Reflective practice via the lens of the life career and paradox: a contemplation of being and becoming a social worker.

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<td>Keywords:</td>
<td>Reflective Practice, social work, paradox, career, Reflection</td>
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URL: http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/crep
Reflective practice via the lens of the life career and paradox: a contemplation of being and becoming a social worker

Abstract

Reflective practice constitutes an important aspect of social work enactment, with a range of theory available to the practitioner, e.g. Schön (1983) and Timmins (2015). This paper continues this heritage with a theory of reflection informed via continental philosophy. The theory advocated here considers the life career of the practitioner via the duality of being and becoming, providing a critical lens upon retrospective enactment illuminating paradoxical moments. Such moments provide diachronic and nuanced insights into enactment across a range of interconnected strands of the life career, allowing the practitioner to consider important emergent themes across career articulation and thus action within and outside the vista of paid employment. This paper provides a case illustration to demonstrate the penetrative nature of such a lens, advocating future research endeavours to inform social work pedagogy and practice.

Introduction

Social work as a profession involves important decisions and actions that influence people’s lives, where the evaluation of the ‘quality’ of outcome of such provision is difficult to judge, bringing forth subjective interpretation in conjunction to previously inscribed notions of ‘best practice’. Being a social worker is a lived experience, one that provides an important contribution toward the life career. Career within this paper is operationalised via Goffman’s definition of career as ‘any social strand in a person’s life’ (1961: 127), significant activity traced via reflexive articulation that connects to a broader sense of life narrativisation (Author, 2017, 183). The strand of social work is one that interconnects and comes into tension with other enacted strands - e.g. family, leisure, housing - occurring within a social world, where practice benefits from acknowledging undecidability, that there is an art to practice, a practice that cannot follow a set formulae or procedure (Parton and O’Bryne 2000, Payne, 2016). There is invariably a longevity to
being/becoming a social worker, one that will provide articulation, narrative(s), where a diachronic analysis is required to enhance meaning and understanding of enactment at any given duration. This paper therefore reviews and outlines important parameters of the literature relating to being/becoming a social worker, how this relates to professional practice, the context of delivery and the part that reflection plays to benefit such practice, a practice inherently full of contradictions and complexity. The paper will then provide a critical analysis of such literature suggesting it provides a narrow perspective upon reflection, concentrating too heavily upon the individual, rarely acknowledging context, temporality and multiplicity of the life career. The paper asserts how the conceptualisation of the life career can aid practitioners to consider how many facets of their career interrelate and may be placed in tension, becoming particularly useful when considering the relationship between ‘personal’ and ‘professional’ values. The paper highlights its use of the duality of being and becoming to explore career (see Author, 2017) to expose moments of paradox, which the paper asserts are useful moments to open and consider important emergent themes that provide a tension across career articulation. Such an approach allows enactment to be considered within and outside the vista of paid employment, moving reflection toward a broader and more critical lens to aid career development. This paper provides a case illustration to demonstrate the penetrative nature of such a lens to advocate future research endeavours to inform social work pedagogy and practice.

Professional practice

Social Work is a profession, where profession - rooted within the realms of the clergy, medicine and accounting (Clarke and Newman and Clarke, 1997) - provides a legitimisation of expertise, symbolisation that one is more skilled with a broader knowledge base than a ‘layperson’; due to a professional having to undertaken a lengthy process of licensed and inaugurated training and/or education. Profession provides an identificatory label, one that can communicate expertise quickly to another as well as a sense of self-esteem. The symbolism of ‘profession’ is one that provides a relational power with other, both other professionals within the same, as well as, different fields and the layperson, influencing the distribution of rewards, capital and esteem (May and Buck, 1998; Kreber, 2019). Such status therefore enables, as well as constrains, the professional as they are required to follow normative and regulative processes, rules and policy, thus providing a tension between practice as an art, sensitive to its context, with an acknowledgement of previous experiences and ‘intuition’; as well as a science adhering to espoused ‘scientific’ objective entrenched forms of ‘best’ previously ascribed practice (Parker and Bradley, 2003; Doel and Shadlow, 2017, xxiv). Social Work requires an ability to be a reflective...
professional, to come to know one's unfolding values and how this influences practice. With many social work practitioners having to fulfil the requirement of a higher education (HE) degree or post graduate qualification, connecting with the widening of participation of HE, there has been an influx of non-traditional graduates eagerly looking to fill newly calibrated 'professional' roles within a post-industrialised society, where many face a challenge to previous value bases and where social work pedagogy may provoke a disorientation of such values and sense of identity and where practice is likely to provoke complexity, contradiction and paradoxical notions of 'best practice' where care can become control and vice-versa (Scanlon, 2011, Kosberg, 1973, Cournoyer, 2016). Given such parameters it becomes important for the practitioner to have not only an ability to reflect – to consider action – but also reflexivity – to consider how aspects of identity – that which can at times be fluid as well as concrete – may adapt and change as well as acknowledging aspects of continuity. Therefore, the professional social worker is to consider the interplay of being and becoming and the way this traces upon a sense of self-narrativisation (see Author, 2017).

The duality of being and becoming

The life career is constituted by a range of interconnecting strands. Given the multiplicity of such conceptualisation it can be difficult to frame reflection upon career action. Therefore, this paper advocates framing such reflection via notions of duality, what Author (2017:187) describes as a 'conceptualisation of reality that provides a paradoxical relationship between opposing yet entwining entities'. Being and becoming, provides a useful focus for reflection, one not afraid to dive into ambiguity and paradox. Therefore, to contemplate being and becoming, one is to consider objective and subjective dimensions of 'reality', to intimately connect with philosophical reflection from a range of perspectives. For example, Sartre and existentialism focuses on being, as does Heidegger, and has an application in many areas of health and social care (Thompson and Pascal 2012) as well as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) or even back to the pre-Socratics of debates between Parmenides and Heraclitus. Being and becoming, as one of the framing orientations of this discussion, requires an engagement with Heidegger where in Being and Time (Heidegger 1962, Caputo 1986, [1993]) Heidegger addresses 'the question of being' which he believes philosophers have generally failed to do, focusing on beings as entities (these are 'ontical' questions about the properties of beings, not the ontological questions of their Being). Being, for Heidegger, is understood as 'being-in-the-world' as an engaged purposeful agent, not just spatially located, but immersed in a world of meaning. This world is not just a collection of things 'present-to-hand' but is a world of 'equipment' or 'gear' (Zeug) of things 'ready-to-hand' (zuhanden) that are involved in our
purposeful projects. For the professional, training and education is to become proficient in the use of ‘ready-to-hand’ things, techniques, equipment and gear of the professions. Dasein is ‘in’ a ‘relational totality’ of ‘significance’. This relational totality is what gives things their significance by their relationship to our ‘concerns’ or ‘care’ (Sorge). For professionals, their relationship of care and concern to situated ‘things’ or equipment, gear or the ‘ready-to-hand’, rather than the ‘present-to-hand’. Much discussion about professionals has been caught in the present-to-hand rather than concern over the ready-to-hand and the scope and foundations of an ethical life (Reid 2019).

Scanlon (2011) and Goh (2019) suggests ‘becoming’ is the most useful defining concept or metaphor for a new professional class who understand that their working lives are open-ended, lifelong process of learning. The ‘ongoingness’ of professional development means individual professional identities are constructed throughout one’s professional lives rather than an isolated, rugged, individualistic traditional professional. This process of becoming is the ongoing journeying of professionalism that is multi-layered and demands engagement and change from the individual. Becoming has the connotation of flattering dress and elegance. However, philosophically, ‘becoming’ is flux and change, with no arrival or departure point to becoming a professional, rather a constant process of becoming. This can uncouple the professional from secure reference points, but it is in the fluidity of movement that change and becoming occurs. This discussion is located in the movement of philosophers, symbolic interactionalists, existentialist and humanists and how these resources contribute to the understanding of the becoming as a professional journey. Such a journey of ‘being’/‘becoming’ a social worker will critically engage with the issues that reflective professionals encounter and give air to tensions along the way, tensions evoked via the complex nature of working within the social world. For example, ‘atrocity stories’ are the sorts of account that are common in ethnographic literature on the work of professions (Stimson and Webb 1975; Dingwall, 2018). Atrocity stories are the devices whereby users of professional services retrospectively interpret their encounters with professions, negotiate the norms of behaviour, understand the rules of engagement, and redress imbalances of power in professional relationships. These stories are dramatic narratives, drawing on shared understanding of the world, casting the teller or user of services as hero and right, against incompetence and dereliction of others (Dingwall 2001:68). Through these stories social structures and power relations are rendered rational and comprehensible. The rise of narrative approaches has become significant in professions where meanings and safety have become watchwords in social work and health and social care practice.
It is worth considering that there is a recursive relationship between theory and practice, where theory can inform practice as well as there being ‘theories of social practices’ (Reckwitz 2002), that which indicates the ‘turn to practices’ in social theory, tying to an interest in both the ‘everyday’ and the ‘life-world’ or the lived experience of professional practice. A further consideration of the complex nodal interactions that occur for the contemporary professional (Reckwitz 2002; Bryson et al, 2015). With a lived experience focus, vantage point or perspective, the mythology of managerialist cultural constructs dissipates and the actions, thoughts and feelings of professionals comes into focus. This is the corporeality and everyday life of becoming/being a professional. Reckwitz (2002: 249) asserts that ‘practice theory does not place the social in mental qualities, nor discourse, nor in interaction but in practices’. This adds to the canon of practice theories by changing the location of practice against earlier theorists (such as Bourdieu, Butler, Foucault, Garfinkel, Giddens, Latour, Schatzki). It also adds a significant element to professional practice by locating it in the practice itself rather than with reference to imposed or guiding constraints on what professional practice should be according to competences or tick box performance measures. Reckwitz (2002: 225) suggests that ‘for practice theory bodily and mental patterns are necessary components of practices and are thus social’. The tacit dimension of unknown bodily and mental activities and the rule-governed nature of practice provides a richer picture of practice including an ontology of the flesh (Merleau-Ponty 2002), taking place within a context. At this juncture the paper moves toward a reflection upon reflection, to place its contribution, that reflection can be aided by the life career and duality framework concentrating on moments of paradox.

Reflection

The history of reflection has seminal roots in Dewey (1933), Kolb (1984) and Schön (1983). The art of reflection spans many fields, for example Mackintosh (1998) suggests the 80s saw the emergence of reflection for career development. Schön (1983) concerned with professional development of knowledge and skills makes the distinction between reflection in action in a process of ongoing continuous learning, and reflection as immediate (in) or by looking back across practice (on) (Timmins 2015: 75). Reflection-in-action is the core of ‘professional artistry’ rather than ‘technical-rationality’ - where evidence-based practice values, quantitative rather than qualitative methods, areas established as protocol rather than intuitive practice. Schön’s work has therefore become part of the ‘canon’ in teaching and learning across a spectrum of professional practices. However Schön’s work is not without its critics. Eraut (2004) criticises the lack of precision and clarity, Boud and...
Walker (1998) argue the context of reflection is ignored, Usher et al (1997) criticises the unreflective methodology, and Smyth (1989) criticises the theoretical and apolitical nature of his work. Greenwood (1993) requires more reflection-before-action and Moon (1999) suggests reflection-in-action is unachievable. As Ghaye (2000: 7) suggests ‘maybe reflective practices offer us a way of trying to make sense of the uncertainty in our workplaces and the courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos’, and Collin et al (2013) summarise such critiques to encapsulate the theoretical, practical and methodological e.g. ‘Lack of clarity and consensus on the concept of reflective practice, particularly its relationship with action and emotion’. This paper considers whether uncertainty, or chaos and feelings of uncertainty can only make sense via a contemplation of order and vice-versa, linking back to the being and becoming duality mentioned earlier, where being provides a concreteness, knowledge, whilst becoming provides startlement and uncomforting (see Author, 2017).

One continuity provided by reflective practice theory is that it is understood as the process of learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice. Jarvis (1995) argues this involves examining assumptions in everyday practice and adopting a critical attitude of self-awareness, and in the case of this paper assumptions in regard to career (see Author, 2016). The pressures on busy professionals to individually neglect a contextual and situated focus on reflection is a warning this paper wishes to heed.

To provide a critical engagement in reflexivity, one that considers social positionality, the self in relation to others and vice-versa, and evoking a close look at paradox to be revealing moments of career enactment and articulation, therefore questioning reflection as a catch-all concept that provides a decontextualized and abstract analysis. Critical reflection takes a wider and contextualised look at the situation within which reflection takes place drawing upon the philosophical tradition of the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, providing a substantive analysis of personal beliefs, how these fit within social settings and how these social settings influence and affect situations (Fook and Askeland 2006) where power differences are a necessary component of reflection (Fook, 2015; Brookfield, 1995). Critical reflection extends the reflective project to include assumption hunting (Brookfield 1995), taken for granted and common-sense and power dynamics exercised in reflective situations. As such, critical reflection is both a theory and a process (Gardner 2014) with a deeper look at the underpinning reasons why situations occur and consideration of all the elements that contributes to reflection.

To critically reflect means engaging with diachronic readings, acknowledging that reflection is both a posteriori, after the event, recollection; or a priori, before the event, anticipation. Such readings need to consider the risks of over and under preparation which may evoke
assumption and anxiety. Therefore, along the journey toward being/becoming a social worker one is likely to experience a clash of value structures between the personal and the professional, evoking contradiction and paradox within the mind of the practitioner, both neophyte and the experienced. This occurs via duration of experience, peppered with fateful moments where the paradoxical interplay between being and becoming manifest within consciousness (see Author, 2017). Our reflective engagement is to re-imagine the existing world and propose and explore alternative mental landscape of thoughts, ideas and practice. As such, reflective disclosure becomes a condition for social justice, a social justice that may well be out of reach.

Methodology – Case-study

The paper now will move toward providing a case study to illustrate the use of reflective theory espoused above. The case study is a participant in a longitudinal research project which utilised a duality framework to read career articulation, focusing on the transition from undergraduate study to up to 3 years post-graduation of a small selected sample (see Author, 2019). Although reflective practice was not the sole focus of the research project the participant in question – who is now a fully qualified social worker – provides excellent insights into her career articulation that focuses on her being/becoming a social worker. The illustration provides great insight into the parameters of reflection highlighted above, including reflections that account for the tension experienced being/becoming a social worker, where there was a conflict between personal and professional value structures, inherent contradiction prevalent within social work. The longitudinal study started with a review of a worksheet written by the participants as an undergraduate student, a worksheet that reflects upon career enactment both retrospectively and anticipatorily, informed via social theory. The researcher then deconstructively read such a worksheet focusing on the duality of being and becoming to reveal a prominent paradoxical tension found throughout the longitudinal research project – in the case of the participant being revealed here; ‘Protection as Vulnerability’. The participants were then revisited 2 years and 3 years after graduation where they engaged in 2 semi-structured interviews, which covers a period where the participant was undertaking a social work Masters Programme. What unfolds is the penetrative nature of reading career via notions of paradox, how this reveals many important aspects of the participant’s journey to become/be a social worker, which clearly influence future enactment.

Participant J is a white working-class female in her mid-twenties. She is a hard-working individual who has consistently across the longitudinal study spoken of the importance of caregiving to her career enactment. Participant J experienced the divorce of her birth parents within childhood, resulting in her living with her mother, whom she considers

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having had a tough life spending many years bringing her up on her own. Participant J has a half-sister, who is of dual heritage and who has learning difficulties, Participant J feels very protective of her younger half-sister. Participant J speaks of how she gains from enacting care, how care is looked upon as an aspired gift, yet, at the same time, can acknowledge how this seeks a return within an emotional economy of care. Such an economy, for Participant J, makes her feel vulnerable when providing protection via care, to others. The providing of inadequate protection may hurt her as well as the receiver of care, hence providing the overarching paradox identified in the project, one validated by the participant. The reflections below illustrate how an exploration of such an overarching paradox allows other paradoxes to come into play, where the participant acknowledges an eagerness to explore such paradoxes, providing her with a useful career analytic, illustrating the penetrative and utility of paradox as an analytical lens or motif.

Reflections

Participant J, has consistently across the study, articulated a position upon career as paid work. This is evident in her worksheet as an undergraduate.

I applied for an undergraduate degree in children’s nursing as I felt this career was very suitable to my characteristics... I continued gaining work experience in the NHS and this is the precise time my ontological security was threatened after I had experienced a prominent fateful moment (Giddens, 1991) I was assigned to work with oncology patients which began pleasantly, however after several months of becoming friends with a patient, I witnessed her condition deteriorate rapidly. I had been with her at her time of death and this was extremely emotional. I felt as though I had not been able to help her, something I have found confidence in when referring to my identity, questioning myself and my emotional resilience. I could not continue working and understood that a career in nursing was not appropriate for me and decided to apply for a youth studies degree that offered me many other possible career paths.

This event challenges Participant J’s perception of career, one where the enactment of care becomes questioned and where protection, so vital a motivator, ends with a negative return, one that makes Participant J vulnerable as the act of protection is seen to have failed. The deconstructive reading once shared with the participant in the first semi-structured interview provides a challenge to the participant, a questioning of the endeavour of care and protection from a differing perspective, how the giving of care
provides an emotional economy, how validation comes from care, a sense of purpose, and a taking as well as a giving.

I thought it was really useful [the deconstructive reading] … the caring as a strength and vulnerabilities and the paradox of that, that I thought was really good, as I think it reflects what it means for me to do it [care for others], it does validate me as a person if I help others... I think it does highlight that you need to feel worthy ... yeah when I read it, it sort of made sense it was care that, that is really true, but you wouldn't sort of go to someone and say, well oh, selfishly, you know I am helping you out because it makes me feel better, cause really it should always be like that person, and what you are doing for them, but it does make you, you know, you are doing something to make yourself feel better, I suppose.

Care is therefore wished upon as a gift, where the participant in some way gives herself over to the care receiver, where they are put first. However, Participant J has to acknowledge how there is always a return that is anticipated, a need for reassurance and validation that comes from the thank you or gratitude that comes back into play in the emotional economy of care announced. The emotional economy of care, via the paradox exposed, becomes manifest in consciousness to the participant, where discussion evokes an unfolding of further connecting paradoxes, in particular how her work experiences as a social worker provide the paradox of ‘care as control’ and ‘control as care’… it [the controlling aspect of service users] sort of attacks what I am used to, so my brain sort of goes, ‘oh my god this person doesn’t like you, you’re not doing what this person wants, you’re going against what they think is good for them, you’re not getting that feeling of you are helping them’ because they are blatantly sort of going ‘what are you doing to me?’ But you sort of have to realise that that is eventually for them, so I have gotten used to that idea, but it has sort of sent me into melt down a couple of times if I have had to say ‘look I am really sorry but, you’re not doing what’s best for your child’, ‘we are going to have to remove your child at the moment for a court order’ it sort of all goes into melt down, the control sort of takes over, and sometime, it has to, you have got no choice! It’s not nice to do the control bit, it is necessary sometimes, I have to get used to that.
'Care' for Participant J is focused upon as a means of gaining a quick positive emotional return, however there are times when this is not deemed appropriate by the service user, and therefore a sense of controlling someone is presented in consciousness as being in the best interest of the care receiver, however, such an enactment feels alien to intended enactment, an enactment that seeks verification via positive regard. Control at times becomes enacted in the best interest of the service user, though they may not see this at this time and it is hoped that they may be able at some later date. Within the second semi-structured interview (3 years-after-graduation) further paradoxes unfold when revisiting the overarching paradox of protection as vulnerability. What is of note is that the participant had taken on-board the paradoxes explored in previous interview and came prepared to the interview with her observations of other paradoxes that had become manifest within consciousness. A fateful moment, which had occurred between interviews, provides an impetus to acknowledge such paradoxes, in particular how 'helping provides a sense of helplessness'. The fateful moment involved the participant's younger half-sister whom had experienced a period of mental distress culminating in the writing of a couple of suicide notes, found initially by the participant's mother.

... my sister had stopped eating, my mum ... found a different bunch of suicide notes, there was one for me and my mother and one for her friends at school ... my mum started to blame herself as she had depression in the past, I had sort of had to become the parent as them two, to me, had become crumbling bricks... she is only 15 and my mum has always been this steady rock and I thought what do I do now I am the one that has got to sort this out and the paradox that I found which is what I was thinking about is that I found that I was the helper but I found that I felt really helpless.

The event appears to throw the participant into uncharted territory, forcing a reconfiguration of the relationship between the participant and her mother, a change in power dynamics that is viewed to have disorrientated the participant at first, a position loaded with meanings of finitude, forced by her sister's actions, providing a threat toward the act of protection again, to be made vulnerable, yet this time perceived as 'helping providing a sense of helplessness'. Both interviews reveal subjective value structures of the participant and how experiences shape such structures. In the first interview this is particularly manifest due to the Master's course providing a focus upon reflective practice. What becomes apparent is how such reflection provides a tension for Participant J, how
the course is pushing for certain codes of values that at first challenge the participant’s ‘personal’ set of values and sense of ‘authenticity’.

When your personal and professional values start to conflict you start worrying about where you are going to get lost in being as you are now ... when is that point gonna be where I have got to forget what my judgements are and what my instincts are? Are they gonna get swallowed up ... that sort of taught me that meshing my professional and personal values together so it is sort of continuous being and becoming, because it is forever evolving I think. I was a bit worried that being a social worker I would have to lose some parts of myself but it just sort of means it has got to be adapted differently.

The duality of being/becoming, as well as self/other, is salient in such a reflection, where the participant contemplates how the self is a moving projection and that a deep-rooted sense of self – values - are adaptable and context dependent constituted by experiences with other, including the other within self. This is further explored in the second interview where another two further paradoxes emerge, a challenge to dichotomous logic, where certainty can only be evoked via a sense of uncertainty and how one has to become comfortable with such uncomforting.

... professionalism and guidelines are a nice safety net for you, telling you what to do, it really is not like that when you get into it, it is very much like a mixture of everything and if you don't get the balance right you really will mess up ... and the welfare of the child that should be at the front of your mind, am I thinking of the practice guidelines that is saying I should do it this way, and then your values, you are like ‘ I am not treating a parent like an equal, valuing that they are an independent person they have got a right to do this', and there is no way you are going to know what is the right thing to do, that is what I don't like as I would have said before any of this [studying and working as a social worker] that I am a black and white person with my values, with my judgement of saying that 'I did the right thing', yet it is very grey ... I don't like not knowing I think that is why it is a benefit for me to learn because I like to know, I like to be certain about things, or, I at least like to have the information there to make a judgment. Social work is so grey there is no black and white there is no black and white what so ever ... as long as you are certain that you are uncertain then you will be fine, because if you think
‘yeah I know this I have done the right thing 100%’ people will look at you and go ‘hold on a second’ … yeah you have to be uncertain and be comfortable with being uncertain.

In the second interview opportunity was provided to consider how the participant has taken on-board the researcher’s deconstructive reading that occurred in the first. Participant J relishes this opportunity and illustrates how she has utilised such knowledge to help her to read her own career articulations and has also asserted her to suggest it may have other utility

... paradox with my sister’s situation, being a helper but feeling helpless ... that has helped me understand what has happened and how that happens, I think if you were ever going to use it in therapy it would be the best thing ever as it helps people understand why they say what they do and why they feel that way, I think it is necessary for research, academia, personal life, relationships, everything.... I have really enjoyed it [the interview], it is good, it is therapeutic, cathartic, yeah I have enjoyed it thank you

**Discussion and conclusion**

The reflections above concentrate upon the enactment of care, via social work, a profession inherently filled with complexity and paradox, providing a challenge to the yearning for certainty. The enactment of care is perceived to be difficult, where there are multiple perspectives to be read, where learning becomes a means of improving one's reading of enactment, yet learning is acknowledged as only providing a certainty of uncertainty, in-turn qualities to be able to feel comfortable with such uncomfortable situations. This resonates with Kafka’s (1992) notions of ‘before the law’, where the participant, as practitioner, has to justify her enactment to a higher law, potentially herself, her profession, policy, her own assigned gateway to universal ‘Law’ to justify why she has done what she has done, how this relates to the tension and paradox of care as control, personal values as professional values as well as linking to the prominent duality of being and becoming - where there is an acknowledgment that protection becomes vulnerability and vulnerability becomes protection.

The authors have taken on-board the views of the participant, thus exposing the method of reflection aided by the lens of the life career, framed via the duality of being and becoming to evoke useful paradoxes, paradox as an analytical motif to aid reflective
practice, both retrospectively and anticipatorily. The literature on reflective practice is peppered with models that evoke the user to follow a set formula, generally following a geometric symmetry, rarely, apart from aspects of critical reflection, taking into account power relations, context and temporality. It also espouses how moments of confusion, potentially of conceptual contradiction, startlement, are moments to focus reflection. This paper continues along this line of logic, that such moments provide a useful focus on reflection particularly if situated within the life career, where many interconnecting strands are enacted, framed via the duality of being and becoming, thus evoking paradox. The paper has highlighted that once reflected upon, prominent paradoxes can be found within career articulation, paradoxes of an enduring nature, in the case study presented ‘protection as vulnerability’, thus providing a diachronic analysis that can aid lifelong practice. Focusing upon this paradox allowed the participant to consider her personal value structure and how this had become influenced by her newly acquired professional values, how the self was lost, found, reconfigured and is reconfiguring. Such a journey allowed the participant to question enactment critically, to acknowledge that her perceived ‘gift’ of care giving is part of an emotional economy seeking a return, that such a return needs to be situated within a broader context, where policy, ethics and resources need to be contemplated. This provokes the uncertainty of professional practice, how she is to contemplate her own judgement against the back drop of professional values. Doing so she becomes comfortable being uncomfortable, which for her appears to be an important development.

It is acknowledged here the limitations of this paper as it only concentrates upon 1 case study that comes from a longitudinal project whose focus is not specifically upon reflective practice. However, the authors feel this is a strength, how allowing space for individuals to reflect broadly upon career and paradox has allowed powerful reflections to emerge. Such reflections have clearly had an impact on the participant who eagerly takes on-board learning from the research project, becomes a contributor of research yet at the same time receives unplanned pedagogy. The authors feel that such an emergence is important to share with the social work literature, with the anticipation that such learning could inform social work research and pedagogy. From a research perspective the authors assert that the paradigm of the lifecareer, with its inevitable emerging paradoxes, could provoke further research to consider their anticipated endurance across the lifecourse of a range practitioners. From an interconnecting pedagogical perspective is how What becomes apparent from a HE pedagogical perspective is that many contemporary courses across the academy are charged with an employability input. The argument here is that the approach espoused above is one that can be in concert with employability pedagogy, yet, importantly, via a critical lens that also connects with the main home study of the student, in this case social work.
References

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Anonymous

Reflective Practice

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**Abstract**

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**Introduction**

Social work as a profession involves important decisions and actions that influence people’s lives, where the evaluation of the ‘quality’ of outcome of such provision is difficult to judge, bringing forth subjective interpretation in conjunction to previously inscribed notions of ‘best practice’. Being a social worker is a lived experience, one that provides an important contribution toward the life career. Career within this paper is operationalised via Goffman’s definition of career as ‘any social strand in a person’s life’ (1961: 127), significant activity traced via reflexive articulation that connects to a broader sense of life narrativisation (Author, 2017, 183). The strand of social work is one that interconnects and comes into tension with other enacted strands - e.g. family, leisure, housing - occurring within a social world, where practice benefits from acknowledging undecidability, that there is an art to practice, a practice that cannot follow a set formulae or procedure (Parton and O’Bryne 2000, Payne, 2016). There is invariably a longevity to
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reflection, concentrating too heavily upon the individual, rarely acknowledging context,
temporality and multiplicity of the life career. The paper asserts how the conceptualisation
of the life career can aid practitioners to consider how many facets of their career
interrelate and may be placed in tension, becoming particularly useful when considering
the relationship between ‘personal’ and ‘professional’ values. The paper highlights its use
of the duality of being and becoming to explore career (see Author, 2017) to expose
moments of paradox, which the paper asserts are useful moments to open and consider
important emergent themes that provide a tension across career articulation. Such an
approach allows enactment to be considered within and outside the vista of paid
employment, moving reflection toward a broader and more critical lens to aid career
development. This paper provides a case illustration to demonstrate the penetrative nature
of such a lens to advocate future research endeavours to inform social work pedagogy and
practice

Professional practice

Social Work is a profession, where profession - rooted within the realms of the clergy,
medicine and accounting (Clarke and Newman and Clarke, 1997) – provides a
legitimisation of expertise, symbolisation that one is more skilled with a broader knowledge
base than a ‘layperson’; due to a professional having to undertaken a lengthy process of
licensed and inaugurated training and/or education. Profession provides an identificatory
label, one that can communicate expertise quickly to another as well as a sense of self-
esteeum. The symbolism of ‘profession’ is one that provides a relational power with other,
both other professionals within the same, as well as, different fields and the layperson,
influencing the distribution of rewards, capital and esteem (May and Buck, 1998; Kreber,
2019). Such status therefore enables, as well as constrains, the professional as they are
required to follow normative and regulative processes, rules and policy, thus providing a
tension between practice as an art, sensitive to its context, with an acknowledgement of
previous experiences and ‘intuition’; as well as a science adhering to espoused ‘scientific’
objective entrenched forms of ‘best’ previously ascribed practice (Parker and Bradley,
2003:4; Doel and Shadlow, 2017, xxiv). Social Work requires an ability to be a reflective

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first reviewers comments – 'May benefit from a bit more
discussion about the inherently paradoxical nature of
'social' work/labour'

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'conceptual framework is largely based on a dated
literature'
professional, to come to know one’s unfolding values and how this influences practice.

With many social work practitioners having to fulfil the requirement of a higher education (HE) degree or post graduate qualification, connecting with the widening of participation of HE, there has been an influx of non-traditional graduates eagerly looking to fill newly calibrated ‘professional’ roles within a post-industrialised society, where many face a challenge to previous value bases and where social work pedagogy may provoke a disorientation of such values and sense of identity and where practice is likely to provoke complexity, contradiction and paradoxical notions of ‘best practice’ where care can become control and vice-versa (Scanlon, 2011, Kosberg, 1973, Cournoyer, 2016). Given such parameters it becomes important for the practitioner to have not only an ability to reflect – to consider action – but also reflexivity – to consider how aspects of identity – that which can at times be fluid as well as concrete – may adapt and change as well as acknowledging aspects of continuity. Therefore, the professional social worker is to consider the interplay of being and becoming and the way this traces upon a sense of self-narrativisation (see Author, 2017).

The duality of being and becoming

The life career is constituted by a range of interconnecting strands. Given the multiplicity of such conceptualisation it can be difficult to frame reflection upon career action. Therefore, this paper advocates framing such reflection via notions of duality, what Author (2017:187) describes as a ‘conceptualisation of reality that provides a paradoxical relationship between opposing yet entwining entities’. Being and becoming, provides a useful focus for reflection, one not afraid to dive into ambiguity and paradox. Therefore, to contemplate being and becoming, one is to consider objective and subjective dimensions of ‘reality’, to intimately connect with philosophical reflection from a range of perspectives. For example, Sartre and existentialism focuses on being, as does Heidegger, and has an application in many areas of health and social care (Thompson and Pascal 2012) as well as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) or even back to the pre-Socratics of debates between Parmenides and Heraclitus. Being and becoming, as one of the framing orientations of this discussion, requires an engagement with Heidegger where in Being and Time (Heidegger 1962, Caputo 1986, 1993) Heidegger addresses ‘the question of being’ which he believes philosophers have generally failed to do, focusing on beings as entities (these are ‘ontical’ questions about the properties of beings, not the ontological questions of their Being). Being, for Heidegger, is understood as ‘being-in-the-world’ as an engaged purposeful agent, not just spatially located, but immersed in a world of meaning. This world is not just a collection of things ‘present-to-hand’ but is a world of ‘equipment’ or ‘gear’ (Zeug) of things ‘ready-to-hand’ (zuhanden) that are involved in our

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purposeful projects. For the professional, training and education is to become proficient in the use of 'ready-to-hand' things, techniques, equipment and gear of the professions. Dasein is 'in' a 'relational totality' of 'significance'. This relational totality is what gives things their significance by their relationship to our 'concerns' or 'care' (Sorge). For professionals, their relationship of care and concern to situated 'things' or equipment, gear or the 'ready-to-hand', rather than the 'present-to-hand'. Much discussion about professionals has been caught in the present-to-hand rather than concern over the ready-to-hand and the scope and foundations of an ethical life (Reid 2019).

Scanlon (2011) and Goh (2019) suggests 'becoming' is the most useful defining concept or metaphor for a new professional class who understand that their working lives are open-ended, lifelong process of learning. The 'ongoingness' of professional development means individual professional identities are constructed throughout one’s professional lives rather than an isolated, rugged, individualistic traditional professional. This process of becoming is the ongoing journeying of professionalism that is multi-layered and demands engagement and change from the individual. Becoming has the connotation of flattering dress and elegance. However, philosophically, 'becoming' is flux and change, with no arrival or departure point to becoming a professional, rather a constant process of becoming. This can uncouple the professional from secure reference points, but it is in the fluidity of movement that change and becoming occurs. This discussion is located in the movement of philosophers, symbolic interactionalists, existentialist and humanists and how these resources contribute to the understanding of the becoming as a professional journey. Such a journey of 'being'/'becoming' a social worker will critically engage with the issues that reflective professionals encounter and give air to tensions along the way, tensions evoked via the complex nature of working within the social world. For example, 'atrocity stories' are the sorts of account that are common in ethnographic literature on the work of professions (Stimson and Webb 1975; Dingwall, 2018). Atrocity stories are the devices whereby users of professional services retrospectively interpret their encounters with professions, negotiate the norms of behaviour, understand the rules of engagement, and redress imbalances of power in professional relationships. These stories are dramatic narratives, drawing on shared understanding of the world, casting the teller or user of services as hero and right, against incompetence and dereliction of others (Dingwall 2001, 68). Through these stories social structures and power relations are rendered rational and comprehensible. The rise of narrative approaches has become significant in professions where meanings and safety have become watchwords in social work and health and social care practice.
It is worth considering that there is a recursive relationship between theory and practice, where theory can inform practice as well as there being ‘theories of social practices’ (Reckwitz 2002), that which indicates the ‘turn to practices’ in social theory, tying to an interest in both the ‘everyday’ and the ‘life-world’ or the lived experience of professional practice, a further consideration of the complex nodal interactions that occur for the contemporary professional (Reckwitz 2002; Bryson et al, 2015). With a lived experience focus, vantage point or perspective, the mythology of managerialist cultural constructs dissipates and the actions, thoughts and feelings of professionals comes into focus. This is the corporeality and everyday life of becoming/being a professional. Reckwitz (2002: 249) asserts that ‘practice theory does not place the social in mental qualities, nor discourse, nor in interaction but in practices’. This adds to the canon of practice theories by changing the location of practice against earlier theorists (such as Bourdie, Butler, Foucault, Garfinkel, Giddens, Latour, Schatzki). It also adds a significant element to professional practice by locating it in the practice itself rather than with reference to imposed or guiding constraints on what professional practice should be according to competences or tick box performance measures.

Reckwitz (2002: 225) suggests that ‘for practice theory bodily and mental patterns are necessary components of practices and are thus social’. The tacit dimension of unknown bodily and mental activities and the rule-governed nature of practice provides a richer picture of practice including an ontology of the flesh (Merleau-Ponty 2002), taking place within a context. At this juncture the paper moves toward a reflection upon reflection, to place its contribution, that reflection can be aided by the life career and duality framework concentrating on moments of paradox.

Reflection

The history of reflection has seminal roots in Dewey (1933), Kolb (1984) and Schön (1983). The art of reflection spans many fields, for example Mackintosh (1998) suggests the 80s saw the emergence of reflection for career development. Schön (1983) concerned with professional development of knowledge and skills makes the distinction between reflection in and on action in a process of ongoing continuous learning, and reflection as immediate (in) or by looking back across practice (on) (Timmins 2015: 75). Reflection-in-action is the core of ‘professional artistry’ rather than ‘technical-rationality’ - where evidence-based practice values, quantitative rather than qualitative methods, areas established as protocol rather than intuitive practice. Schön’s work has therefore become part of the ‘canon’ in teaching and learning across a spectrum of professional practices. However Schön’s work is not without its critics. Eraut (2004) criticises the lack of precision and clarity, Boud and
Walker (1998) argue the context of reflection is ignored, Usher et al (1997) criticises the unreflective methodology, and Smyth (1989) criticises the theoretical and apolitical nature of his work. Greenwood (1993) requires more reflection-before-action and Moon (1999) suggests reflection-in-action is unachievable. As Ghaye (2000: 7) suggests ‘maybe reflective practices offer us a way of trying to make sense of the uncertainty in our workplaces and the courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos’, and Collin et al (2013) summarise such critiques to encapsulate the theoretical, practical and methodological e.g. ‘Lack of clarity and consensus on the concept of reflective practice, particularly its relationship with action and emotion’. This paper considers whether uncertainty, or chaos and feelings of uncertainty can only make sense via a contemplation of order and vice-versa, linking back to the being and becoming duality mentioned earlier, where being provides a concreteness, knowledge, whilst becoming provides startlement and uncomforting (see Author, 2017).

One continuity provided by reflective practice theory is that it is understood as the process of learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice. Jarvis (1995) argues this involves examining assumptions in everyday practice and adopting a critical attitude of self-awareness, and in the case of this paper assumptions in regard to career (see Author, 2016). The pressures on busy professionals to individually neglect a contextual and situated focus on reflection is a warning this paper wishes to heed.

To provide a critical engagement in reflexivity, one that considers social positionality, the self in relation to others and vice-versa, and evoking a close look at paradox to be revealing moments of career enactment and articulation, therefore questioning reflection as a catch-all concept that provides a decontextualized and abstract analysis. Critical reflection takes a wider and contextualised look at the situation within which reflection takes place drawing upon the philosophical tradition of the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, providing a substantive analysis of personal beliefs, how these fit within social settings and how these social settings influence and affect situations (Fook and Askeland 2006) where power differences are a necessary component of reflection (Fook, 2015; Brookfield, 1995).

Critical reflection extends the reflective project to include assumption hunting (Brookfield, 1995), taken for granted and common-sense and power dynamics exercised in reflective situations. As such, critical reflection is both a theory and a process (Gardner 2014) with a deeper look at the underpinning reasons why situations occur and consideration of all the elements that contributes to reflection.

To critically reflect means engaging with diachronic readings, acknowledging that reflection is both a posteriori, after the event, recollection; or a priori, before the event, anticipation. Such readings need to consider the risks of over and under preparation which may evoke...
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assumption and anxiety. Therefore, along the journey toward being/becoming a social worker one is likely to experience a clash of value structures between the personal and the professional, evoking contradiction and paradox within the mind of the practitioner, both neophyte and the experienced. This occurs via duration of experience, peppered with fateful moments where the paradoxical interplay between being and becoming manifest within consciousness (see Author, 2017). Our reflective engagement is to re-imagine the existing world and propose and explore alternative mental landscape of thoughts, ideas and practice. As such, reflective disclosure becomes a condition for social justice, a social justice that may well be out of reach.

Methodology – Case-study

The paper now will move toward providing a case study to illustrate the use of reflective theory espoused above. The case study is a participant in a longitudinal research project which utilised a duality framework to read career articulation, focusing on the transition from undergraduate study to up to 3 years post-graduation of a small selected sample (see Author, 2019). Although reflective practice was not the sole focus of the research project the participant in question – who is now a fully qualified social worker – provides excellent insights into her career articulation that focuses on her being/becoming a social worker. The illustration provides great insight into the parameters of reflection highlighted above, including reflections that account for the tension experienced being/becoming a social worker, where there was a conflict between personal and professional value structures, inherent contradiction prevalent within social work. The longitudinal study started with a review of a worksheet written by the participants as an undergraduate student, a worksheet that reflects upon career enactment both retrospectively and anticipatorily, informed via social theory. The researcher then deconstructively read such a worksheet focusing on the duality of being and becoming to reveal a prominent paradoxical tension found throughout the longitudinal research project – in the case of the participant being revealed here; ‘Protection as Vulnerability’. The participants were then revisited 2 years and 3 years after graduation where they engaged in 2 semi-structured interviews, which covers a period where the participant was undertaking a social work Masters Programme. What unfolds is the penetrative nature of reading career via notions of paradox, how this reveals many important aspects of the participant’s journey to become/be a social worker, which clearly influence future enactment.

Participant J is a white working-class female in her mid-twenties. She is a hard-working individual who has consistently across the longitudinal study spoken of the importance of caregiving to her career enactment. Participant J experienced the divorce of her birth parents within childhood, resulting in her living with her mother, whom she considers

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Commented [RG16]: Addressing the first reviewers comments – “May benefit from a bit more discussion about the inherently paradoxical nature of “social” work/labour”
having had a tough life spending many years bringing her up on her own. Participant J has a half-sister, who is of dual heritage and who has learning difficulties, Participant J feels very protective of her younger half-sister. Participant J speaks of how she gains from enacting care, how care is looked upon as an aspired gift, yet, at the same time, can acknowledge how this seeks a return within an emotional economy of care. Such an economy, for Participant J, makes her feel vulnerable when providing protection via care, to others. The providing of inadequate protection may hurt her as well as the receiver of care, hence providing the overarching paradox identified in the project, one validated by the participant. The reflections below illustrate how an exploration of such an overarching paradox allows other paradoxes to come into play, where the participant acknowledges an eagerness to explore such paradoxes, providing her with a useful career analytic, illustrating the penetrative and utility of paradox as an analytical lens or motif.

Reflections

Participant J, has consistently across the study, articulated a position upon career as paid work. This is evident in her worksheet as an undergraduate.

I applied for an undergraduate degree in children’s nursing as I felt this career was very suitable to my characteristics... I continued gaining work experience in the NHS and this is the precise time my ontological security was threatened after I had experienced a prominent fateful moment (Giddens, 1991) I was assigned to work with oncology patients which began pleasantly, however after several months of becoming friends with a patient, I witnessed her condition deteriorate rapidly. I had been with her at her time of death and this was extremely emotional. I felt as though I had not been able to help her, something I have found confidence in when referring to my identity, questioning myself and my emotional resilience. I could not continue working and understood that a career in nursing was not appropriate for me and decided to apply for a youth studies degree that offered me many other possible career paths.

This event challenges Participant J’s perception of career, one where the enactment of care becomes questioned and where protection, so vital a motivator, ends with a negative return, one that makes Participant J vulnerable as the act of protection is seen to have failed. The deconstructive reading once shared with the participant in the first semi-structured interview provides a challenge to the participant, a questioning of the endeavour of care and protection from a differing perspective, how the giving of care
provides an emotional economy, how validation comes from care, a sense of purpose, and a taking as well as a giving.

I thought it was really useful [the deconstructive reading] ... the caring as a strength and vulnerabilities and the paradox of that, that I thought was really good, as I think it reflects what it means for me to do it [care for others], it does validate me as a person if I help others... I think it does highlight that you need to feel worthy ... yeah when I read it, it sort of made sense it was care that, that is really true, but you wouldn't sort of go to someone and say, well oh, selfishly, you know I am helping you out because it makes me feel better, cause really it should always be like that person, and what you are doing for them, but it does make you, you know, you are doing something to make yourself feel better, I suppose.

Care is therefore wished upon as a gift, where the participant in some way gives herself over to the care receiver, where they are put first. However, Participant J has to acknowledge how there is always a return that is anticipated, a need for reassurance and validation that comes from the thank you or gratitude that comes back into play in the emotional economy of care announced. The emotional economy of care, via the paradox exposed, becomes manifest in consciousness to the participant, where discussion evokes an unfolding of further connecting paradoxes, in particular how her work experiences as a social worker provide the paradox of ‘care as control’ and ‘control as care’

... it [the controlling aspect of service users] sort of attacks what I am used to, so my brain sort of goes, 'oh my god this person doesn't like you, you're not doing what this person wants, you're going against what they think is good for them, you're not getting that feeling of you are helping them' because they are blatantly sort of going 'what are you doing to me?' But you sort of have to realise that that is eventually for them, so I have gotten used to that idea, but it has sort of sent me into melt down a couple of times if I have had to say 'look I am really sorry but, you're not doing what's best for your child', 'we are going to have to remove your child at the moment for a court order' it sort of all goes into melt down, the control sort of takes over, and sometime, it has to, you have got no choice! It's not nice to do the control bit, it is necessary sometimes, I have to get used to that.
'Care' for Participant J is focused upon as a means of gaining a quick positive emotional return, however there are times when this is not deemed appropriate by the service user, and therefore a sense of controlling someone is presented in consciousness as being in the best interest of the care receiver, however, such an enactment feels alien to intended enactment, an enactment that seeks verification via positive regard. Control at times becomes enacted in the best interest of the service user, though they may not see this at this time and it is hoped that they may be able at some later date. Within the second semi-structured interview (3 years-after-graduation) further paradoxes unfold when revisiting the overarching paradox of protection as vulnerability. What is of note is that the participant had taken on-board the paradoxes explored in previous interview and came prepared to the interview with her observations of other paradoxes that had become manifest within consciousness. A fateful moment, which had occurred between interviews, provides an impetus to acknowledge such paradoxes, in particular how ‘helping provides a sense of helplessness’. The fateful moment involved the participant’s younger half-sister whom had experienced a period of mental distress culminating in the writing of a couple of suicide notes, found initially by the participant’s mother.

... my sister had stopped eating, my mum ... found a different bunch of suicide notes, there was one for me and my mother and one for her friends at school ... my mum started to blame herself as she had depression in the past, I had sort of had to become the parent as them two, to me, had become crumbling bricks... she is only 15 and my mum has always been this steady rock and I thought what do I do now I am the one that has got to sort this out and the paradox that I found which is what I was thinking about is that I found that I was the helper but I found that I felt really helpless.

The event appears to throw the participant into uncharted territory, forcing a reconfiguration of the relationship between the participant and her mother, a change in power dynamics that is viewed to have disorientated the participant at first, a position loaded with meanings of finitude, forced by her sister’s actions, providing a threat toward the act of protection again, to be made vulnerable, yet this time perceived as ‘helping providing a sense of helplessness’. Both interviews reveal subjective value structures of the participant and how experiences shape such structures. In the first interview this is particularly manifest due to the Master's course providing a focus upon reflective practice. What becomes apparent is how such reflection provides a tension for Participant J, how
the course is pushing for certain codes of values that at first challenge the participant's 'personal' set of values and sense of 'authenticity'.

When your personal and professional values start to conflict you start worrying about where you are going to get lost in being as you are now ... when is that point gonna be where I have got to forget what my judgements are and what my instincts are? Are they gonna get swallowed up ... that sort of taught me that meshing my professional and personal values together so it is sort of continuous being and becoming, because it is forever evolving I think. I was a bit worried that being a social worker I would have to lose some parts of myself but it just sort of means it has got to be adapted differently.

The duality of being/becoming, as well as self/other, is salient in such a reflection, where the participant contemplates how the self is a moving projection and that a deep-rooted sense of self - values - are adaptable and context dependent constituted by experiences with other, including the other within self. This is further explored in the second interview where another two further paradoxes emerge, a challenge to dichotomous logic, where certainty can only be evoked via a sense of uncertainty and how one has to become comfortable with such uncomforting.

... professionalism and guidelines are a nice safety net for you, telling you what to do, it really is not like that when you get into it, it is very much like a mixture of everything and if you don't get the balance right you really will mess up ... and the welfare of the child that should be at the front of your mind, am I thinking of the practice guidelines that is saying I should do it this way, and then your values, you are like 'I am not treating a parent like an equal, valuing that they are an independent person they have got a right to do this', and there is no way you are going to know what is the right thing to do, that is what I don't like as I would have said before any of this [studying and working as a social worker] that I am a black and white person with my values, with my judgement of saying that 'I did the right thing', yet it is very grey ... I don't like not knowing I think that is why it is a benefit for me to learn because I like to know, I like to be certain about things, or, I at least like to have the information there to make a judgment. Social work is so grey there is no black and white there is no black and white what so ever ... as long as you are certain that you are uncertain then you will be fine, because if you think
'yeah I know this I have done the right thing 100%’ people will look at you and go
‘hold on a second’ … yeah you have to be uncertain and be comfortable with being
uncertain.

In the second interview opportunity was provided to consider how the participant has
taken on-board the researcher’s deconstructive reading that occurred in the first.
Participant J relishes this opportunity and illustrates how she has utilised such knowledge
to help her to read her own career articulations and has also asserted her to suggest it
may have other utility

... paradox with my sister’s situation, being a helper but feeling helpless ... that has
helped me understand what has happened and how that happens, I think if you
were ever going to use it in therapy it would be the best thing ever as it helps
people understand why they say what they do and why they feel that way, I think
it is necessary for research, academia, personal life, relationships, everything.... I
have really enjoyed it [the interview], it is good, it is therapeutic, cathartic, yeah I
have enjoyed it thank you

Discussion and conclusion

The reflections above concentrate upon the enactment of care, via social work, a
profession inherently filled with complexity and paradox, providing a challenge to the
yearning for certainty. The enactment of care is perceived to be difficult, where there are
multiple perspectives to be read, where learning becomes a means of improving ones
reading of enactment, yet learning is acknowledged as only providing a certainty of
uncertainty, in-turn qualities to be able to feel comfortable with such uncomfortable
situations. This resonates with Kafka’s (1992) notions of ‘before the law’, where the
participant, as practitioner, has to justify her enactment to a higher law, potentially herself,
her profession, policy, her own assigned gateway to universal ‘Law’ to justify why she has
done what she has done, how this relates to the tension and paradox of care as control,
personal values as professional values as well as linking to the prominent duality of being
and becoming - where there is an acknowledgment that protection becomes vulnerability
and vulnerability becomes protection.

The authors have taken on-board the views of the participant, thus exposing the method
of reflection aided by the lens of the life career, framed via the duality of being and
becoming to evoke useful paradoxes, paradox as an analytical motif to aid reflective
practice, both retrospectively and anticipatorily. The literature on reflective practice is peppered with models that evoke the user to follow a set formula, generally following a geometric symmetry, rarely, apart from aspects of critical reflection, taking into account power relations, context and temporality. It also espouses how moments of confusion, potentially of conceptual contradiction, startlement, are moments to focus reflection. This paper continues along this line of logic, that such moments provide a useful focus on reflection particularly if situated within the life career, where many interconnecting strands are enacted, framed via the duality of being and becoming, thus evoking paradox. The paper has highlighted that once reflected upon, prominent paradoxes can be found within career articulation, paradoxes of an enduring nature, in the case study presented ‘protection as vulnerability’, thus providing a diachronic analysis that can aid lifelong practice. Focusing upon this paradox allowed the participant to consider her personal value structure and how this had become influenced by her newly acquired professional values, how the self was lost, found, reconfigured and is reconfiguring. Such a journey allowed the participant to question enactment critically, to acknowledge that her perceived ‘gift’ of care giving is part of an emotional economy seeking a return, that such a return needs to be situated within a broader context, where policy, ethics and resources need to be contemplated. This provokes the uncertainty of professional practice, how she is to contemplate her own judgement against the back drop of professional values. Doing so she becomes comfortable being uncomfortable, which for her appears to be an important development.

It is acknowledged here the limitations of this paper as it only concentrates upon 1 case study that comes from a longitudinal project whose focus is not specifically upon reflective practice. However, the authors feel this is a strength, how allowing space for individuals to reflect broadly upon career and paradox has allowed powerful reflections to emerge. Such reflections have clearly had an impact on the participant who eagerly takes on-board learning from the research project, becomes a contributor of research yet at the same time receives unplanned pedagogy. The authors feel that such an emergence is important to share with the social work literature, with the anticipation that such learning could inform social work research and pedagogy. From a research perspective the authors assert that the paradigm of the lifecareer, with its inevitable emerging paradoxes, could provoke further research to consider their anticipated endurance across the lifecourse of a range practitioners. From an interconnecting pedagogical perspective is how What becomes apparent from a HE pedagogical perspective is that many contemporary courses across the academy are charged with an employability input. The argument here is that the approach espoused above is one that can be in concert with employability pedagogy, yet, importantly, via a critical lens that also connects with the main home study of the student, in this case social work.
References


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Anonymous

Reflective Practice

Key words: reflective practice, social work, paradox, career.

Reflective practice via the lens of the life career and paradox: a contemplation of being and becoming a social worker

Abstract

Reflective practice constitutes an important aspect of social work enactment, with a range of theory available to the practitioner, e.g. Schön (1983) and Timmins (2015). This paper continues this heritage with a theory of reflection informed via continental philosophy. The theory advocated here considers the life career of the practitioner via the duality of being and becoming, providing a critical lens upon retrospective enactment illuminating paradoxical moments. Such moments provide diachronic and nuanced insights into enactment across a range of interconnected strands of the life career, allowing the practitioner to consider important emergent themes across career articulation and thus action within and outside the vista of paid employment. This paper provides a case illustration to demonstrate the penetrative nature of such a lens, advocating future research endeavours to inform social work pedagogy and practice.

Introduction

Social work involves important decisions and actions that influences people’s lives. Being a social worker is a lived experience, one that provides an important contribution toward the life career. Career within this paper is operationalised via Goffman’s definition of career as ‘any social strand in a person’s life’ (1961: 127), significant activity traced via reflexive articulation that connects to a broader sense of life narrativisation (Author, 2017, 183). The strand of social work is one that interconnects and comes into tension with other enacted strands - e.g. family, leisure, housing - occurring within a social world, where practice benefits from acknowledging un-decidability, that there is an art to practice, a practice that cannot follow a set formulae or procedure (Parton and O’Bryne 2000). There is invariably a longevity to being/becoming a social worker, one that will provide articulation, narrative(s), where a diachronic analysis is required to enhance meaning and understanding of enactment at any given duration. This paper therefore reviews and
outlines important parameters of the literature relating to being/becoming a social worker, how this relates to professional practice, the context of delivery and the part that reflection plays to benefit such practice. The paper will then provide a critical analysis of such literature suggesting it provides a narrow perspective upon reflection, concentrating too heavily upon the individual, rarely acknowledging context, temporality and multiplicity of the life career. The paper asserts how the conceptualisation of the life career can aid practitioners to consider how many facets of their career interrelate and may be placed in tension, becoming particularly useful when considering the relationship between ‘personal’ and ‘professional’ values. The paper highlights its use of the duality of being and becoming to explore career (see Author, 2017) to expose moments of paradox, which the paper asserts are useful moments to open and consider important emergent themes that provide a tension across career articulation. Such an approach allows enactment to be considered within and outside the vista of paid employment, moving reflection toward a broader and more critical lens to aid career development. This paper provides a case illustration to demonstrate the penetrative nature of such a lens to advocate future research endeavours to inform social work pedagogy and practice.

**Professional practice**

Social Work is a profession, where profession - rooted within the realms of the clergy, medicine and accounting (Clarke and Newman, 1997) – provides a legitimisation of expertise, symbolisation that one is more skilled with a broader knowledge base than a ‘layperson’; due to a professional having to undertaken a lengthy process of licensed and inaugurated training and/or education. Profession provides an identificatory label, one that can communicate expertise quickly to another as well as a sense of self-esteem. The symbolism of ‘profession’ is one that provides a relational power with other, both other professionals within the same, as well as, different fields and the layperson, influencing the distribution of rewards, capital and esteem (May and Buck, 1998). Such status therefore enables, as well as constrains, the professional as they are required to follow normative and regulative processes, rules and policy, thus providing a tension between practice as an art, sensitive to its context, with an acknowledgement of previous experiences and ‘intuition’; as well as a science adhering to espoused ‘scientific’ objective entrenched forms of ‘best’ previously ascribed practice (Parker and Bradley, 2003: 4). Social Work requires an ability to be a reflective professional, to come to know one’s unfolding values and how this influences practice. With many social work practitioners having to fulfil the requirement of a higher education (HE) degree or post graduate qualification, connecting with the widening of participation of HE, there has been an influx of non-traditional graduates eagerly looking to fill newly calibrated ‘professional’ roles.
within a post-industrialised society, where many face a challenge to previous value bases and where social work pedagogy may provoke a disorientation of such values and sense of identity (Scalon, 2011). Given such parameters it becomes important for the practitioner to have not only an ability to reflect – to consider action – but also reflexivity – to consider how aspects of identity – that which can at times be fluid as well as concrete – may adapt and change as well as acknowledging aspects of continuity. Therefore, the professional social worker is to consider the interplay of being and becoming and the way this traces upon a sense of self-narrativisation (see Author, 2017).

The duality of being and becoming

The life career is constituted by a range of interconnecting strands. Given the multiplicity of such conceptualisation it can be difficult to frame reflection upon career action. Therefore, this paper advocates framing such reflection via notions of duality, what Author (2017:187) describes as a ‘conceptualisation of reality that provides a paradoxical relationship between opposing yet entwining entities’. Being and becoming, provides a useful focus for reflection, one not afraid to dive into ambiguity and paradox. Therefore, to contemplate being and becoming, one is to consider objective and subjective dimensions of ‘reality’, to intimately connect with philosophical reflection from a range of perspectives. For example, Sartre and existentialism focuses on being, as does Heidegger, and has an application in many areas of health and social care (Thompson and Pascal 2012) as well as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) or even back to the pre-Socratics of debates between Parmenides and Heraclitus. Being and becoming, as one of the framing orientations of this discussion, requires an engagement with Heidegger where in Being and Time (Heidegger 1962) Heidegger addresses ‘the question of being’ which he believes philosophers have generally failed to do, focusing on beings as entities (these are ‘ontical’ questions about the properties of beings, not the ontological questions of their Being). Being, for Heidegger, is understood as ‘being-in-the-world’ as an engaged purposeful agent, not just spatially located, but immersed in a world of meaning. This world is not just a collection of things ‘present-to-hand’ but is a world of ‘equipment’ or ‘gear’ (Zeug) of things ‘ready-to-hand’ (zuhanden) that are involved in our purposeful projects. For the professional, training and education is to become proficient in the use of ‘ready-to-hand’ things, techniques, equipment and gear of the professions. Dasein is ‘in’ a ‘relational totality’ of ‘significance’. This relational totality is what gives things their significance by their relationship to our ‘concerns’ or ‘care’ (Sorge). For professionals, their relationship of care and concern to situated ‘things’ or equipment, gear or the ‘ready-to-hand’, rather than the ‘present-to-hand’. Much discussion about professionals has been caught in the present-to-hand rather than concern over the ready-to-hand.
Scanlon (2011) suggests ‘becoming’ is the most useful defining concept for a new professional class who understand that their working lives are open-ended, lifelong process of learning. The ‘ongoingness’ of professional development means individual professional identities are constructed throughout one’s professional lives rather than an isolated, rugged, individualistic traditional professional. This process of becoming is the ongoing journeying of professionalism that is multi-layered and demands engagement and change from the individual. Becoming has the connotation of flattering dress and elegance. However, philosophically, ‘becoming’ is flux and change, with no arrival or departure point to becoming a professional, rather a constant process of becoming. This can uncouple the professional from secure reference points, but it is in the fluidity of movement that change and becoming occurs. This discussion is located in the movement of philosophers, symbolic interactionalists, existentialist and humanists and how these resources contribute to the understanding of the becoming as a professional journey. Such a journey of ‘being’/‘becoming’ a social worker will critically engage with the issues that reflective professionals encounter and give air to tensions along the way. For example, ‘atrocity stories’ are the sorts of account that are common in ethnographic literature on the work of professions (Stimson and Webb 1975). Atrocity stories are the devices whereby users of professional services retrospectively interpret their encounters with professions, negotiate the norms of behaviour, understand the rules of engagement, and redress imbalances of power in professional relationships. These stories are dramatic narratives, drawing on shared understanding of the world, casting the teller or user of services as hero and right, against incompetence and dereliction of others (Dingwall 2008). Through these stories social structures and power relations are rendered rational and comprehensible. The rise of narrative approaches has become significant in professions where meanings and safety have become watchwords in social work and health and social care practice.

It is worth considering that there is a recursive relationship between theory and practice, where theory can inform practice as well as there being ‘theories of social practices’ (Reckwitz 2002), that which indicates the ‘turn to practices’ in social theory, tying to an interest in both the ‘everyday’ and the ‘life-world’ or the lived experience of professional practice. With a lived experience focus, vantage point or perspective, the mythology of managerialist cultural constructs dissipates and the actions, thoughts and feelings of professionals comes into focus. This is the corporeality and everyday life of becoming/being a professional. Rechwitz (2002: 249) asserts that ‘practice theory does not place the social in mental qualities, nor discourse, nor in interaction but in practices’. This adds to the canon of practice theories by changing the location of practice against
earlier theorists (such as Bourdieu, Butler, Foucault, Garfinkel, Giddens, Latour, Schatzki). It also adds a significant element to professional practice by locating it in the practice itself rather than with reference to imposed or guiding constraints on what professional practice should be according to competences or tick box performance measures.

Reckwitz (2002: 225) suggests that ‘for practice theory bodily and mental patterns are necessary components of practices and are thus social’. The tacit dimension of unknown bodily and mental activities and the rule-governed nature of practice provides a richer picture of practice including an ontology of the flesh (Merleau-Ponty 2002), taking place within a context. At this juncture the paper moves toward a reflection upon reflection, to place its contribution, that reflection can be aided by the life career and duality framework concentrating on moments of paradox.

**Reflection**

The history of reflection has seminal roots in Dewey (1933), Kolb (1984) and Schön (1983). The art of reflection spans many fields, for example Mackintosh (1998) suggests the 80s saw the emergence of reflection for career development. Schön (1983) concerned with professional development of knowledge and skills makes the distinction between reflection in and on action in a process of ongoing continuous learning, and reflection as immediate (in) or by looking back across practice (on) (Timmins 2015: 75). Reflection-in-action is the core of ‘professional artistry’ rather than ‘technical-rationality’ - where evidence-based practice values quantitative rather than qualitative methods as established protocol rather than intuitive practice. Schön’s work has therefore become part of the ‘canon’ in teaching and learning across a spectrum of professional practices. However Schön’s work is not without its critics. Eraut (2004) criticises the lack of precision and clarity, Boud and Walker (1998) argue the context of reflection is ignored, Usher et al (1997) criticises the unreflective methodology, and Smyth (1989) criticises the theoretical and apolitical nature of his work. Greenwood (1993) requires more reflection-before-action and Moon (1999) suggests reflection-in-action is unachievable. As Ghaye (2000: 7) suggests ‘maybe reflective practices offer us a way of trying to make sense of the uncertainty in our workplaces and the courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos’. This paper considers whether uncertainty, or chaos can only make sense via a contemplation of order and vice-versa, linking back to the being and becoming duality mentioned earlier, where being provides a concreteness, knowledge, whilst becoming provides startlement and uncomforting (see Author, 2017).

One continuity provided by reflective practice theory is that it is understood as the process of learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice.
Jarvis (1995) argues this involves examining assumptions in everyday practice and adopting a critical attitude of self-awareness, and in the case of this paper assumptions in regard to career (see Author, 2016). The pressures on busy professionals to individually neglect a contextual and situated focus on reflection is a warning this paper wishes to heed. To provide a critical engagement in reflexivity, one that considers social positionality, the self in relation to others and vice-versa, and evoking a close look at paradox to be revealing moments of career enactment and articulation, therefore questioning reflection as a catch-all concept that provides a decontextualized and abstract analysis. Critical reflection takes a wider and contextualised look at the situation within which reflection takes place drawing upon the philosophical tradition of the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, providing a substantive analysis of personal beliefs, how these fit within social settings and how these social settings influence and affect situations (Fook and Askeland 2006) where power differences are a necessary component of reflection (Fook, 2015; Brookfield, 1995). Critical reflection extends the reflective project to include assumption hunting (Brookfield 1995), taken for granted and common-sense and power dynamics exercised in reflective situations. As such, critical reflection is both a theory and a process (Gardner 2014) with a deeper look at the underpinning reasons why situations occur and consideration of all the elements that contributes to reflection.

To critically reflect means engaging with diachronic readings, acknowledging that reflection is both a posteriori, after the event, recollection; or a priori, before the event, anticipation. Such readings need to consider the risks of over and under preparation which may evoke assumption and anxiety. Therefore, along the journey toward being/becoming a social worker one is likely to experience a clash of value structures between the personal and the professional. This occurs via duration of experience, peppered with fateful moments where the paradoxical interplay between being and becoming manifest within consciousness (see Author, 2017). Our reflective engagement is to re-imagine the existing world and propose and explore alternative mental landscape of thoughts, ideas and practice. As such, reflective disclosure becomes a condition for social justice, a social justice that may well be out of reach.

**Methodology – Case-study**

The paper now will move toward providing a case study to illustrate the use of reflective theory espoused above. The case study is a participant in a longitudinal research project which utilised a duality framework to read career articulation, focusing on the transition from undergraduate study to up to 3 years post-graduation of a small selected sample.
(see Author, 2019). Although reflective practice was not the sole focus of the research project the participant in question – who is now a fully qualified social worker – provides excellent insights into her career articulation that focuses on her being/becoming a social worker. The illustration provides great insight into the parameters of reflection highlighted above, including reflections that account for the tension experienced being/becoming a social worker, where there was a conflict between personal and professional value structures. The longitudinal study started with a review of a worksheet written by the participants as an undergraduate student, a worksheet that reflects upon career enactment both retrospectively and anticipatorily, informed via social theory. The researcher then deconstructively read such a worksheet focusing on the duality of being and becoming to reveal a prominent paradoxical tension found throughout the longitudinal research project – in the case of the participant being revealed here; ‘Protection as Vulnerability’. The participants were then revisited 2 years and 3 years after graduation where they engaged in 2 semi-structured interviews, which covers a period where the participant was undertaking a social work Masters Programme. What unfolds is the penetrative nature of reading career via notions of paradox, how this reveals many important aspects of the participant’s journey to become/be a social worker, which clearly influence future enactment.

Participant J is a white working-class female in her mid-twenties. She is a hard-working individual who has consistently across the longitudinal study spoken of the importance caregiving to her career enactment. Participant J experienced the divorce of her birth parents within childhood, resulting in her living with her mother, whom she considers having had a tough life spending many years bringing her up on her own. Participant J has a half-sister, who is of dual heritage and who has learning difficulties, Participant J feels very protective of her younger half-sister. Participant J speaks of how she gains from enacting care, how care is looked upon as an aspired gift, yet, at the same time, can acknowledge how this seeks a return within an emotional economy of care. Such an economy, for Participant J, makes her feel vulnerable when providing protection via care, to others. The providing of inadequate protection may hurt her as well as the receiver of care, hence providing the overarching paradox identified in the project, one validated by the participant. The reflections below illustrate how an exploration of such an overarching paradox allows other paradoxes to come into play, where the participant acknowledges an eagerness to explore such paradoxes, providing her with a useful career analytic, illustrating the penetrative and utility of paradox as an analytical lens or motif.

Reflections
Participant J, has consistently across the study, articulated a position upon career as paid work. This is evident in her worksheet as an undergraduate.

I applied for an undergraduate degree in children’s nursing as I felt this career was very suitable to my characteristics... I continued gaining work experience in the NHS and this is the precise time my ontological security was threatened after I had experienced a prominent fateful moment (Giddens, 1991) I was assigned to work with oncology patients which began pleasantly, however after several months of becoming friends with a patient, I witnessed her condition deteriorate rapidly. I had been with her at her time of death and this was extremely emotional. I felt as though I had not been able to help her, something I have found confidence in when referring to my identity, questioning myself and my emotional resilience. I could not continue working and understood that a career in nursing was not appropriate for me and decided to apply for a youth studies degree that offered me many other possible career paths.

This event challenges Participant J’s perception of career, one where the enactment of care becomes questioned and where protection, so vital a motivator, ends with a negative return, one that makes Participant J vulnerable as the act of protection is seen to have failed. The deconstructive reading once shared with the participant in the first semi-structured interview provides a challenge to the participant, a questioning of the endeavour of care and protection from a differing perspective, how the giving of care provides an emotional economy, how validation comes from care, a sense of purpose, and a taking as well as a giving.

I thought it was really useful [the deconstructive reading] ... the caring as a strength and vulnerabilities and the paradox of that, that I thought was really good, as I think it reflects what it means for me to do it [care for others], it does validate me as a person if I help others...

I think it does highlight that you need to feel worthy ... yeah when I read it, it sort of made sense it was cary that, that is really true, but you wouldn’t sort of go to someone and say, well oh, selfishly, you know I am helping you out because it makes me feel better, cause really it should always be like that person, and what you are doing for them, but it does make you, you know, you are doing something to make yourself feel better, I suppose.

Care is therefore wished upon as a gift, where the participant in some way gives herself over to the care receiver, where they are put first. However, Participant J has to acknowledge how there is always
a return that is anticipated, a need for reassurance and validation that comes from the thank you or
gratitude that comes back into play in the emotional economy of care announced. The emotional
economy of care, via the paradox exposed, becomes manifest in consciousness to the participant,
where discussion evokes an unfolding of further connecting paradoxes, in particular how her work
experiences as a social worker provide the paradox of ‘care as control’ and ‘control as care’

... it [the controlling aspect of service users] sort of attacks what I am used to, so my brain sort
of goes, ‘oh my god this person doesn’t like you, you’re not doing what this person wants,
you’re going against what they think is good for them, you’re not helping them out now,
you’re not getting that feeling of you are helping them’ because they are blatantly sort of
going ‘what are you doing to me?’ But you sort of have to realise that that is eventually for
them, so I have gotten used to that idea, but it has sort of sent me into melt down a couple of
times if I have had to say ‘look I am really sorry but, you’re not doing what’s best for your
child’, ‘we are going to have to remove your child at the moment for a court order’ it sort of
all goes into melt down, the control sort of takes over, and sometime, it has to, you have got
no choice! It’s not nice to do the control bit, it is necessary sometimes, I have to get used to
that.

‘Care’ for Participant J is focused upon as a means of gaining a quick positive emotional return,
however there are times when this is not deemed appropriate by the service user, and therefore a
sense of controlling someone is presented in consciousness as being in the best interest of the care
receiver, however, such an enactment feels alien to intended enactment, an enactment that seeks
verification via positive regard. Control at times becomes enacted in the best interest of the service
user, though they may not see this at this time and it is hoped that they may be able at some later
date. Within the second semi-structured interview (3 years-after-graduation) further paradoxes
unfold when revisiting the overarching paradox of protection as vulnerability. What is of note is that
the participant had taken on-board the paradoxes explored in previous interview and came prepared
to the interview with her observations of other paradoxes that had become manifest within
consciousness. A fateful moment, which had occurred between interviews, provides an impetus to
acknowledge such paradoxes, in particular how ‘helping provides a sense of helplessness’. The fateful
moment involved the participant’s younger half-sister whom had experienced a period of mental
distress culminating in the writing of a couple of suicide notes, found initially by the participant’s
mother.
... my sister had stopped eating, my mum ... found a different bunch of suicide notes, there was one for me and my mother and one for her friends at school ... my mum started to blame herself as she had depression in the past, I had sort of had to become the parent as them two, to me, had become crumbling bricks... she is only 15 and my mum has always been this steady rock and I thought what do I do now I am the one that has got to sort this out and the paradox that I found which is what I was thinking about is that I found that I was the helper but I found that I felt really helpless.

The event appears to throw the participant into uncharted territory, forcing a reconfiguration of the relationship between the participant and her mother, a change in power dynamics that is viewed to have disorientated the participant at first, a position loaded with meanings of finitude, forced by her sister’s actions, providing a threat toward the act of protection again, to be made vulnerable, yet this time perceived as ‘helping providing a sense of helplessness’. Both interviews reveal subjective value structures of the participant and how experiences shape such structures. In the first interview this is particularly manifest due to the Master’s course providing a focus upon reflective practice. What becomes apparent is how such reflection provides a tension for Participant J, how the course is pushing for certain codes of values that at first challenge the participant’s ‘personal’ set of values and sense of ‘authenticity’.

When your personal and professional values start to conflict you start worrying about where you are going to get lost in being as you are now ... when is that point gonna be where I have got to forget what my judgements are and what my instincts are? Are they gonna get swallowed up ... that sort of taught me that meshing my professional and personal values together so it is sort of continuous being and becoming, because it is forever evolving I think. I was a bit worried that being a social worker I would have to lose some parts of myself but it just sort of means it has got to be adapted differently.

The duality of being/becoming, as well as self/other, is salient in such a reflection, where the participant contemplates how the self is a moving projection and that a deep-rooted sense of self – values - are adaptable and context dependent constituted by experiences with other, including the other within self. This is further explored in the second interview where another two further
paradoxes emerge, a challenge to dichotomous logic, where certainty can only be evoked via a sense of uncertainty and how one has to become comfortable with such uncomforting.

... professionalism and guidelines are a nice safety net for you, telling you what to do, it really is not like that when you get into it, it is very much like a mixture of everything and if you don’t get the balance right you really will mess up ... and the welfare of the child that should be at the front of your mind, am I thinking of the practice guidelines that is saying I should do it this way, and then your values, you are like ‘I am not treating a parent like an equal, valuing that they are an independent person they have got a right to do this’,, and there is no way you are going to know what is the right thing to do, that is what I don’t like as I would have said before any of this [studying and working as a social worker] that I am a black and white person with my values, with my judgement of saying that ‘I did the right thing’, yet it is very grey ... I don’t like not knowing I think that is why it is a benefit for me to learn because I like to know, I like to be certain about things, or, I at least like to have the information there to make a judgment. Social work is so grey there is no black and white there is no black and white what so ever ... as long as you are certain that you are uncertain then you will be fine, because if you think ‘yeah I know this I have done the right thing 100%’ people will look at you and go ‘hold on a second’ ... yeah you have to be uncertain and be comfortable with being uncertain.

In the second interview opportunity was provided to consider how the participant has taken on-board the researcher’s deconstructive reading that occurred in the first. Participant J relishes this opportunity and illustrates how she has utilised such knowledge to help her to read her own career articulations and has also asserted her to suggest it may have other utility

... paradox with my sister’s situation, being a helper but feeling helpless ... that has helped me understand what has happened and how that happens, I think if you were ever going to use it in therapy it would be the best thing ever as it helps people understand why they say what they do and why they feel that way, I think it is necessary for research, academia, personal life, relationships, everything.... I have really enjoyed it [the interview], it is good, it is therapeutic, cathartic, yeah I have enjoyed it thank you
Discussion and conclusion

The reflections above concentrate upon the enactment of care, via social work, providing a challenge to the yearning for certainty. The enactment of care is perceived to be difficult, where there are multiple perspectives to be read, where learning becomes a means of improving ones reading of enactment, yet learning is acknowledged as only providing a certainty of uncertainty, in-turn qualities to be able to feel comfortable with such uncomfortable situations. This resonates with Kafka’s (1992) notions of ‘before the law’, where the participant, as practitioner, has to justify her enactment to a higher law, potentially herself, her profession, policy, her own assigned gateway to universal ‘Law’ to justify why she has done what she has done, how this relates to the tension and paradox of care as control, personal values as professional values as well as linking to the prominent duality of being and becoming - where there is an acknowledgment that protection becomes vulnerability and vulnerability becomes protection.

The authors have taken on-board the views of the participant, thus exposing the method of reflection aided by the lens of the life career, framed via the duality of being and becoming to evoke useful paradoxes, paradox as an analytical motif to aid reflective practice. The literature on reflective practice is peppered with models that evoke the user to follow a set formula, generally following a geometric symmetry, rarely, apart from aspects of critical reflection, taking into account power relations, context and temporality. It also espouses how moments of confusion, potentially of conceptual contradiction, startlement, are moments to focus reflection. This paper continues along this line of logic, that such moments provide a useful focus on reflection particularly if situated within the life career, where many interconnecting strands are enacted, framed via the duality of being and becoming, thus evoking paradox. The paper has highlighted that once reflected upon, prominent paradoxes can be found within career articulation, paradoxes of an enduring nature, in the case study presented ‘protection as vulnerability’. Focusing upon this paradox allowed the participant to consider her personal value structure and how this had become influenced by her newly acquired professional values, how the self was lost, found, reconfigured and is reconfiguring. Such a journey allowed the participant to question enactment critically, to acknowledge that her perceived ‘gift’ of care giving is part of an emotional economy seeking a return, that such a return needs to be situated within a broader context, where policy, ethics and resources need to be contemplated. This provokes the uncertainty of professional practice, how she is to contemplate her own judgement against the back drop of professional values. Doing so she becomes comfortable being uncomfortable, which for her appears to be an important development.
It is acknowledged here the limitations of this paper as it only concentrates upon 1 case study that comes from a longitudinal project whose focus is not specifically upon reflective practice. However, the authors feel this is a strength, how allowing space for individuals to reflect broadly upon career and paradox has allowed powerful reflections to emerge. Such reflections have clearly had an impact on the participant who eagerly takes on-board learning from the research project, becomes a contributor of research yet at the same time receives unplanned pedagogy. The authors feel that such an emergence is important to share with the social work literature, with the anticipation that such learning could inform social work research and pedagogy. What becomes apparent from a HE pedagogical perspective is that many contemporary courses across the academy are charged with an employability input. The argument here is that the approach espoused above is one that can be in concert with employability pedagogy, yet, importantly, via a critical lens that also connects with the main home study of the student, in this case social work.

References


