Early identification as not a priority to SLT.			166 Difference addressed in safe spaces.	149 Conflict between SLs as evident to everybody.
			167 Difference as unsafe to share in SLT.	156 Conflict as reactive communication.
			169 1:1 space as safer than group discussion.	157 Observing and avoiding conflict.

5d. Shared experiences and developing team-work.		
Learning from eachothe	Team working	Shared experience
106 WDG as modelling learning from each other.	57 SLT requesting collaborative planning.	51 Shared experience as validation.
107 WDG as shared learning experience.	109 WDG as developing team working.	80 Feedback identifying similarities across presentations.
108 WDG as levelling the playing field.	124 Learning as impacting others.	81 Commonality in presentations highlighting shared experiences.
114 Sharing presentation as inviting 'words of wisdom'.	144 Support as a continuous resource.	110 Developing shared experiences as becoming more accepting.
123 WDG as providing opportunity to learn through SLT.	170 Discussing more whole-school issues.	113 Sharing presentation as shared vulnerability.
141 Learning to share perspectives as helping to inform others.		168 Communication in SLT as relevant to whole school.
175 WDG as developing practice through team.		171 SLs relating through shared experiences of task.

5e. Concepts of support and learning to share.			
Seeking solutions	Support	Inviting sharing/feedback	Sharing
89 Solution focused as following training guidance.	72 Seeking support as indicating incompetence.	58 Inviting feedback from staff to share perspectives.	99 Sharing with SLs as novel.
93 Providing solutions as 'quick fix[es]'.	96 Problems as a nuisance.	59 Unanswered invitations to connect.	102 WDG as an opportunity for explorative discussion.
94 Finding a solution as moving down the to-do list.	97 Difficult admitting problems as an SL.	98 Seeking advice from others as 'good' practice.	105 Openness enabling learning through communication.
95 Finding solutions as avoiding learning.	130 Confidence to ask for support from SLs.	145 Accessing support as taking responsibility for practise.	111 Developing openness through working as a team.
	131 Proactively seeking support.	161 Offering opportunities to share with other SLs.	
	132 Relief in the ability to ask for support.		

5f. Communicating and connecting: a leap of faith.							
Betrayal	Vulnerable	Apprehensive sharing	Turning the chair as protective	Learning to listen	Being listend to	Habitual communication	Speaking out
61 Preparing presentation as difficult.	63 Presenting as exposing vulnerabilities.	70 SL communication as apprehensive.	67 Turning the chair as opportunity to focus.	91 Learning to listen.	82 SLs as 'actually listening'.	88 Fighting habits of communication.	134 WDG as opportunity to 'speak out'.
62 Presenting as 'telling tales'.	64 Presenting as an admission of incompetence.	74 SL communication as testing the boundaries.	69 Turning the chair as opportunity to ignore disquiet.	92 Learning to listen as 'really, really tricky'.	103 Comments as heard and respected in WDG.	90 Unable to offer solutions as unable to communicate.	136 Developing the confidence to share perspective.
65 Presenting as betraying personal relationships.	85 Presentation as important to presenter.	75 SLs frightened of upsetting the peace.	76 Turning the chair as shielding self from indifference.	152 Listening as attending to the social construction.	150 SLT as talking and 'actually' listening.		
66 Presenting as highlighting the shortcomings of others.	118 Exploring presentation as exploring practice as SL.	87 Beginning WDG as unsafe uncertainty.	79 Turning the chair as opportunity to attend to the spoken word.	153 Listening to understand.			
86 Questioning choices of presentation.	119 Exploring presentation through connecting relationships to experiences.	154 Sitting with uncertainty.		Listening to understand as increasing awareness of conflict.			

5g. Authority: presence and impact.		
Influencing relationships	Authority	Presence of authority
52 Receiving recognition in SLT as taking sides.	73 Presence of authority as awkward.	71 Presence of authority as silencing.
164 Relationships influencing interactions.	112 Looking for acceptance from authority figures.	115 SL absence as enabling more open discussion.
	116 Inexperience as approachability.	117 SL absence as 'level[ing] the playing field'.
	137 Begrudgingly following instructions.	151 Authority as silencing.
		158 Discussion as limited by presence of authority.
		159 'Less senior' SLs as more approachable.
		162 Authority as impacting other SL's contribution.
		Restricted discussion as losing perspecti

5h. Learning and change: observing and initiating.		
Time for learning	Rethinking accepted practice	Personal learning
101 Time in WG as increasing familiarity with process.	100 Questioning the absence of early identification.	125 Desire to assess personal learning.
104 Openness increasing with duration of group.	135 Difference as not tantamount to wrong.	146 Learning an unexpected journey.
127 Learning as a journey.	142 Comparing SLT communication in and out of WDG.	
133 WDG as a learning journey.		
173 WDG as an 'enormous learning journey'.		

Figure 5. Screenshot of the Excel workbook for P5's superordinate, subordinate and emergent themes.

Appendix 10. Ethical approval

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699

https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/

Eleanor Raman

By Email

12th July 2018

Dear Ms Raman

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of school leaders' experiences of Work Discussion Group.

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Best regards,

Paru Jeram
Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee
T: 020 938 2699
E: pjeram@tavi-Port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisors/Research Tutors, Academic Quality

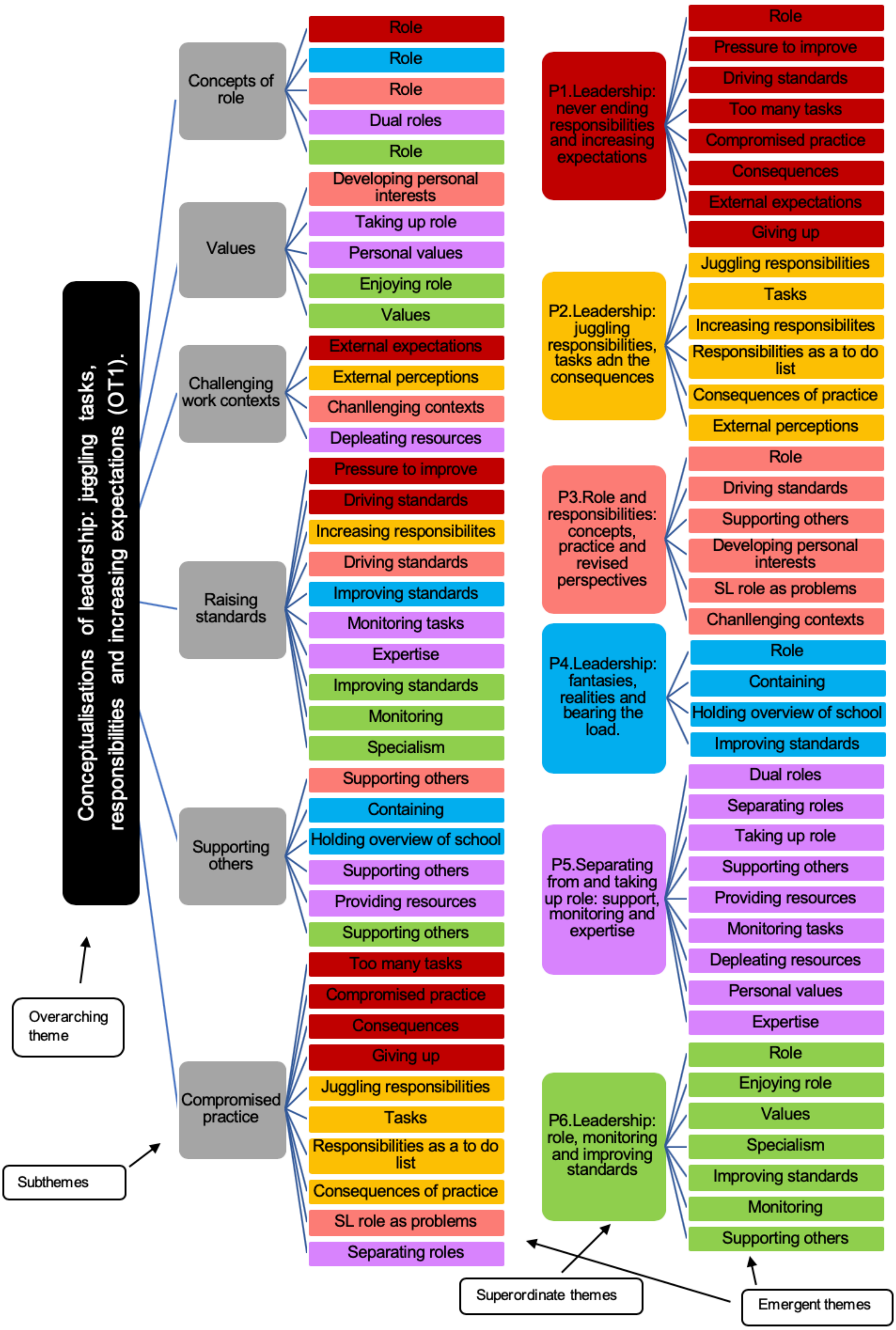
Appendix 11. Transcript sample with emergent themes

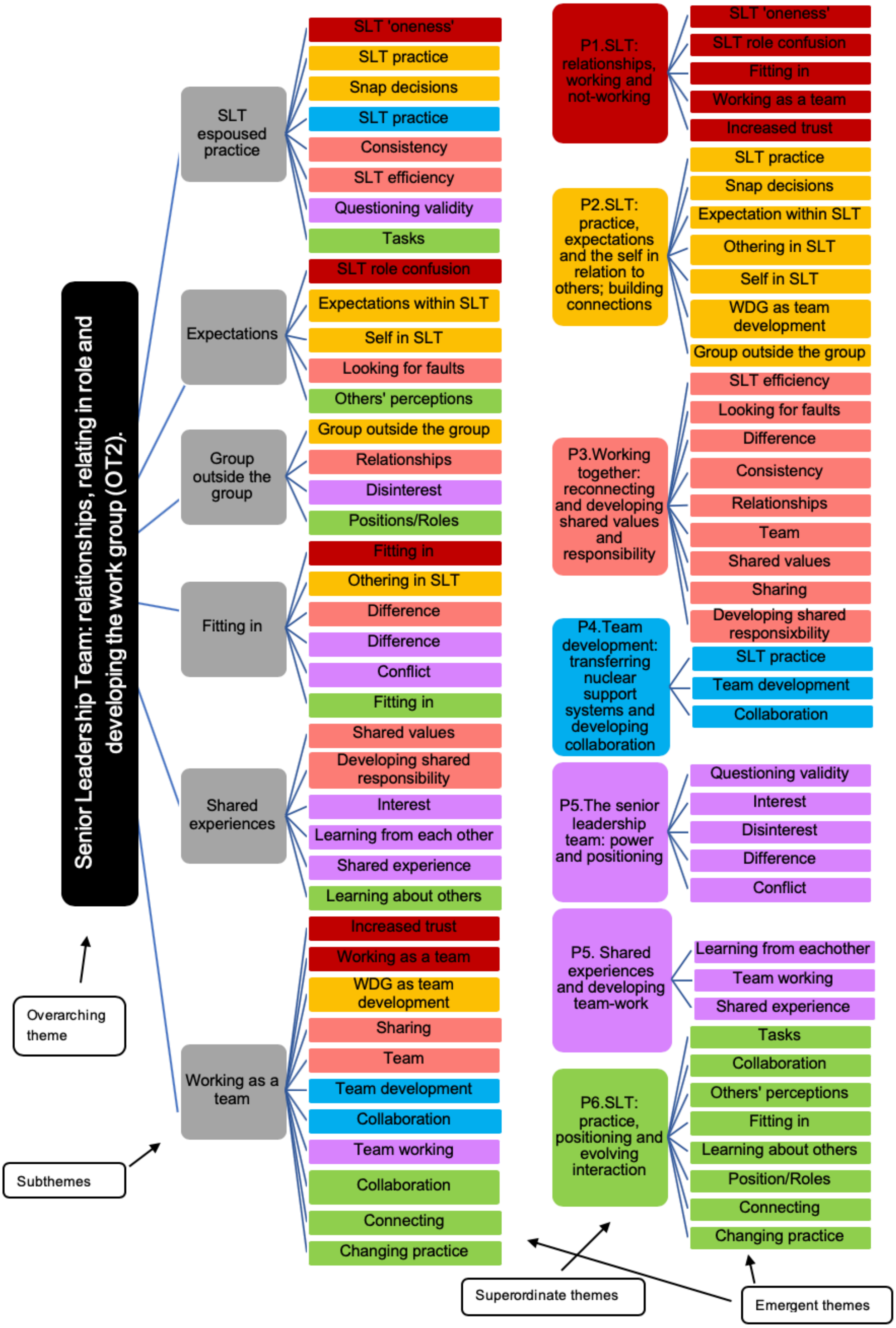
	P4: Yeah.			
	ER: Have I got that right?			
Shared experience as shared investment. Relatable presentations as more meaningful for SLT. Contribution to WDG depending on relatability of presentation.	P4: Yeah. Absolutely. It certainly is and from me being a part of the group and observing other people sharing theirs, I felt more invested. All of them kind of fit, so I felt invested in all of them. Probably thinking about it from other leaders' point-of-view as well. If it's something they can relate to then I think it is more meaningful for them. Perhaps, that might be why in some situations where someone's slightly quieter or... Yeah. Shared experience is important.	Developing shared experience with the group as 'fe[eling] more invested'. WDG as more 'invest[able]' and 'meaningful' if presentations are 'something they can relate to'. 'Shared experience' as enabling more interaction.	Emphasis on 'relate': the focus being relating to the topic and each other as a by-product?	Group membership as giving/receiving in presentation and discussion: how does this sit with previous ideas of 'worthy' presentations? Ability to relate to presentation as impacting contribution in the group.
	ER: How did you feel after the work discussion group? Not necessarily immediately after your presentation but so say...I mean, we're at a point now where I think we're four weeks post our last group?			
Importance for WDG learning to be recognised. Desire to transfer learning from WDG to SLT. Reflecting as listening together. Desire to build support systems for all SLs.	P4: I feel like I don't want it to go unnoticed or I don't want the work we did to be lost. I was thinking about what we can take from that and how it can be used moving forward to support our leaders. One of the main things is around the listening. Having time to reflect and sit down together. Thinking about our leaders and who they've got for that support. Is it that they've got a small network? Is it that we support them in	Desire for the WDG not to 'go unnoticed' or 'the work we did to be lost'. Desire to use WDG learning to 'support our leaders' 'moving forward'. Key learning as 'listening' and having 'time to reflect… together'. Considering how to ensure all SLs have access to and create their own 'small	Emphasis on 'unnoticed' and 'lost' illustrating the will to ensure that this doesn't happen? Speed of speech: Is the significance of this point	Fear of WDG to go unnoticed – by who? Learning in the WDG to be transferred to practise outside of WDG: listening, time and reflection in order to feel 'supported'.

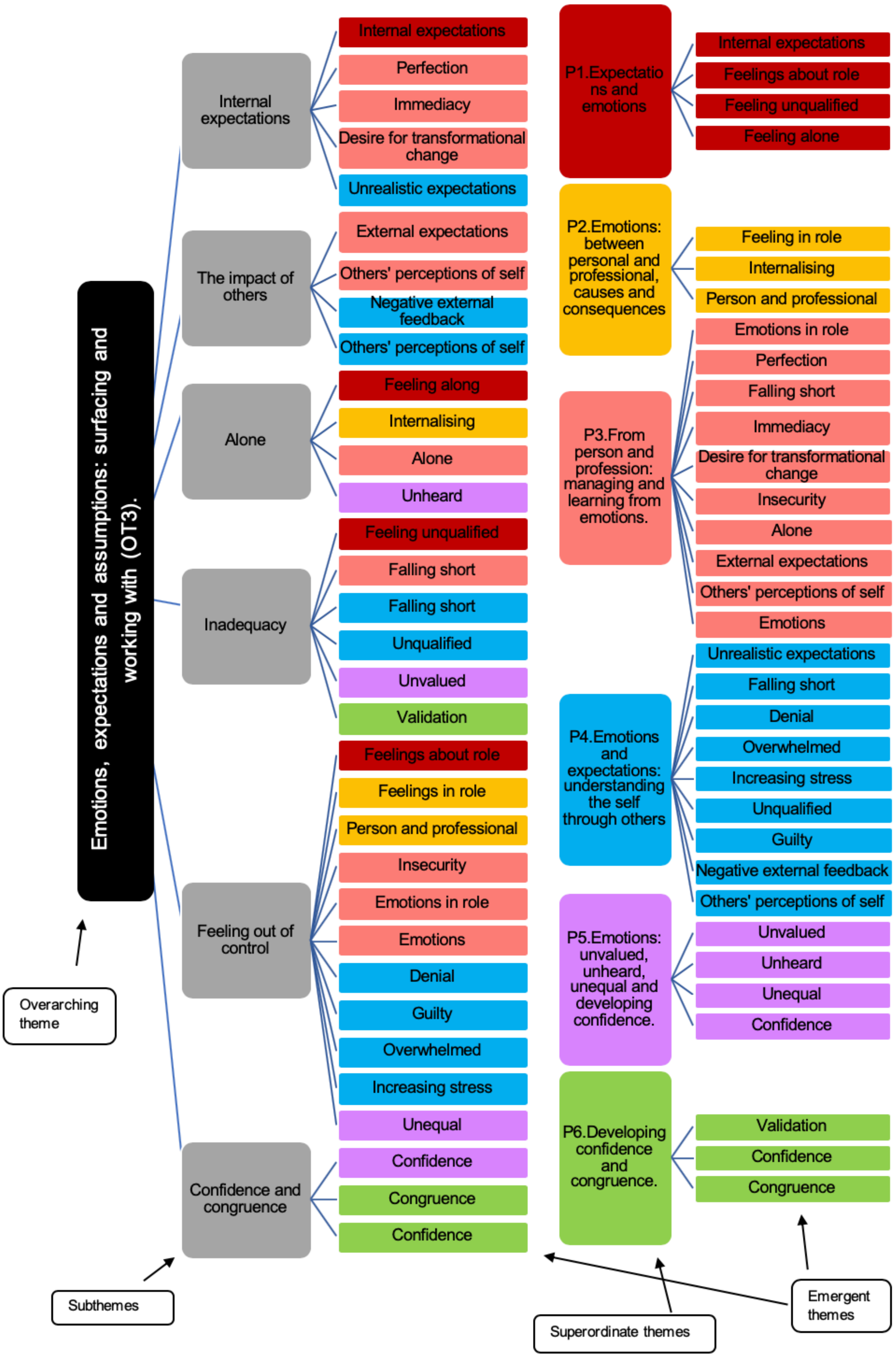
	creating that so that they've got somebody that they can unpick those things with?	network' to 'unpick those things with'.	that Taylor is distancing herself from other SLs?	
	ER: This leads on to the next question. In what ways, if any, has your participation in the group affected you personally and/or professionally?			
Learning about the self through others. Learning about personal defences.	P4: I suppose on both levels it has certainly. I don't know whether it's through seeing behaviour of others but, something made me realize that I'm very defensive [laughter].	Learning about the self through 'seeing the behaviours of others'. Considering 'defensive' internal responses.	Emphasis on 'both levels': reflecting the person and professional to behave 'defensiv[ly]'.	Learning about the self through others: is this a novel concept?
	ER: OK…			
	P4: And that I need to stop.	Desire to 'stop' defensive reactions.		'Need to stop': recognising that these responses are not conducive to desired outcome?
	ER: Tell me more about that. What do you mean by defensive?			
Identifying emotions through observing others. Working with others as working on self. Defensive explanations to justify actions. Reflecting on reactions. Listening as understanding.	P4: I notice it in someone else. I've noticed it in one of our leaders and I've had conversations, really quite frequently, about that and how do I work on that with her? I think, I actually do that, in terms of somebody suggesting something that hasn't been done or somebody suggesting something's not working. Then I've found I'm always very quick to explain, or justify or talk about what has been done or what has worked well. I've tried recently, certainly, to take a step back from that a little bit and just acknowledge, what, the view of others, as in what they're actually saying, rather than jump in for	'Notic[ing]' behaviours in others, generating desire to 'work on that with her'. Recognising being 'very quick to explain, or justify or talk' about 'what has worked well' to deflect suggestions of need. Post WDG, attempting to 'take a step back' and 'acknowledge the view of others'.	Use of 'explain' or 'justify': are these suggestions intended as an attack? Use of 'jump': illustrating the leap that assumption or defensive listening can cause.	Through trying to understand other, she has made sense of some of her own behaviours: what does this mean for identification? 'Defensive' responses as 'talk about what has been done or what has worked well'. Reflection enabling space to understand the intention of others' interaction.

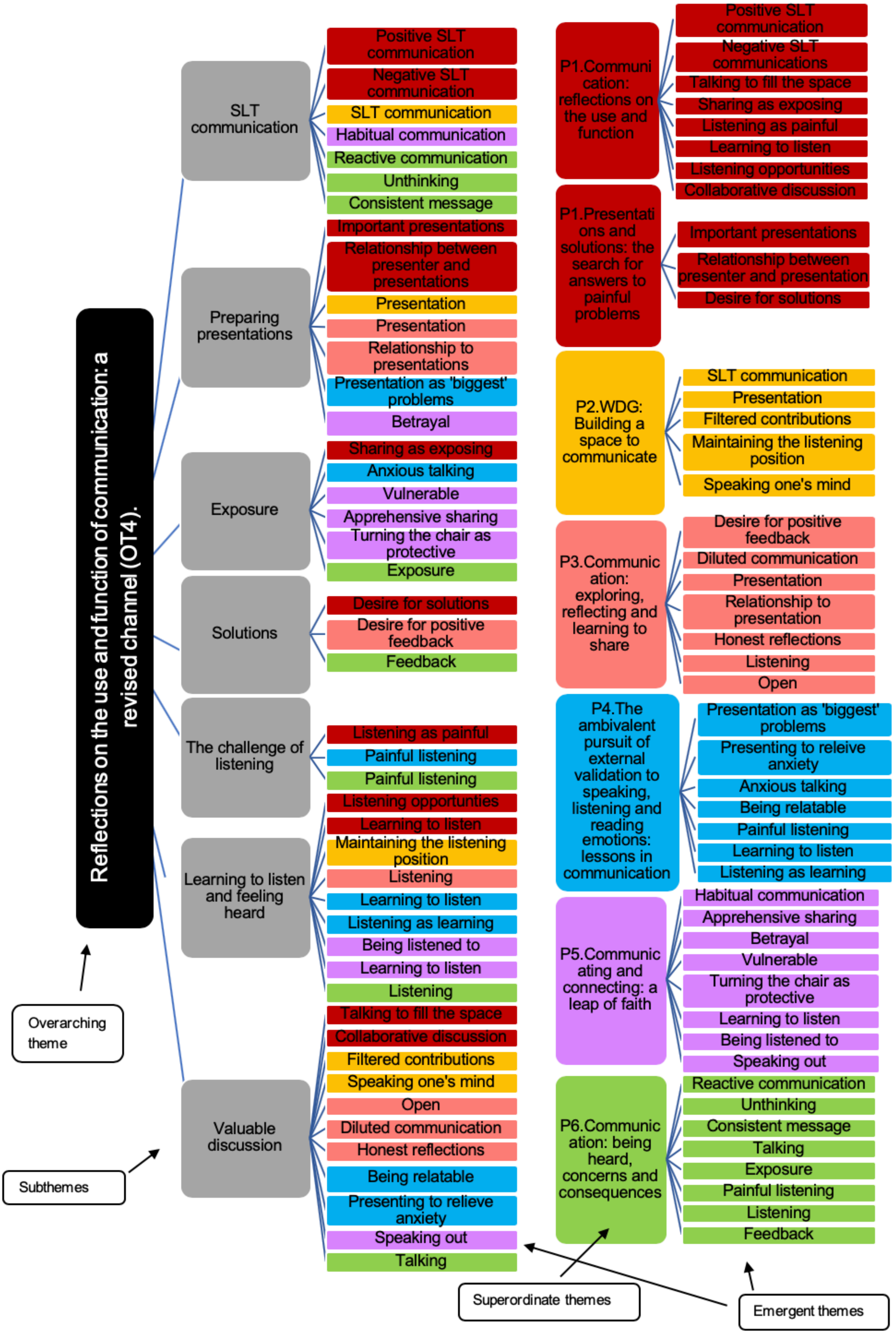
Defensive responses as attending to personal assumptions.	justification of why that might be that case, because that's not necessarily how that person's feeling.	'Jump[ing] in for justification' as 'not necessarily [responding to] how that person's feeling'.		Defensive responses as assumptions that don't 'necessarily [reflect] how that person's feeling.'
	ER: What do you think has led to that?			
Identifying noneffective communication through observation. Adhering to roles in WDG as learning to communicate effectively. Transferring learning from self to interactions outside WDG.	P4: I'm noticing it in other people, almost, and having that discussion... Just being able to see it really clearly that that's not necessarily helpful. Also, we weren't really allowed. It was stopped in the discussion group. There wasn't really the opportunity to do that because it wasn't helpful to the group. In noticing that it's not helpful to the group or discussion, also made me think a little more about the way in which I was participating and having conversations with others outside of the group.	Recognising behaviours 'in other people' as 'see[ing] really clearly that that's not necessarily helpful'. Turning the chair as 'not allowed' to act on defensive reactions. Defensive reactions as 'not helpful to the group of discussion'. Transferring communication from WDG to interactions outside of WDG.	Use of 'we weren't really allowed': adherence to role/process as following rules.	Observing communicative interactions of others as opportunity to identify communication that is 'not necessarily helpful'. Adhering to boundaries of role/process in WDG facilitating helpful communication. Applying learning of the self to 'conversations with others outside of the group.'
	ER: What is it, do you think, brings yourself to respond in that way or others in the group to respond in that way?			
Defensive responses as controlling the narrative. Constant fear of being seen to be failing. Desire to please all.	P4: I don't know whether it's around trying to justify that you're doing a good job or that I'm doing a good job. That I'm doing the right thing. I'm probably similar to others in it's that constant feeling of not wanting to fail, wanting to do the right thing by everybody. That's quite a broad.. children, parents, staff. Yeah, it goes quite wide.	Defensive responses as 'trying to justify that I'm doing a good job. That I'm doing the right thing'. SL role as 'constant feeling of not wanting to fail, wanting to do the right thing by everybody'. SL role as try to please a 'wide' audience.	Emphasis on 'the right thing': difference as intolerable?	Defensive responses as overriding the other person to prove 'you're doing a good job' or that you're 'doing the right thing': do words speak louder than actions? What does this suggest about keeping up appearances?
	ER: Big audience to please.			

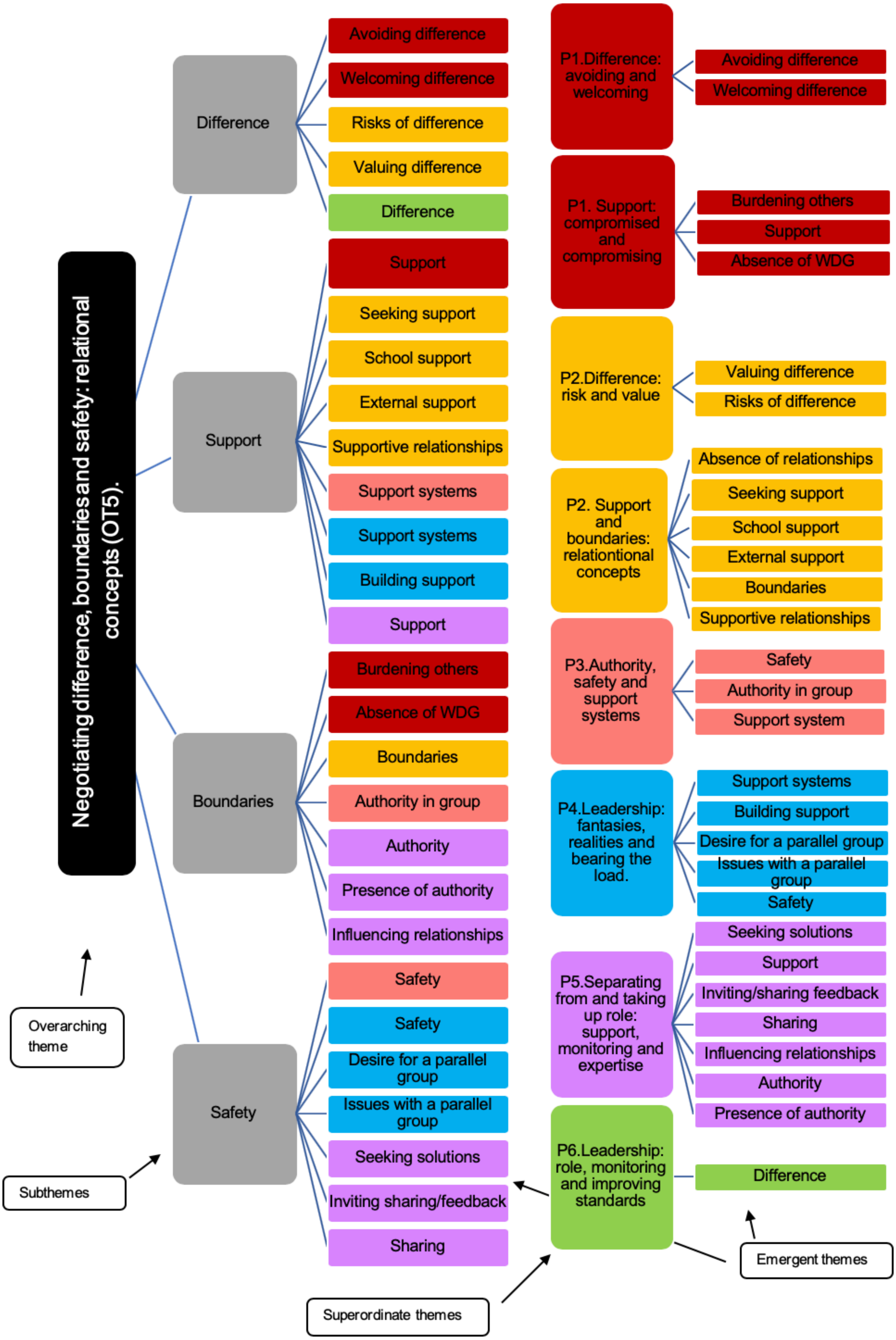
Appendix 12. Theme maps

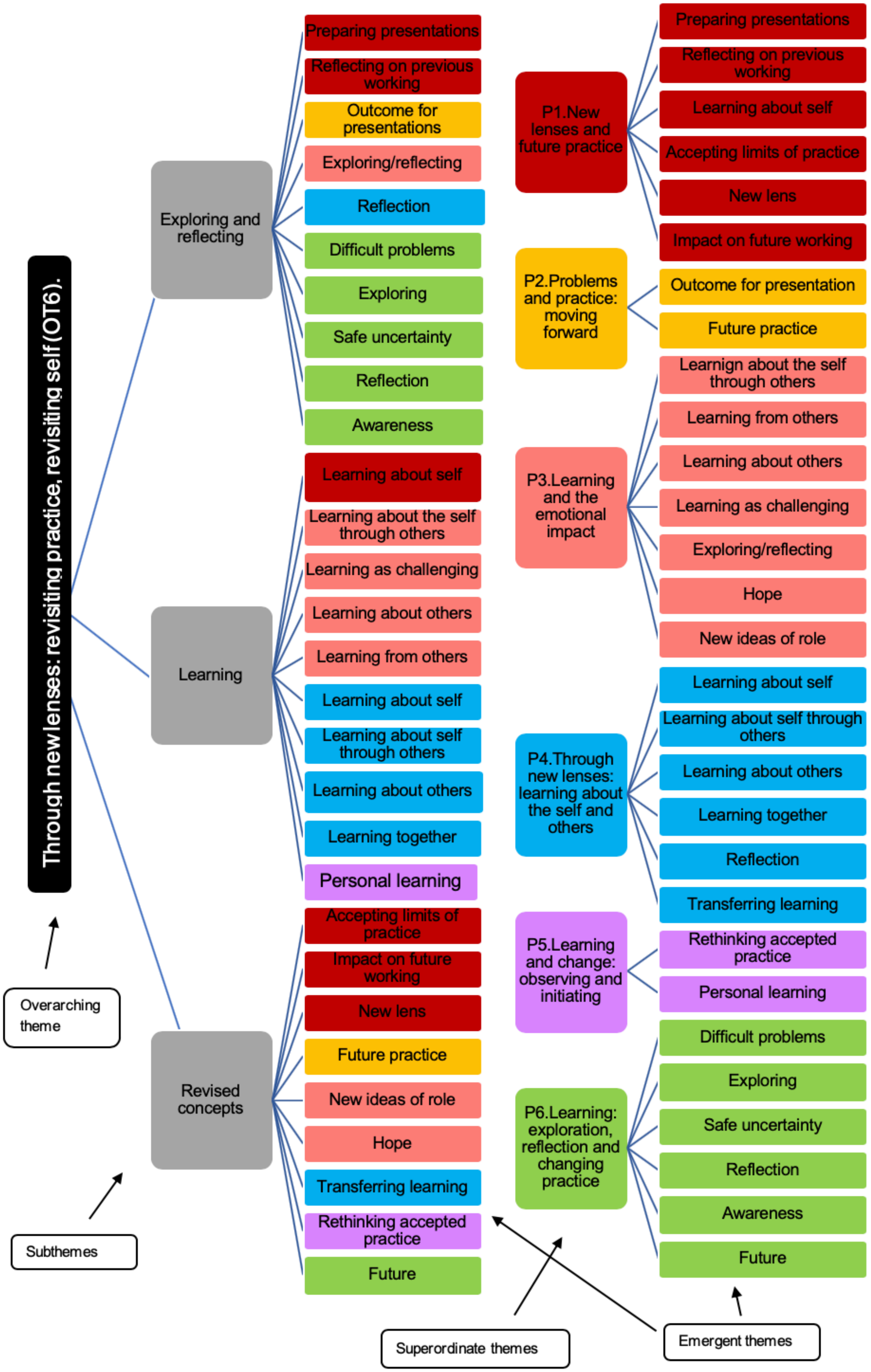

Conceptualisations of leadership: juggling tasks, responsibilities and increasing expectations (OT1).
Concepts of role
Role
Role
Role
Dual roles
Role
Values
Developing personal interests
Taking up role
Personal values
Enjoying role
Values
Challenging work contexts
External expectations
External perceptions
Chanllenging contexts
Depleating resources
Raising standards
Pressure to improve
Driving standards
Increasing responsibilites
Driving standards
Improving standards
Monitoring tasks
Expertise
Improving standards
Monitoring
Specialism
Supporting others
Supporting others
Containing
Holding overview of school
Supporting others
Providing resources
Supporting others
Compromised practice
Too many tasks
Compromised practice
Consequences
Giving up
Juggling responsibilities
Tasks
Responsibilities as a to do list
Consequences of practice
SL role as problems
Separating roles
P1.Leadership: never ending responsibilities and increasing expectations
Role
Pressure to improve
Driving standards
Too many tasks
Compromised practice
Consequences
External expectations
Giving up
P2.Leadership: juggling responsibilities, tasks adn the consequences
Juggling responsibilities
Tasks
Increasing responsibilites
Responsibilities as a to do list
Consequences of practice
External perceptions
P3.Role and responsibilities: concepts, practice and revised perspectives
Role
Driving standards
Supporting others
Developing personal interests
SL role as problems
Chanllenging contexts
P4.Leadership: fantasies, realities and bearing the load.
Role
Containing
Holding overview of school
Improving standards
P5.Separating from and taking up role: support, monitoring and expertise
Dual roles
Separating roles
Taking up role
Supporting others
Providing resources
Monitoring tasks
Depleating resources
Personal values
Expertise
P6.Leadership: role, monitoring and improving standards
Role
Enjoying role
Values
Specialism
Improving standards
Monitoring
Supporting others
Overarching theme
Subthemes
Superordinate themes
Emergent themes

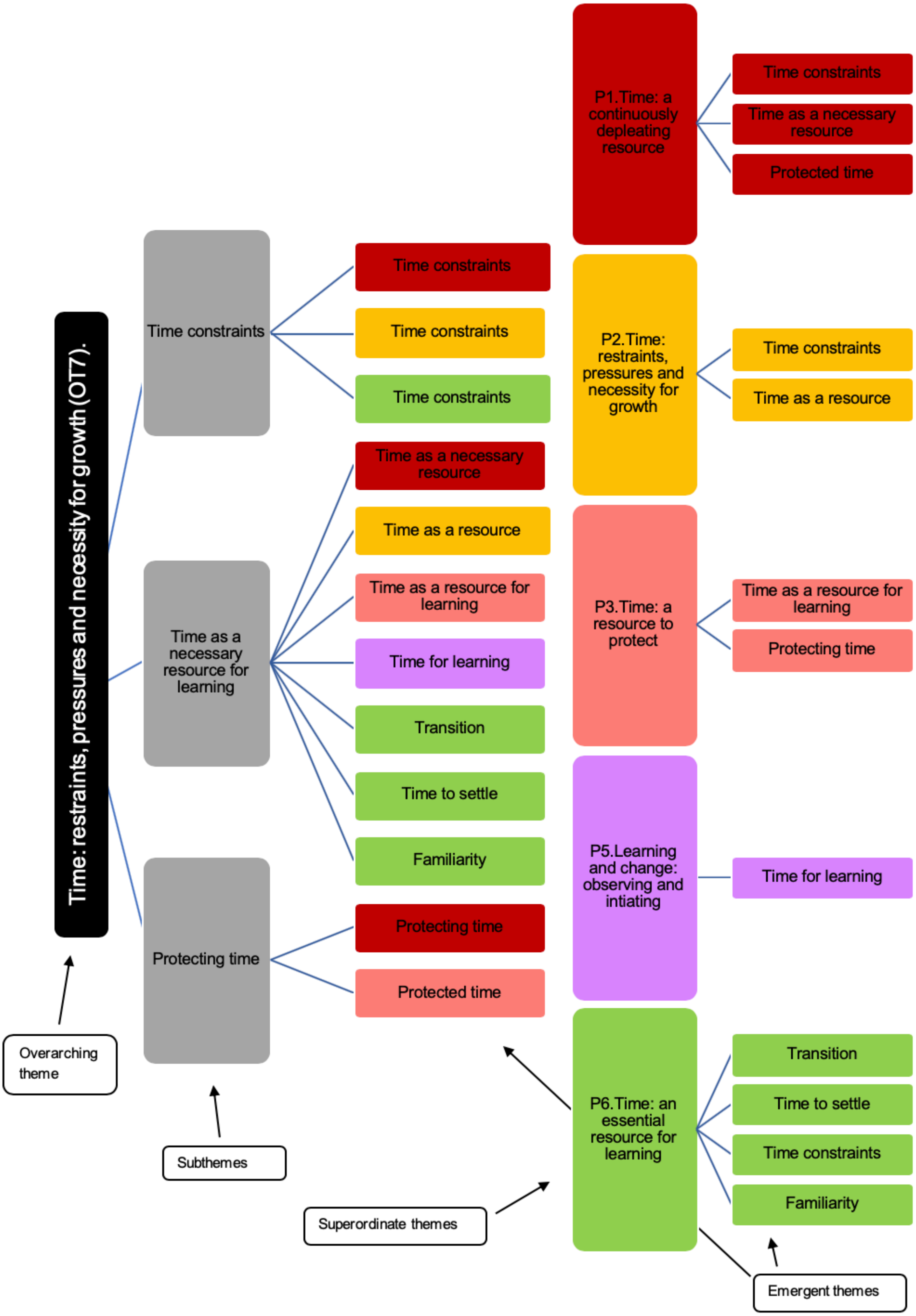

Senior Leadership Team: relationships, relating in role and developing the work group (OT2).
SLT espoused practice
SLT 'oneness'
SLT practice
Snap decisions
SLT practice
Consistency
SLT efficiency
Questioning validity
Tasks
Expectations
SLT role confusion
Expectations within SLT
Self in SLT
Looking for faults
Others' perceptions
Group outside the group
Group outside the group
Relationships
Disinterest
Positions/Roles
Fitting in
Fitting in
Othering in SLT
Difference
Difference
Conflict
Fitting in
Shared experiences
Shared values
Developing shared responsibility
Interest
Learning from each other
Shared experience
Learning about others
Working as a team
Increased trust
Working as a team
WDG as team development
Sharing
Team
Team development
Collaboration
Team working
Collaboration
Connecting
Changing practice
P1.SLT: relationships, working and not-working
SLT 'oneness'
SLT role confusion
Fitting in
Working as a team
Increased trust
P2.SLT: practice, expectations and the self in relation to others; building connections
SLT practice
Snap decisions
Expectation within SLT
Othering in SLT
Self in SLT
WDG as team development
Group outside the group
P3.Working together: reconnecting and developing shared values and responsibility
SLT efficiency
Looking for faults
Difference
Consistency
Relationships
Team
Shared values
Sharing
Developing shared responsixbility
P4.Team development: transferring nuclear support systems and developing collaboration
SLT practice
Team development
Collaboration
P5.The senior leadership team: power and positioning
Questioning validity
Interest
Disinterest
Difference
Conflict
P5. Shared experiences and developing team-work
Learning from eachother
Team working
Shared experience
P6.SLT: practice, positioning and evolving interaction
Tasks
Collaboration
Others' perceptions
Fitting in
Learning about others
Position/Roles
Connecting
Changing practice
Overarching theme
Subthemes
Superordinate themes
Emergent themes


Emotions, expectations and assumptions: surfacing and working with (OT3).
Internal expectations
Internal expectations
Perfection
Immediacy
Desire for transformational change
Unrealistic expectations
The impact of others
External expectations
Others' perceptions of self
Negative external feedback
Others' perceptions of self
Alone
Feeling along
Internalising
Alone
Unheard
Inadequacy
Feeling unqualified
Falling short
Falling short
Unqualified
Unvalued
Validation
Feeling out of control
Feelings about role
Feelings in role
Person and professional
Insecurity
Emotions in role
Emotions
Denial
Guilty
Overwhelmed
Increasing stress
Unequal
Confidence and congruence
Confidence
Congruence
Confidence
P1.Expectations and emotions
Internal expectations
Feelings about role
Feeling unqualified
Feeling alone
P2.Emotions: between personal and professional, causes and consequences
Feeling in role
Internalising
Person and professional
P3.From person and profession: managing and learning from emotions.
Emotions in role
Perfection
Falling short
Immediacy
Desire for transformational change
Insecurity
Alone
External expectations
Others' perceptions of self
Emotions
P4.Emotions and expectations: understanding the self through others
Unrealistic expectations
Falling short
Denial
Overwhelmed
Increasing stress
Unqualified
Guilty
Negative external feedback
Others' perceptions of self
P5.Emotions: unvalued, unheard, unequal and developing confidence.
Unvalued
Unheard
Unequal
Confidence
P6.Developing confidence and congruence.
Validation
Confidence
Congruence
Overarching theme
Subthemes
Superordinate themes
Emergent themes


Reflections on the use and function of communication: a revised channel (OT4).
SLT communication
Positive SLT communication
Negative SLT communication
SLT communication
Habitual communication
Reactive communication
Unthinking
Consistent message
Preparing presentations
Important presentations
Relationship between presenter and presentations
Presentation
Presentation
Relationship to presentations
Presentation as 'biggest' problems
Betrayal
Exposure
Sharing as exposing
Anxious talking
Vulnerable
Apprehensive sharing
Turning the chair as protective
Exposure
Solutions
Desire for solutions
Desire for positive feedback
Feedback
The challenge of listening
Listening as painful
Painful listening
Painful listening
Learning to listen and feeling heard
Listening opportunties
Learning to listen
Maintaining the listening position
Listening
Learning to listen
Listening as learning
Being listened to
Learning to listen
Listening
Valuable discussion
Talking to fill the space
Collaborative discussion
Filtered contributions
Speaking one's mind
Open
Diluted communication
Honest reflections
Being relatable
Presenting to relieve anxiety
Speaking out
Talking
P1.Communication: reflections on the use and function
Positive SLT communication
Negative SLT communications
Talking to fill the space
Sharing as exposing
Listening as painful
Learning to listen
Listening opportunities
Collaborative discussion
P1.Presentations and solutions: the search for answers to painful problems
Important presentations
Relationship between presenter and presentation
Desire for solutions
P2.WDG: Building a space to communicate
SLT communication
Presentation
Filtered contributions
Maintaining the listening position
Speaking one's mind
P3.Communication: exploring, reflecting and learning to share
Desire for positive feedback
Diluted communication
Presentation
Relationship to presentation
Honest reflections
Listening
Open
P4.The ambivalent pursuit of external validation to speaking, listening and reading emotions: lessons in communication
Presentation as 'biggest' problems
Presenting to releive anxiety
Anxious talking
Being relatable
Painful listening
Learning to listen
Listening as learning
P5.Communicating and connecting: a leap of faith
Habitual communication
Apprehensive sharing
Betrayal
Vulnerable
Turning the chair as protective
Learning to listen
Being listened to
Speaking out
P6.Communication: being heard, concerns and consequences
Reactive communication
Unthinking
Consistent message
Talking
Exposure
Painful listening
Listening
Feedback
Overarching theme
Subthemes
Superordinate themes
Emergent themes


Negotiating difference, boundaries and safety: relational concepts (OT5).
Difference
Avoiding difference
Welcoming difference
Risks of difference
Valuing difference
Difference
Support
Support
Seeking support
School support
External support
Supportive relationships
Support systems
Support systems
Building support
Support
Boundaries
Burdening others
Absence of WDG
Boundaries
Authority in group
Authority
Presence of authority
Influencing relationships
Safety
Safety
Safety
Desire for a parallel group
Issues with a parallel group
Seeking solutions
Inviting sharing/feedback
Sharing
P1.Difference: avoiding and welcoming
Avoiding difference
Welcoming difference
P1. Support: compromised and compromising
Burdening others
Support
Absence of WDG
P2.Difference: risk and value
Valuing difference
Risks of difference
P2. Support and boundaries: relationtional concepts
Absence of relationships
Seeking support
School support
External support
Boundaries
Supportive relationships
P3.Authority, safety and support systems
Safety
Authority in group
Support system
P4.Leadership: fantasies, realities and bearing the load.
Support systems
Building support
Desire for a parallel group
Issues with a parallel group
Safety
P5.Separating from and taking up role: support, monitoring and expertise
Seeking solutions
Support
Inviting/sharing feedback
Sharing
Influencing relationships
Authority
Presence of authority
P6.Leadership: role, monitoring and improving standards
Difference
Overarching theme
Subthemes
Superordinate themes
Emergent themes


Through newlenses: revisiting practice, revisiting self (OT6).
Exploring and reflecting
Learning
Revised concepts
Preparing presentations
Reflecting on previous working
Outcome for presentations
Exploring/reflecting
Reflection
Difficult problems
Exploring
Safe uncertainty
Reflection
Awareness
Learning about self
Learning about the self through others
Learning as challenging
Learning about others
Learning from others
Learning about self
Learning about self through others
Learning about others
Learning together
Personal learning
Accepting limits of practice
Impact on future working
New lens
Future practice
New ideas of role
Hope
Transferring learning
Rethinking accepted practice
Future
P1.New lenses and future practice
P2.Problems and practice: moving forward
P3.Learning and the emotional impact
P4.Through new lenses: learning about the self and others
P5.Learning and change: observing and initiating
P6.Learning: exploration, reflection and changing practice
Preparing presentations
Reflecting on previous working
Learning about self
Accepting limits of practice
New lens
Impact on future working
Outcome for presentation
Future practice
Learnign about the self through others
Learning from others
Learning about others
Learning as challenging
Exploring/reflecting
Hope
New ideas of role
Learning about self
Learning about self through others
Learning about others
Learning together
Reflection
Transferring learning
Rethinking accepted practice
Personal learning
Difficult problems
Exploring
Safe uncertainty
Reflection
Awareness
Future
Overarching theme
Subthemes
Superordinate themes
Emergent themes


Time: restraints, pressures and necessity for growth (OT7).
Time constraints
Time as a necessary resource for learning
Protecting time
Time constraints
Time constraints
Time constraints
Time as a necessary resource
Time as a resource
Time as a resource for learning
Time for learning
Transition
Time to settle
Familiarity
Protecting time
Protected time
P1.Time: a continuously depleating resource
Time constraints
Time as a necessary resource
Protected time
P2.Time: restraints, pressures and necessity for growth
Time constraints
Time as a resource
P3.Time: a resource to protect
Time as a resource for learning
Protecting time
P5.Learning and change: observing and intiating
Time for learning
P6.Time: an essential resource for learning
Transition
Time to settle
Time constraints
Familiarity
Overarching theme
Subthemes
Superordinate themes
Emergent themes