

**Teaching staff experiences of a Work Discussion Group (WDG): An
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.**

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Abstract

This research explores how teaching staff experienced their participation in a Work Discussion Group (WDG) in a provision for pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. The Government has recently published a green paper (2017) outlining the expanded role that educational establishments will play in relation to the mental health and emotional wellbeing of their pupils. This comes during a period in which many schools are facing increased pressure due to a reduction in funding and difficulties with teacher retention. A review of the theoretical literature suggests that WDG may have a valuable role in the current context; providing a reflective and supportive space could be helpful as part of a whole school approach to maximising staff and pupil wellbeing. A review of the literature indicates that there is minimal existing research examining the use of WDG in educational settings, particularly from the perspective of staff. As the research is exploratory in nature a qualitative approach was taken with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the chosen methodology. Six members of staff who had participated in the same WDG were recruited to take part. The findings suggest that the WDG was experienced by staff in a way that allowed them to feel emotionally contained; to reflect on practice; to connect with colleagues; to feel empowered through voice; to experience themselves in relation to others; to raise awareness around organisational issues and to lead to some organisational change. The findings reveal some ambivalence relating to facilitation processes and the permeability of the group boundary. The discussion illuminates experiences through the lens of systemic and psychodynamic theory. This provides further theoretical interpretation of staff experience and highlights areas for consideration for future facilitation. Theoretical transferability and implications for Educational Psychology practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The Work Discussion Group (WDG) has featured as an element of reflective practice in psychoanalytically informed training since the mid-1960s (Bradley & Rustin, 2008).

The model of the WDG has been brought to schools, with Jackson writing prominently on the topic (2002, 2008, 2010, 2015). However, there is limited empirical research exploring WDGs within education settings (Jackson, 2002; Hulusi, 2007; Elfer, 2012). This potentially leads to their under-use in a climate prioritising evidence-based practice (Turpin & Fonagy, 2011).

Proponents of the WDG in schools highlight the positive impact on practitioners not receiving supervision as part of their role; a mandatory aspect of practice for other helping professions (Hulusi, 2007; Westergaard & Bainbridge, 2014). There may be a theoretical fit between the benefits offered by WDGs and some of the difficulties facing the teaching profession nationally. A reflective space encouraging collaboration and competence could be helpful to support staff wellbeing at a time when teacher retention is a national problem (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017). Furthermore, a forum encouraging an understanding of behaviour as communication could support pupils' mental wellbeing, a current national focus. These ideas have yet to be fully explored in the research pertaining to WDGs in educational contexts.

This research is an exploratory attempt to add to the evidence base for WDGs in educational settings. It considers the experiences of teaching staff who have

participated in a WDG. Through exploring their meaning-making, it is hoped that something further will be offered to the current body of knowledge. As this research is exploratory, any links with contextual issues described above will arise inductively from participants' experiences of the WDG.

In the interests of transparency I set out my position from the outset. I formerly worked as a secondary school teacher and often found myself preoccupied about aspects of my practice: my relationship with particular classes; the behaviour of certain pupils; the emotions elicited by my role (sometimes of elation, sometimes of dejection) – and finding that there were few places to explore these issues, that did not feel unhelpfully informal (the staff room) or potentially persecutory (observations and appraisals). When training as an Educational Psychologist (EP) I received supervision and found it helpful as a supportive space to reflect on my practice. I wondered why teachers were not routinely offered a similar space. As my training course operates primarily from systemic and psychodynamic perspectives I became familiar with the use of the WDG as a potential supportive, reflexive space for teachers.

I began this thesis with the notion that participating in a WDG *could* potentially be experienced as a supportive and reflective space. However, I was also aware that little research has been conducted around the experience of WDG participants in schools. Furthermore, I felt conscious that schools, and teachers, are not generally versed in the psychodynamic theory that underpins the WDG; I was curious as to how the WDG might 'translate'.

All researchers have a standpoint (Haraway, 1988) and are inescapably working according to preconceptions, leading us to ask particular questions about particular phenomena. I do not consider my position in relation to this study invalidates my research in this area, although I concede it will have implications in terms of my use of an interpretative methodology.

In order to orient the reader I now offer some background information on WDGs.

1.2 Background

This section offers background information. The WDG is briefly described, followed by the theoretical underpinning. Finally, there is an exploration of what has been written about WDGs in schools from a theoretical perspective.

1.2.1 What is a WDG?

Rustin and Bradley (2008) define the WDG as, “The systematic discussion of experience of work with small and stable groups of professional workers” (p. 19).

The task can be understood as the discussion of experience, leading to experiential learning through a consideration of the feelings evoked in the worker by the task (Bradley & Rustin, 2008). Jackson (2015) explains that, at the simplest level, the WDG offers teachers with a regular space to share and think about difficulties that may be troubling them in relation to their work. The WDG might look like a group supervision session, with a circle of workers accompanied by a facilitator or two.

Commonly, each meeting would involve one or two participants bringing a case of concern. The discussion would then be thoughtfully guided by the facilitator. The

participants would be encouraged not to rush to solutions, but to open up different perspectives and ways of thinking; to be able to develop a deeper understanding of what might be happening below the surface (considering the impacts of the dynamic unconscious at the level of individuals, the group, and the organisation); and to be able to tolerate the potential discomfort that might come with the uncertainty generated.

1.2.2 What are the theoretical underpinnings of the WDG?

Rustin and Bradley (2008) explain that the theoretical background as: “a belief in the central importance of the emotional dynamics of experience at work. This entails a focus on those feelings, both conscious and unconscious, evoked in the worker by the task, context, institutional constraints, and daily relationships.” (p. 19). The theoretical grounding is primarily psychoanalytic, but it also draws from group psychology, systems theory and developmental and cognitive psychology (Rustin and Bradley, 2008).

Bibby (2018) explains that psychoanalytic theory has something unique to offer educational practitioners, explaining that psychoanalysis is not interested in the general (as cognitive and developmental approaches would tend to be) but rather in the specifics of experience:

“Psychoanalysis provides us with ways of thinking about the edges of experience, about our uncanny responses to others, about our loopy learning [...] the aim is not to describe the general but find a language with which to

explore the particular [...] Making sense of [...] experiences and the patchy and contradictory accounts we offer to ourselves and others, is the stuff of psychoanalysis, which explores the ways the unconscious shapes and impacts our lives.” (p. 8).

Teaching staff often have experiences with pupils with whom the traditional bank of ‘strategies’ offered to teachers are not effective. Thus, the WDG can allow a space for teachers to go beneath the surface, supported by a thoughtful facilitator informed by psychoanalytic ideas.

1.2.3 What key psychoanalytic ideas might be drawn on?

There are certain psychoanalytic ideas particularly pertinent to WDGs which are outlined below. This is necessarily selective; readers desiring a more thorough exploration are directed to Rustin and Bradley (2008).

1.2.3 i The dynamic unconscious and the defended subject

The unconscious is unknowable to our conscious selves: partly due to its origin in pre-verbal life but also due to the necessity of its repression (Bibby, 2018). Some of that which is unconscious *is* unconscious because it has been repressed as too devastating for our conscious selves to know. The notion of the defended subject is that of the self constantly needing to protect itself and others from the (repressed) worst of itself (Bibby, 2018).

The unconscious is not a stationary, fixed ‘store’ of repressed instincts, but is rather dynamic. That is, as well as being dynamic in the way that it needs to be restrained by the conscious self, it is also dynamic in the sense that it is

generative: “It is the unconscious that produces much of the warp and weft of psychic life, its richness and its confusion.” (Frosh, 2002, p. 15).

The subject requires defending from anxieties arising from the interaction of the self and the social world. Anxieties, in this sense, are understood as an unconscious sense of threat to human needs, e.g. to perceive oneself as safe (physically and emotionally); to feel a connection with others; not to feel helpless. If the individual does not block anxieties through defence mechanisms the resulting state can be akin to being in a terrified state of being: “in uncharted territory in the presence of unpredictable strangers” (Ogden, 1992, p. 20). Subsequently, the individual utilises defence mechanisms, for example: repression, displacement, reaction-formation, compensation, denial, projection, intellectualization, and regression (Kramer, 2010).

It is not only individuals that adopt defences in response to anxiety. In all institutions, the specific work task incites anxieties that must be addressed through developing ways of managing the anxiety. Individual defences can merge to create a culture of defensive techniques that can then impact upon individuals in the system. Social defences are to some extent necessary to cope with anxiety. However, defences can become rigid and antithetical to the espoused organisational task. Social defences can be thought of as collective, unconscious arrangements (e.g. processes, structures and policies) that groups use to collectively defend against anxiety (Kahn, 2012).

1.2.3 ii Splitting and projection

Object relations theory (Klein, 1932) is a psychoanalytic theory conceptualising how the external world comes to be known for individuals through the internalisation of symbols or objects. These objects are not exact simulacra of a mother, father, sibling, superior – but rather a caricature viewed through the lens of emotionally charged experience.

Klein (1932) postulated that, in order for a young child to cope with the demands of an anxiety-producing world, it was necessary for the typically-developing child to divide the world into delineated 'good' and 'bad' objects. Klein (1932) termed this as the 'paranoid-schizoid position' – schizoid because it is characterised by splitting processes, and paranoid due to the fact that negative feelings are projected into external objects (a defence mechanism). The concept of projection can be described as the defensive process by which individuals (and organisations) can avoid processing overwhelming *internal* anxieties by projecting them into the *external* world. Undesirable aspects of the self (internal objects) are split off and projected onto an externalised other. This is a necessary defence for infants who can feel overwhelmed by the painful parts that are subsequently projected onto another (mother). Splitting and projection makes the external world appear more threatening, as it takes on the malign aspects projected onto it.

If the infant is able to internalise a secure relationship with internal 'objects' perceived as good, the infant can come to terms with the fact that the 'bad' mother that leaves her is also the same 'good' mother that loves her. As her view of the external world becomes more realistic (and less threatening), so can her sense of self; a position known as the depressive position. This position was termed *depressive* because Klein (1932) postulated that in this position the infant experiences negative emotions, as when she realises her mother is a separate person, she also realises her actions could have negatively affected her. The realisation of her mother as a separate individual occurs alongside feelings such as guilt and concern for the other. Klein (1932) conceptualised these as positions, rather than stages, as individuals can revert to the less psychologically mature paranoid-schizoid position in defence against overwhelming anxieties.

The identification aspect of projective identification occurs when the projection evokes the desired response from a receptive other (e.g. parent or teacher). Bion (1962, 1985) suggested that from birth a baby is able to cause the mother to feel both feelings that she does not wish to have, and feelings that she wishes her to have. This is therefore a means of communication as the identification with the projection (on the part of the mother) allows the mother to respond. Projective identification can fail if the recipient of projections shows a lack of awareness of feelings projected, or if the recipient recognises those feelings but cannot tolerate them (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1999).

These ideas are useful for thinking about learning as it suggests that the effect that a pupil or group has on an adult may signal the types of feelings they wish to engender. Salzberger-Wittenberg (1999) explains that these feelings might be positive, like feelings of being idealised or valued. However, they may be emotions that cannot be borne by the pupil or group (like confusion or despair). They may be projected so they do not have to be owned, but also perhaps as a communication; so that adults can receive those projections through a process of projective identification and provide appropriate support. If such anxiety-provoking emotions are received and made sense of by another it may lead to psychic development. Similarly, Winnicott (1964) identified the role of the mother in holding her infant both physically and emotionally in order to enable psychic growth.

1.2.3 iii Containment, thinking and the learning relationship

Linked to this notion of emotional holding is the concept of containment. Containment is a process by which painful thoughts and feelings can be tolerated, and therefore made sense of (Bion, 1967). Bion (1967) posits that this process begins with the initial mother-infant relationship, arguing that infants are overwhelmed by difficult emotions from events outside of their control, which cannot be processed and are therefore perceived as unwanted objects that need to be expelled. Bion (1967) suggests that through the containing presence of the mother, unprocessed sensory experiences can be thought about and given meaning; offered back to the infant as an opportunity for further psychic growth.

Bion (1962) gave the term 'alpha-function' to the mother's process of psychic holding. The mother contains fragmented aspects of psychic experience (beta-elements) and offers the experience back in a shape that lends meaning to the infant's experience (alpha elements); helping to make sense of fragmented experience without either imposing meaning from an external source or merely reflecting it back. This relationship allows the contained to develop her capacity for thinking or to regain a capacity for thinking that had been temporarily overwhelmed due to unbearable anxiety (Grinberg, Sor & Tabak de Bianchedi, 1993). Bion (1985) also posits that in order for the mother to provide a containing function, she herself must feel supported emotionally (or contained) by another.

Salzberger-Wittenberg (1999) explains:

The task of the teacher may be thought of as resembling the parental function: that is, to act as a temporary container for the excessive anxiety of his students at points of stress. It will mean that he will experience in himself some of the mental pain connected with learning, and yet set an example of maintaining curiosity in the face of chaos, love of truth in the face of terror of the unknown, and hope in the face of despair [...] which will foster in the student an ability to tolerate the uncertainties connected with learning (p. 60).

1.2.4 What does the existing theoretical literature suggest about the WDG in educational contexts?

This literature is not considered empirical in nature and therefore not included in the literature review. The body of literature draws on anecdotal evidence, case studies and clinical examples. This may be because it is difficult to operationalize and measure the psychodynamic concepts that underpin the WDG. Furthermore, it is perhaps difficult to recruit participants for large scale studies due to the heterogeneity of samples across schools, as well as the relative rarity of WDGs (Jackson, 2005; 2008). The decision to include these ideas here and not in the literature review was reflected on by the researcher (see appendix A). Nonetheless, ideas in the theoretical literature suggest what could be empirically investigated through further research and provide justification for this as a useful area for research. Below follows a thematic review of the literature.

1.2.4 i Offering a supportive function

WDGs are described as having a supportive, or containing, function. Jackson (2008) explains that the process of sharing, normalising and understanding the emotions inherent in teaching and learning relieves staff anxiety and increases competence. Jackson (2002) describes how teachers working in challenging conditions can frequently experience a host of difficult feelings towards pupils and management. Jackson (2002) explains that unsupported teachers can have a tendency to be reactive rather than reflective.

Hulusi and Maggs (2015) argue that teachers require containment themselves to contain the powerful emotions stirred up in pupils through learning. Indeed, Bibby (2011) explains that the “business of learning is dangerous [...] because of its proximity to love (and therefore also to hate, acceptance and rejection). If love is demonstrated by acts of caring, nurturing, feeding, through acts of kindness and the symbolism of gifts, then teaching, which involves the metaphorical exchange of all these goods, is an act of love.” (p. 18). Hulusi and Maggs (2015) refer to Bion’s (1985) explanation that containers (mothers) also require emotional support or containment (e.g. from the father), in order to effectively contain the projections of infants, to argue that teachers require emotional support to contain their pupils. Ellis and Wolfe (2019) describe how members of a WDG were supported to consider their own emotional wellbeing through a process of being contained by the group.

Hulusi and Maggs (2015) draw on Bion’s (1961) theory of group processes, to explain how a teacher also contains the anxieties of the group. Work-group mentality refers to the dynamics at play in the life of a group when members are able to manage shared anxieties and relationships, in order to function effectively. Conversely, basic-assumption mentality refers to the state of a group that is overwhelmed by emotions and has lost sight of its primary purpose (Bion, 1961). In the classroom, a teacher has to work to contain groups of pupils so that they can adopt a work-group mentality, focused on the task of learning. This seems particularly relevant to school life with learning commonly occurring in groups.

The literature on WDG describes teachers as able to share elements of their practice within a culture of non-judgemental acceptance. This potentially results in sharing experiences that may have been hidden due to fears of potential criticism. This can serve a supportive function for staff; secretly harbouring doubts about professional practice can be a source of anxiety (Jackson, 2015). Jackson (2002) reports that, in a survey of 25 teachers, 77% reported feeling less stressed after discussing cases with which they were struggling. Jackson (2008) reports that in a school with a culture of utilising WDGs, attendees had a significantly lower rate of absence when compared with the staff body as a whole; this may suggest that the teachers' increased wellbeing led to a reduction in absence from work.

1.2.4 ii Offering a reflective and educative function

Supporting staff to consider emotional factors inherent in teaching and learning is supportive as it normalises anxieties which may potentially become persecutory in nature, and also allows staff to view behaviour in a new light (Jackson, 2002). Staff members are able to move away from 'stuck' narratives about a situation and view things from a different perspective, from which they are able to make decisions and develop approaches based on a deeper understanding of pupils' needs (Jackson, 2002). Jackson (2002) reports that of twenty-five teachers responding to a survey about a WDG, 92% reported developing a deeper understanding about the meaning of behaviour, whilst 88% felt they had developed their skills in working with challenging pupils. Ellis and Wolfe (2019) describe how members of a WDG felt less stuck and more confident in the roles following participation in a WDG.

Jackson (2008) explains that teacher training courses do not offer teaching in relation to personality development, emotional factors underpinning teaching and learning, or the management of relationships between pupil and teacher. These are topics that emerge organically through discussions within the group. Thus, Jackson (2008) describes teachers reporting that WDGs have offered the most useful training of their careers.

1.2.4 iii Offering a protective function

A culture of increased openness also serves pupils. Teachers feeling unable to share doubts for fear of reprisal can potentially find themselves in unhelpful situations which may have been avoidable had an uncomfortable, but necessary, discussion taken place (Jackson, 2008).

For example, Jackson (2015) describes the way in which WDGs can serve as container for sexual anxieties in schools. Jackson explains that the reality of relationships between teachers and pupils – particularly when the pupils are adolescents – can be treated as something of a taboo topic in schools. Jackson suggests that the dearth of training or support in the area of adolescent development and the lack of space to reflect openly on relationships can lead to staff feeling isolated and without skills to manage difficult situations.

Furthermore, WDGs can offer a protected space where teachers can share experiences of a pupil which may help in terms of increasing empathic understanding and also identifying shared concern that could result in highlighting potential safeguarding concerns (Jackson, 2008). Thus, WDGs can serve a protective function for pupils and staff.

1.2.4 iv Offering a thinking space within mercurial institutions

The WDG has been posited as a protected space that allows a time for reflection (Jackson, 2008). For example, McLoughlin (2010) describes the WDGs as one of the: “circles of containment” (p.225) that her multidisciplinary Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) offered a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). She suggests that the protected space was particularly valuable within a climate in which firmly boundaried institutions are increasingly replaced by an: “ever-changing network of complex organisational relationships to be negotiated” (p. 238). Similarly, Ellis and Wolfe (2019) describe how members valued the reflective space offered by the WDG as the educational setting was felt to lack space for mental and emotional reflection.

Although schools are arguably more clearly boundaried institutions than CAMHS, some argue the role of the school is similarly mutable. Elfer (2012) explains that schools are increasingly expected to fulfil: “broad social remedy expectations,” (p. 138), adopting functions previously handled by other institutions. Tucker (2015) makes a similar observation. Role ambiguity and the daunting challenge of the

school's ever-expanding task (both conscious and unconscious (Obholzer, 1994)) can potentially be a source of anxiety, which a WDG could help explore and contain.

Jackson (2008) describes how the WDG can be useful for leadership teams to consider challenges pertinent to their role (like organisational changes).

Furthermore, Jackson (2008) describes how the WDG can transform organisational culture, through members of the WDG acting as supportive consultants within the group, which can lead to a culture of peer consultation occurring between staff, so that the work of the WDG takes place within the school as a whole.

Thus the WDG can be seen as fulfilling a triad of functions: supporting staff (and therefore potentially the institution as a whole); fulfilling training needs; and thus serving the interests of pupils. It is possible that this triad of functions could prove useful to schools in the current context, discussed below.

1.3 Contextualizing this research

Yardley (2000) suggests that one of the dimensions by which qualitative studies can be assessed is that of impact. Below follows a discussion of current issues in education that point to the potential need for a space such as a WDG, justifying further research in this area.

1.3.1 Teacher retention and the possible place for WDGs

A Commons Select Committee report into teacher retention and recruitment states that: “schools face increasing challenges of teacher shortages.” (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017, p. 10). The report outlines a key issue as the number of teachers leaving the profession. The report’s recommendations for improving retention focus on school leaders, “promot[ing] a culture of wellbeing in their schools.” (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017, p. 82). This includes taking greater account of workload and ensuring access to high quality, continuing professional development (CPD).

A survey reports that over half of teachers are considering leaving the profession within the next two years, citing ‘volume of workload’ (61%) and ‘seeking better work/life balance’ (57%) as primary concerns (NUT, 2015). The government’s own strategy to address workload recommended providing teachers with a space to reflect on classroom management as long ago as 2005 (DFES, 2005). Westergaard and Bainbridge (2014) explain that teachers have few opportunities to reflect on practice. A WDG could provide the function of supporting wellbeing in staff, as well as offering a space for CPD.

Teaching involves ‘emotional labour’. This is defined as the practice of: “induc[ing] or suppress[ing] feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others.” (Hochschild, 1983, p.7). Hochschild (1983) explains that some organisations suggest feelings rules; proscriptions for how employees ought to behave in certain situations. Individuals may experience

disconnect between their genuine emotions and the organisation's feelings rule, leading to a suppression or induction of emotion – emotional labour. Teaching seems to involve feelings rules - sometimes emotional responses on the part of teachers can be seen as undesirable. Jackson (2002) suggests there seems to be a belief that one should side-line personal feelings towards pupils in case they impede one's ability to work efficiently. Bibby (2018) also suggests that advice given to teachers, "seems designed to minimise (or even deny) the need to recognise and think about the very relationships that are at the heart of learning and teaching." (p. 5).

Other helping professions involving 'emotional labour' (e.g. social workers, psychologists) have mandatory supervision to ensure the wellbeing of both practitioner and client (Hawkins and Shohet, 2012; Hulusi, 2007; Westergaard and Bainbridge, 2014). Teachers arguably suffer the lack of the supportive function that supervision offers, potentially leading to burn-out (Steel, 2001; Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes and Salovey, 2010; Ellis, 2012) and loss of teachers to the profession (Westergaard and Bainbridge, 2014), or to teachers coping through denying their emotional responses through depersonalising pupils (Kinman, Wray & Strange, 2011). Indeed, a 2019 report suggests job related stress is higher among teachers than other professionals (Worth & Van den Brande, 2019). Pupils also potentially suffer from teachers feeling unsupported and anxious (Hanko, 1995).

The WDG could offer a group supervision experience for teachers with a specific focus on the relationships and conscious and unconscious emotional processes at the heart of teaching and learning.

1.3.2 Mental Health and emotional wellbeing in schools and the possible place for WDGs

The Prime Minister stated that mental health is one of the “greatest social challenges of our time” (2017), with research estimating that one in ten children and young people (CYP) have a diagnosable mental disorder (Department for Education, 2017). Teresa May’s government has highlighted the central role that educational establishments can play in the identification and support of CYP with mental health needs, publishing a green paper addressing the issue (Department of Health and Department for Education, 2017).

Staff would likely require additional training and support to identify and manage SEMH needs, particularly as teaching staff are already citing workload difficulties. The green paper highlights the need for a whole school approach to supporting emotional wellbeing. Similarly, a House of Commons Education and Health Committee (2017) report into the role of the school in children’s mental health states the need for a whole school approach embedding well-being throughout the culture of the school as well as in CPD. Although the WDG is not explicitly a space for training - the transmission of facts from facilitator to attendees - it nonetheless offers a space for critical reflection on what might be communicated through the

behaviour of students, which would may help teachers better understand their students as well as uncovering possible SEMH issues (Jackson, 2008).

A Public Health England report (2015) states that staff require opportunities to: “reflect on and to take actions to enhance their own wellbeing,” (p. 16). The WDG is not a therapeutic space and cannot intervene in systemic issues impacting on wellbeing; however it offers a space for staff to reflect on their responses to particular situations. This self-awareness could support the staff in, “tak[ing] actions to enhance their own wellbeing,” (PHE, 2015, p. 16).

1.3.3 Educational psychology practice and WDGs

Work Discussion Groups are congruent with systemic working; promoting mental wellbeing; supporting practice; and in terms of being a proactive and preventative intervention (British Psychological Society, 2015; Health and Care Professions Council, 2015). As teachers often implement EP recommendations, it is sensible to support teachers’ emotional wellbeing so they are able to meet the demands of the teaching task, whilst encouraging curiosity regarding possible communications behind behaviour.

However, present gaps in research around WDGs (Jackson, 2002, 2005; Warman & Jackson, 2007; Hulusi, 2007; Rustin, 2008; Elfer, 2012) potentially reduces the use of WDGs, particularly given the focus on evidence-based practice. This research usefully provides an exploratory look at WDGs from the perspective of staff (a

perspective that has been under-researched, outlined in the literature review below) and is relevant as it considers an intervention that is systemic and focuses on affect, often not explicitly addressed in schools. This research is timely as it coincides with research suggesting job related stress is higher among teachers than other professionals (Worth & Van den Brande, 2019); as well as reports of increasing mental health problems in CYP (Department for Education, 2017), alongside the need for EP work to show value at a time of austerity.

1.4 Rationale for this research

There is a rationale for further empirical research as there is limited research in this field; there are a lack of WDGs across educational settings (Warman & Jackson, 2007), and subsequently, a lack of published research (Jackson, 2002, 2005; Warman & Jackson, 2007). There is potentially a feedback loop in that a limited evidence base leads to a reduced implementation of WDGs, reinforcing this limited pool of WDGs on which to conduct research. The theoretical literature makes the case that WDGs could support teachers in their role (potentially mitigating some of the pressures on teachers); as well as strengthening teachers' capacity to support pupils' mental wellbeing. However, further research into experiences of participants is necessary to explore these possible functions.

This research aims to explore how teaching staff experience their participation in a WDG and whether they feel their participation has influenced their practice. At present, there is limited research exploring the experience of the WDG from the

perspective of teaching staff. The research question has arisen as a result of gaps in the current literature and is as follows:

How do teaching staff experience a Work Discussion Group?

2. Systematic literature review

The previous chapter outlined the context and justification for this research. The aim of this research is to explore how teaching staff experience their participation in a WDG. The purpose of this is to add to the research and help provide professionals with knowledge as to how staff experience a WDG, which can inform practice.

The literature review below outlines what is known about WDGs in educational settings, with a view to identifying gaps that could potentially be addressed.

Methodological issues raised will be discussed. This section seeks to answer the literature review question: *What is already known about WDGs in educational settings?*

2.1 Conducting the literature search

The search was conducted in August 2018 using EBSCOhost. Search terms were entered into the following databases: British Library EThOS, PsycINFO, Education Source, ERIC and PEP Archive. Abstracts were searched.

2.1.1 Search terms

In order to answer the literature review question: *What is already known about WDGs in educational settings?* the following search terms were used:

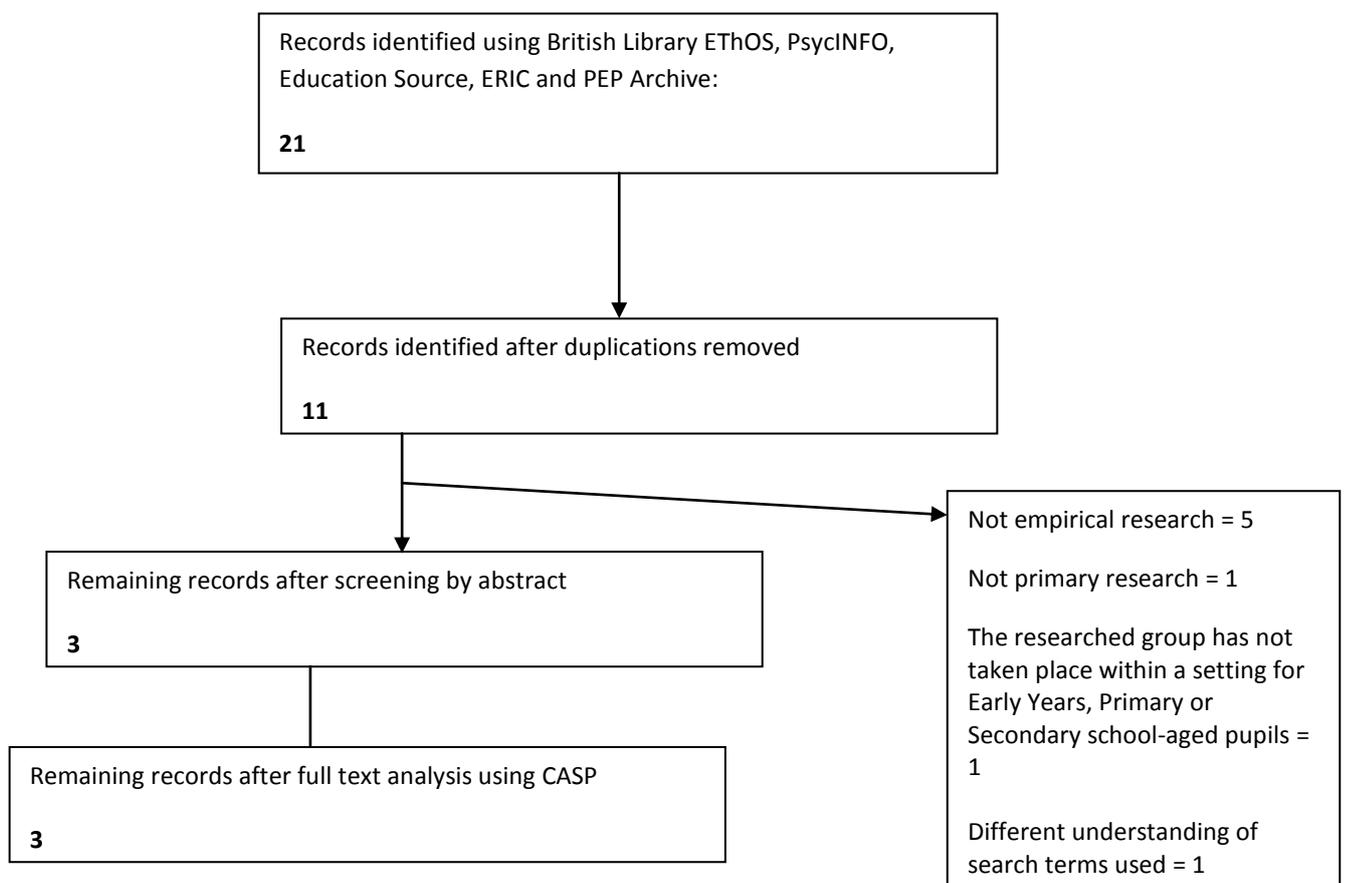
- The researched group is for teaching staff
- Empirical research (qualitative or quantitative)
- Reports primary research or previously unpublished research

The following exclusion criteria was applied:

- Different understanding of search terms used.

Appendix C details the full results of records yielded by the search, including the databases from which they originated, and the relevant inclusion/exclusion criteria applied.

2.1.4 Flowchart outlining process of systematic literature review



Adapted from the PRISMA flowchart (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff and Altman, 2009).

2.2 Assessing rigour

The methods used in research are assessed to determine the weighting that can be given to the knowledge produced. For papers identified through the literature search the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) Qualitative Research Checklist (appendix D) was used to evaluate methodological rigor and validity (results meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria were all qualitative in methodology). The CASP was selected as it is widely used by bodies overseeing the dissemination and conduct of research (Mills & Birks, 2014). For each of the ten subsections points were assigned from 0-3 (with 0= no evidence provided of rigour pertaining to specific subsection, 3 = high level of rigour pertaining to specific subsection). Based on the score attained, papers were categorised using a traffic light system (appendix E). Appendix F details the scoring and analysis of papers reviewed using this CASP traffic light system.

This process was undertaken to provide the reader with an accountable and transparent assessment. However, this was limited to the information available in the paper, in turn constrained by publication limits such as word limits. The assessment of a publication rests on the information presented, which does not necessarily reflect the quality of research.

2.3 Results for Literature review question: What is already known about WDGs in educational settings?

Three papers were found in the literature search: Elfer (2012); Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014).

2.4 Thematic review of literature

2.4.1 Introduction

Elfer (2012) uses Grounded Theory to investigate a WDG undertaken with nursery managers. The aim of the research was to report on issues brought for discussion; the experience of participants in the group; and the value placed on the group by the participants. Hulusi (2007) uses a narrative analytic approach to two case studies, to explore the effect of the WDG on the concerns of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in a secondary school. Maggs (2014) uses Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis to explore primary school teachers' experiences of WDG in promoting their understanding of working with children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD).

2.4.2 Overview of the research aims

Elfer's (2012) findings pertain to issues brought for discussion in the WDG and the managers' evaluation of what they valued. Maggs (2014) has two research questions, the first relating to the perceived experience of primary school teachers as to their support in working with children with SEBD. The second directly relates to

WDGs, asking how teachers experience the WDG model as a means of gaining support in their work with pupils. Hulusi's (2007) research seeks to explore the effect of WDG on concerns raised by NQTs. All seek to explore how the WDG is perceived by participants.

It should be noted that Hulusi (2007) uses Farouk's (2004) four phased model, which Hulusi (2007) describes as a model for WDGs. Hulusi (2007) adopts this structured approach in an effort to encourage a consistent approach across the WDGs; perhaps more relevant to his research as he analysed the content of the sessions. However, Farouk (2004) outlined his approach as a model of group process consultation, not a WDG. Although it shares similar theoretical perspectives, being psychodynamic and systemic in orientation, it primarily reworks Schien's (1988) model of process consultation with Hanks's (1985, 1999) method of approaching group work with teachers and has a different purpose. The aim of Farouk's (2004) model is to arrive at strategies, with the four phased model moving towards a final 'strategy generating phase'. This phased approach is more rigid than the structure proposed for WDGs in the literature, potentially because a rigid approach could restrict the scope for a thorough unpacking of the issues brought for discussion. Furthermore, concluding with strategy generation is in opposition to the aims of the WDG that is not focused on providing solutions, "rather than primarily seeking a specific solution or direction for the "presenter" to take, WDGs aim to open up different ways of seeing and thinking so as to generate a deeper understanding of what might be happening beneath the surface" (Jackson, 2005, p.271). Indeed, part of the WDG

model is the idea that there may not be a solution to be found at some points – it may be necessary instead to be able to tolerate a lack of resolutions - and indeed the desire to leave with a solution might be a defensive strategy itself. Indeed, when reporting on the aspects of the WDG that were valued by participants, Elfer (2012) describes: “a renewed capacity to tolerate discomfort and uncertainty; what seemed to be learned here was that difficult situations in nursery were not necessarily resolved by remaining ‘cheerfully positive’, when the difficulty could then continue to be corrosive and undermining, but that sometimes acknowledging these, even when no obvious solutions were immediately apparent, could serve to reduce their toxicity.” (p. 138).

On balance, it appears that Hulusi’s (2007) research is investigating a different phenomenon, in that his findings pertain to Farouk’s (2004) model of group process consultation, rather than WDGs. However, as Hulusi (2007) felt that he was delivering a WDG, the ‘spirit’ of the method may have been sufficiently present in the group for his research to be exploring a phenomenon approaching a WDG. Therefore, the research is included in the literature review with the reader encouraged to exercise critical caution.

2.4.3 The rationale for Work Discussion Groups as explored in the research

2.4.3 i Social defences

Elfer (2012), Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) interpret some of their findings from a psychodynamic perspective, in keeping with the theoretical grounding of the WDG.

They suggest that the WDG is valuable as it illuminates unhelpful social defences that can be used by teachers. For a discussion of psychodynamic concepts, see the introduction.

2.4.3 ii Splitting

Elfer (2012) describes how the issues raised in the WDG illuminated the tendency for participants to utilise the defence of splitting (Klein, 1948). Elfer (2012) outlines how the group described split communication and thinking within the workplace. For example, Elfer (2012) discusses how a split was discussed in relation to the role of the manager; was it necessary to be either “hard-headed”, or “not in that category”? (p. 137).

Maggs (2014) describes how the process of splitting was used by teachers, as problems experienced were placed solely ‘within child.’ That is, the complexities of the children’s situation were reduced so that the problem was seen to reside with the child, and positive aspects of the child’s personality were split off and denied. Some participants seemed to implicitly feel this was happening as they felt wary of discussing issues in the group, worrying it would become an exercise in vilifying a child (an exercise in splitting). Maggs (2014) states this as a particularly troublesome defence for teachers working with vulnerable children as it can potentially lead to the child (or the child’s family) being split off as the source of all of the negative aspects of the situation (perhaps to protect the organisation). The rationale is that the WDG could be a space where these defences could be acknowledged and explored.

2.4.3 iii Denial and avoidance

Maggs' (2014) participants describe a: "culture of coping," (p. 116) with teachers not seeking support from colleagues due to fears of repercussions. This was felt by some participants to lead to 'burnout'. From a psychodynamic perspective, this culture can be seen as evidence of psychological denial – where the individual diminishes or entirely refutes the source of anxiety (Freud, 1961).

Similarly, Elfer (2012) explains that participants felt a pressure to: "be positive for fear of a spiral of despair," (p. 135). The managers reflected on the tendency to remain relentlessly positive to avoid unmanageable negative emotion. Within the WDG, managers reflected on the potential negative impact of denial, including considering whether sufficient attention was given to allowing children to express negative emotions. Furthermore, Elfer (2012) highlights the way in which the managers used the WDG to think about difficult emotional issues and effect on practice, rather than avoiding issues.

2.4.3. iv Stressors within the system

The research highlights how participants can feel that the organisation is stretched by competing demands. A further rationale for the WDG explored in the research is that it is a space where stressors within the system can be considered. Elfer (2012) explains that one of the issues brought by managers was that of conflicting demands between organisational tasks: the requirement for the nursery to be financially viable; to provide education; to provide day care; and to support families.

Similarly, Maggs (2014) outlines how participants highlighted the need for an external perspective, suggesting that one of the stressors experienced was a lack of support for children with SEBD from external agencies. Maggs (2014) also suggests that participants felt that their organisation lacked expertise to cope with SEBD issues. Maggs (2014) suggests that this denial of capacity was linked to a practice of avoiding the anxiety associated with engaging with the distressing experiences of the children. Maggs (2014) suggests that the WDG could increase the sense of competence within a system. However, this can only be done through clarifying the primary task of the WDG (defined by Maggs (2014) as a space to discuss an issue relating to a child with the aim of promoting understanding and creating opportunities for reflection on practice in relation to working with pupils with SEBD) as opposed to being a place where solutions will be proposed by an external 'expert' to 'fix' the problem.

2.4.4 The functions of the Work Discussion Groups as explored in the research

2.4.4. i Containment

Adopting a psychodynamic perspective, Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) discuss how their findings suggest that WDGs serve a containing function for participants (the concept of containment is outlined further in the introduction chapter). Maggs (2014) states that participants experienced a lack of containment in terms of their perception of the support they received when working with children with SEBD. Maggs (2014) posits that this lack of containment was partly alleviated through participation in the WDG. Similarly, Hulusi (2007) found that the narratives of his

participants were more stable after participating in the WDG; taken by Hulusi to indicate that NQTs positively reconstructed their reality as a result of the narrative change (with participants' exit narratives indicating that teachers had undertaken a systemic exploration of alternative narratives).

Both Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) draw on Bion's (1985) theory of containment to explain that the WDGs psychologically held anxiety and unprocessed thinking in order to allow a space for thinking and reflection. Hulusi (2007) explains that through the process of the WDG, teachers were supported to process and give meaning to experiences.

Elfer (2012) found that aspects of the WDG valued by participants were learning about group processes and considering the benefit of thinking about, 'negative' or complex issues. The WDG offered participants opportunities to learn to tolerate uncertainty and discomfort rather than rush to positivity, and to continue thinking even when there were no immediate solutions. This therefore also alludes to a containing space, where participants can feel psychologically held so as to enable the toleration of 'negative' issues and to process difficult issues where previously, Elfer (2012) suggests, there was a rush to unthinking positivity.

2.4.4. ii Catharsis (or venting?)

Linked to the function of containment is that of catharsis. Maggs (2014) explains that the WDG had a cathartic effect for some, as the group was used as an opportunity to 'vent' and reduce occupational stress. Catharsis can be understood as

the discharge of affect connected to a traumatic experience; allowing the release of difficult emotions which may have been repressed. Catharsis is arguably a more transformative process than venting; the reader is encouraged to critically consider Maggs' (2014) definition.

Elfer (2012) similarly describes how managers used the group to explore the emotional experience of management; how the role brought satisfaction but also entailed feelings of guilt and loneliness. Managers reflected on the difficulty of overlapping professional roles and personal relationships and how loneliness could lead to the temptation to confide in staff thereby infringing professional boundaries. Elfer (2012) does not describe the cathartic effect of the WDG, however he suggests that the opportunity to bring difficult emotions to a sanctioned place possibly allowed a release of affect, potentially reducing the likelihood of managers confiding inappropriately.

2.4.4. iii Reflection

Maggs (2014) explains that participants valued the protected reflective space, with some suggesting that this did not exist elsewhere. Participants suggested that this reflective space reduced feelings of isolation. Furthermore, it was professionally helpful as it allowed an opportunity to reflect on the meaning behind behaviour, and reflect on their practice. Hulusi (2007) also comments that participants indicated that the WDG was the first time they had experienced help with thinking outside of line-management procedures. Elfer (2012) similarly explains that participants valued protecting time for personal reflection and mutual support. Managers felt they

should incorporate time for nursery children to similarly explore their own creativity and autonomy.

2.4.4. iv Communication

Elfer (2012) describes how the participants valued the WDG as the opportunity to communicate with others. Consequently, this led to a reduction in competition between individual nurseries, alongside a sense of comfort in realising that individuals from different nurseries also experience difficulties. Maggs (2014) explains that the teachers felt listened to within the WDG, which proved both emotionally containing and also improved practice; supporting shared experiences and collaborative working.

2.4.5 Difficulties with the Work Discussion Groups as explored in the research

Maggs' (2014) research considers obstacles experienced by participants in relation to the WDG, divided into within-group issues and organisational issues. Hulusi (2007) critically reflects on the application of Farouk's (2004) four phased model for WDGs.

2.4.5. i Within group issues

Maggs (2014) explains that participants highlighted membership as an issue, as some individuals felt that attendance was inconsistent. Furthermore, it was felt by some participants that those attending the group did not necessarily represent the members of staff who required support. As Maggs (2014) explains, this is the necessary consequence of voluntary membership.

Maggs' (2014) describes how group dynamics were felt to be problematic by some. Participants perceived some group members as not participating fully. Maggs (2014) explains how this could be an example of Bion's (1961) concept of 'basic assumption mentality'; he explains that the silent members might be understood as feeling uncontained and overwhelmed by anxiety and unable to contribute to the group; dependent on other members to think for them. Maggs (2014) explains that other participants' responses suggested feelings of resentment and/ or persecutory anxiety with regard to what the silent members might be thinking. Some members of the WDG were perceived by some of Maggs' (2014) participants as overbearing and dismissive. Maggs (2014) discusses how this behaviour could be indicative of underlying anxiety within the group, with the overbearing members attempting to deny anxieties associated with uncertainty through a display of denial and omnipotence (Klein, 1948).

2.4.5. ii Organisational issues

The issue of timing was problematic for some participants in Maggs' (2014) research. The WDG was held in the lunch hour to avoid conflicting with after-school commitments. However, this was felt by some to be difficult as it restricted discussion time. Maggs (2014) also notes that it potentially increases the pressure on staff by reducing breaks and possibly implies that support for teachers can be 'slotted in' around more important tasks.

Group membership was also of concern, with some participants questioning how they would feel discussing difficulties in the presence of senior managers. However,

Maggs (2014) explains that head teachers can feel anxious about the content of a WDG if senior managers are excluded.

Maggs (2014) explains that at the start of the WDG he spent time setting out the boundaries of the group. Maggs (2014) explains that although he spent time on the contracting phase - outlining the scope of the WDG and the nature of the task – it was necessary to regularly review the boundaries of the group. Some participants seemed unclear regarding the boundaries of the WDG. Thus, the issue of whether participants fully understand the task and boundaries of the group is highlighted by Maggs' (2014) as a potential obstacle when utilising WDGs.

Hulusi (2007) applied Farouk's (2004) four-phased model for WDGs which emphasises the need for an issue to be fully described, clarified and reflected on prior to generating solutions. Hulusi's (2007) analysis shows that the consultant's role in actively guiding the structure of consultant's narratives protected a space for the consultee to fully tell their story as opposed to exploring solutions for a superficial problem. Hulusi (2007) also feels that this provides emotional containment.

Conversely, his analysis also highlights difficulties with the model's rigidity, with participants struggling to refrain from offering solutions until the appropriate phase. However, this relates to the above discussion regarding whether Farouk's (2004) group consultation model can be considered a WDG. Hulusi's (2007) analysis suggests that the gate-keeping function (defined as "reducing the activity of overactive members and increasing the activity of overtly passive members", Schein,

1988, p. 52) undertaken by the consultant may have inhibited further engagement by group members. Hulusi's (2007) analysis also suggests that delaying solution finding may have had a negative impact on the levels of group anxiety. Hulusi (2007) concludes that asserting an overly rigid model with an anxious group can prove unhelpful and uncontainable, advocating a flexible approach.

2.4.5 The role of the facilitator as explored in the research

In Maggs' (2014) research the WDG was facilitated by an external facilitator – the researcher – in conjunction with the internal Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). Maggs (2014) considers that the advantages of joint facilitation were in the combination of the external facilitator's perspective on issues relating to SEBD within the school, as well as his psychological knowledge employed both in reflecting on SEBD and in managing the group dynamics, in conjunction with the SENCO's knowledge of pupils and school practices, as well as the advantage of having an inside presence who could continue the work of the group in the absence of the external facilitator. Conversely, Maggs (2014) highlights the difficulties of split leadership and how this can lead to a reduced sense of containment and increased uncertainty regarding the boundaries of roles. Maggs (2014) does not make a link to Bion's (1961) *basic assumption – pairing* position, however, this seems relevant here. This basic assumption position works on the premise that the group avoids the real task in the present by focusing on a future rescue provided through a redeeming pairing within the group (or perhaps between a member and an external individual, as in the case of Maggs' group).

Hulusi (2007) similarly considers the: “consultant functions,” (p. 210) undertaken by group members. His analysis highlights that throughout the WDGs members undertook consultant functions, such as: sharing experiences; giving support; consensus testing; and enabling systemic thinking. Hulusi (2007) notes that the functions undertaken by consultees are similar to the consultant activities outlined by Farouk (2004), and considers whether the consultant role could be taken on by a group member. Hulusi (2007), like Maggs (2014) concludes that the dynamic aspects of the group cannot be managed without a practitioner versed in psychodynamic thinking.

2.5 Methodological issues relating to the current research

Methodological issues in the research of Elfer (2012), Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) will be explored as they are issues that relate to this research.

In all papers, the researcher is also the facilitator/joint-facilitator of the WDG. This is reflected on at various levels. Maggs (2014) reflects that holding the position of researcher, joint facilitator of the WDG and school EP may have affected participants’ responses in the interviews. Maggs (2014) also states that participants were aware that he was promoting the use of the WDG model within the school. Thus, participants may have felt he was biased which may have influenced responses. Elfer (2012) does not offer the same level of reflexivity, perhaps due to space constraints. Readers are not able to ascertain how the researcher’s dual role

may have influenced the research. The issue of the researcher holding multiple roles will be considered in relation to this current research in the methodology chapter.

It seemed as though issues of power differences were under-acknowledged in the research. Maggs (2014) acknowledges that his dual position as researcher and school EP may have influenced participants' responses. However, there was less of a consideration of the fact that he jointly facilitated the WDG with the school SENCO. Although Maggs (2014) notes that split leadership can lead to increased anxiety, he appears not to explicitly acknowledge that having a member of management co-facilitating the WDG may have impacted on participants' responses. Maggs' (2014) co-facilitation with the SENCO may have aligned him more broadly with the management in the eyes of the participants; alluded to when Maggs (2014) reflects on possible: "unease about discussing a perception of a lack of support with a local authority EP, especially in view of the regular contact that the researcher had with the senior management teams" (p. 143).

Elfer's (2012) research could also benefit from a reflexive exploration of power dynamics. Potentially due to space constraints, the role of the researcher and potential influence during the formulation of questions, data collection and sample recruitment is not addressed. This is significant given that, like Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014), the researcher ran the WDG. There is a potential conflict of interest in Elfer's (2012) research, due to the presence of a Senior Local Education advisor (who commissioned the WDG in question) being present in the WDG and then involved in the evaluation stage. The presence of a figure possibly viewed as powerful may

have influenced the content of the WDG discussion, participants' responses and the evaluation stage. Hulusi (2007) could perhaps reflect further on the impact of power dynamics given his role as a senior EP – arguably an authority figure - working with NQTs, who may have felt comparatively disempowered. This may have influenced participants' contributions in the WDGs or in their narratives.

This raises important issues around reflexivity for this research, in which the WDG will also be co-facilitated by the researcher. Further reflections on epistemological and personal reflexivity and ethical considerations pertaining to participants can be found in methodology and discussion chapters.

2.6 Expanded systemic literature review

Given the limited records yielded by the systematic literature review, a further systematic review was conducted, in which the search was widened to explore the research literature pertaining to WDGs used in contexts other than educational settings. To this end, a second search was conducted using EBSCOhost, with the following search terms used:

Search terms entered	Field selected
“work discussion group” OR “work discussion groups” OR WDG*	Abstract

2.6.1 Table recording the number of records yielded from each database

Database searched	Number of results
PsycINFO	29

PEP archive	4
Education source	9
Eric	4
British Library EThOS	2

2.6.2 Search limiters and inclusion/ exclusion criteria applied

The following search limiters were applied using EBSCOhost:

- Peer reviewed
- Published in English Language

The search yielded 48 results. This was reduced to 35 after removing duplicates.

The following inclusion criteria were applied sequentially to the results:

- Empirical research (qualitative or quantitative)
- Reports primary research or previously unpublished research

The following exclusion criterion was applied:

- Different understanding of search terms used.

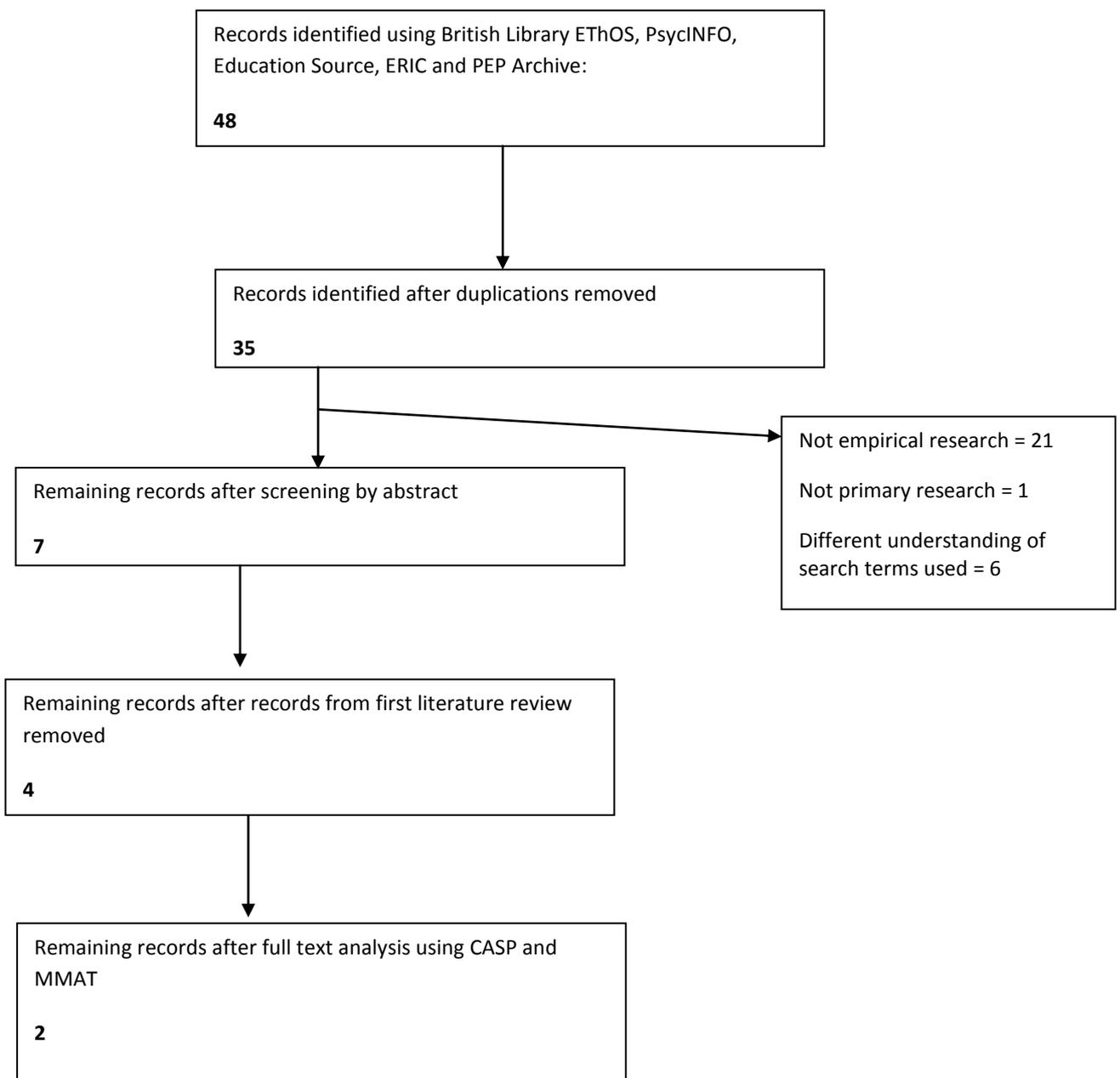
Appendix D details the full results of records yielded by the search, including the databases from which they originated, and the relevant inclusion/exclusion criteria applied.

2.6.3 Assessing rigour

The Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) Qualitative Research Checklist (appendix D) was again used to evaluate methodological rigor and validity of three results that used a qualitative methodology. Two results used a mixed methods design and were

appraised using an adapted version of the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Pluye et al., 2011). Appendix G details the scoring and analysis of papers reviewed.

2.6.4 Flowchart outlining process of systematic literature review



Adapted from the PRISMA flowchart (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff and Altman, 2009).

2.6.5 Brief review of the research literature

Below is an explanation of how WDGs have been used in different settings and any insights that can be drawn from this research literature. As there were two records remaining following the systematic literature review process (above), the papers will be reviewed in turn, before providing a summation of the insights pertaining to the current research.

2.6.5 i Research exploring the experience of hospice nurses of group clinical supervision

Jones (2003) conducted research into the benefits experienced by five hospice nurses through group clinical supervision, utilising a WDG model. Jones used a mixed methods approach, using a questionnaire and a group interview. There are methodological shortcomings in the research (appendix G), so caution should be applied when considering the findings. Jones used the helpful factors of group psychotherapy devised by Yalom (1975) to create a questionnaire to help nurses identify the more useful elements of the WDG. Jones' (2003) reported that combined scores from the questionnaire suggested that the nurses valued the following factors most highly: Interpersonal learning (output), identification, catharsis, family re-enactment, group cohesiveness and self-understanding. However, Jones (2003) notes that there was a variation across individual members regarding which factors were prioritised, perhaps suggesting that the group provided different functions for members. Furthermore, Jones (2003) explains that the findings between the quantitative questionnaire and qualitative group discussion diverge. That is, in the findings from the questionnaire, existential factors

and altruism were rated as less important. However, Jones (2003) explains that they were prominent throughout interview statements. Jones (2003) reflects that this might reflect issues of reliability with regard to the helpful factor constructs adapted from Yalom (1975). On the other hand, Jones (2003) reflects that it might be indicative of the nurses protecting themselves from owning their wishes and needs, and thereby responding in ways that relate to how they wish themselves to be, or think they ought to be.

2.6.5 ii Benefits of the WDG

Jones (2003) discusses how the hospice nurses valued the following aspects of the WDG:

- An environment to share commonalities of experience and explore difference;
- Opportunities to discuss personal, interpersonal and organisational elements influencing their work;
- Opportunities to learn about their work;
- Opportunities to identify support networks;
- Opportunities to explore group relationships, thinking about openness in groups, rivalries, and exploring strengths and weaknesses.
- Experiential learning leading to enhanced personal and professional development.

Jones (2003) suggests that developing concern for oneself and others, bolstering self-esteem, and becoming more aware of professional responsibilities can support the wellbeing of themselves and others.

2.6.5 iii Challenges of the WDG

Jones (2003) highlights potential difficulties arising from a lack of organisational understanding of the purpose of the group leading to feelings of umbrage from colleagues. Jones (2003) therefore stresses the importance of collaborating with non-group members within the organisation.

2.6.5 iv Implications for practice

Jones (2003) highlights that nurses leading groups will need to be able to manage group dynamics along with the uncertainty invoked during WDGs. Thus, organisational understanding and commitment to WDG is crucial to their successful uptake. Jones (2003) also suggests that there is an on-going need to understand how hospice nurses are altered because of thinking differently about their work and if they accommodate their insights within their practice.

2.6.5 v Research into the impact of reflective functioning and stress levels of post-graduate trainees participating in regular individual or small group supervision and work discussion groups

Trowell et al.'s (2008) research focuses on trainees studying post-graduate mental health trainees at the Tavistock Clinic in London. Trowell et al. (2008) considered

whether regular individual or small group supervision and work discussion enhances capacity for reflection and for reflective practice, which they posit would reduce the personal stress of the work, thereby enhancing 'wellbeing'. Their participant sample comprised of fifty-six trainees (out of a total intake on post-graduate mental health courses of 127). The research utilised a mixed-methods approach, comprised of the GHQ (a 30- item questionnaire used as a screening tool for mental health issues). At the end of the first and second year trainees completed the OHQ (although the researchers do not clarify what this tool is). Those trainees who consented were also interviewed using the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), used to assess reflective functioning at the start of training, and again after two years. Participants also completed a questionnaire with open questions to explore experiences on the course. There are methodological shortcomings in the research of Trowell et al. (2008) (appendix G), so caution should be applied when considering the findings.

2.6.5 vi Benefits of WDG

As the research focuses on the influence of individual or small group supervision *and* work discussion it is not possible to isolate findings pertaining to increased reflective capacity and decreased stress as due to participating in the WDG. However, the paper does provide some direct quotations relating to the perceived value of the WDG; participants explained how they valued:

“ ‘Thinking about how I work within a group and reflecting on organizational functioning’ [and] ‘Feeling able to take time to think about issues rather than feeling pressure to take immediate action’.” (Trowell et al., 2008, p. 339).

2.6.6 Insights from the research literature pertaining to the current research

2.6.6 i Functions of the WDG

Although the roles of a hospice nurse, post-graduate trainees and teaching staff are different, they the experience of being involved in a helping profession and are subject to the 'emotional labour' described in the introduction¹. Thus, there are likely to be insights in Jones' (2003) and Trowell et al.'s (2008) research that are relevant to the current research. Indeed, the valued functions identified by Jones (2003) and Trowell et al. (2008) share some commonalities with the findings of Hulusi (2007), Elfer (2012) and Maggs (2014). Jones (2003) describes how participants valued the space to share commonalities of experience and explore difference; there are links with Elfer's (2012) description that participants valued the WDG as an opportunity to communicate with managers in different nurseries. Maggs (2014) similarly highlights how the WDG supported sharing experiences and working collaboratively, which also connects with Jones' (2003) finding that the WDG provided opportunities to identify support networks. Jones' (2003) description of the WDG as a space to explore group relationships, including rivalry, also connects with Elfer (2012) description of the WDG as an opportunity to explore and reduce competition between individual nurseries. The quotation included in Trowell et al.'s (2008) research also identified learning about individual functioning within groups as a valuable component of the WDG experience.

¹ With the assumption that the postgraduate trainees in Trowell et al.'s (2008) research are actively involved in working in the field of mental health. This is suggested in the introduction of the research: "There is considerable interest in the recruitment, training and retention of workers in the field of mental health, as evidence shows significant problems in the retention of highly qualified professionals in this field." (2008, p. 333).

In addition to the functions of connection and support, Jones (2003) seems to outline the reflective and educative functions of the WDG experienced by the nurses. They valued experiential learning allowing them to learn more about their work and leading to enhanced personal and professional development.

Furthermore, reflecting on issues as opposed to taking immediate action, as well as reflecting on organizational functioning are also valued outcomes of participating in a WDG highlighted in Trowell et al.'s (2008) research. This is similar to Maggs (2014) findings that teachers found the WDG helpful as it allowed for reflection on practice. Hulusi (2007) and Elfer (2012) also explain that participants valued protecting time for personal reflection.

Jones (2003) suggests that becoming more aware of professional responsibilities can support the wellbeing of nursing staff and others. The link to a greater professional responsibility supporting wellbeing links with Elfer's (2012) finding that the containment offered by the WDG allowed participants to share in a safe space which meant they were more able to uphold their professional role, which potentially supported the wellbeing of those they managed, and by extension, the children in the nursery.

2.6.6 ii Difficulties with the Work Discussion Group

Similar to the research literature explored in the previous section, Jones (2003) identifies some of the challenges of WDG as relating to within group issues (hence the need for facilitators to be versed in managing difficult group dynamics) and

organisational issues; and the need for the purpose of the group to be understood and committed to within the organisational context.

2.6.6 iii The role of the facilitator

Jones (2003) highlights that nurses leading WDG need to be able to manage group dynamics along with the uncertainty invoked during WDGs. This is similar to the conclusion of Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) who state that the dynamic aspects of the group cannot be managed without a practitioner versed in psychodynamic thinking.

2.6.6 iv Methodological issues relating to the research

Jones (2003) notes that there was a variation across individual members regarding which factors were prioritised in the questionnaire. This perhaps highlights the challenges in identifying definitive helpful components of a WDG as the group perhaps provided different functions for members. This may be relevant to this current research; it may highlight a challenge in identifying commonalities of experience across members of the same WDG.

Furthermore, Jones (2003) describes how participants seemed to describe different factors as helpful according to which tool was used (questionnaire or group interview). Jones (2003) briefly touches on the difficulty of developing a tool to reliably measure the experience of the WDG. He also seems to invoke a psychosocial exploration of the difficulty, suggesting that participants may be protecting themselves from owning their wishes and needs, and thereby responding in ways that relate to how they wish themselves to be, or think they ought to be. This speaks

to the difficulty of accessing another's experience, explored further in the methodology section.

2.7 Emergent research question and rationale

It is believed that WDGs are infrequently utilised in educational settings (Warman & Jackson, 2007), and subsequently, there is a lack of published research evaluating their effectiveness (Jackson, 2002, 2005; Warman & Jackson, 2007; Maggs, 2014). It is hoped that this research will help to extend the evidence base pertaining to how WDGs are experienced by staff. Although research exists exploring teaching staff experiences of WDG, this research will add to the current evidence base as it explores the use of a WDG in a unique context of a specialist provision for children with SEMH needs. Previous research exploring the experience of staff have been within the contexts of: a primary school (Maggs, 2014); a secondary school (Hulusi, 2007) and with nursery managers (Elfer, 2012). The demographic of the participants also differs to previous research: Hulusi's (2007) participants were all White European, and Maggs' (2014) and Elfer's (2012) participants were all female. This current research draws on the experiences of participants identifying as both genders and from different ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, Maggs (2014) suggests that research conducted with a broader of demographics may provide further evidence of teachers' perceptions around WDGs.

Furthermore, this research will utilise an IPA approach, making it methodologically different to the research of Hulusi (2007) and Elfer (2012). Whilst Maggs (2014) used

IPA, the purpose of his study is to, “explore the support networks in place for them in their work with children with SEBD and to investigate the teachers’ experiences of the role that WDGs take in their work” (p. 17). Thus, by placing the exploration of the WDG within the context of support networks for working with SEBD, Maggs (2014) arguably narrows the scope of his exploration, potentially pre-supposing his findings from the outset. It is possible that the scope of this current research is broader in that it seeks to explore perceptions of a WDG without a prior framing of those experiences.

In light of this the research question is:

How do teaching staff experience a Work Discussion Group?

As outlined in the introduction, this will provide professionals with further evidence as to how WDGs are perceived by teaching staff, which can inform decisions about interventions.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology. Part A identifies the specific research question and aims and locates these within a qualitative methodology. The epistemological and ontological positioning of this research is explored and linked to an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. Part B details how the research was conducted.

3.1. Part A – Aims and theoretical background

3.1.1 Research aims, question and purpose

This research seeks to explore the meaning-making of specific staff in relation to the particular WDG they experienced.

The introductory chapter outlined how the theoretical literature makes a case for the use of WDGs in education, with the suggested implication that WDGs could help support teachers in their role as well as strengthening teachers' capacity to support pupils' mental wellbeing. It was explained that further research is necessary into the experiences of participants, in order to explore functions of the WDG, particularly within a climate of evidence-based practice. It is assumed this will be of interest to EPs as it aims to further explore how WDGs are experienced by staff.

The literature review identified a gap in this area of research and indicated that this research will make a unique contribution. The methodology of previous research

was critically appraised; this study aims build upon previous research with a rigorous and reflexive process, outlined in the following sections of this chapter.

The research question is:

How do teaching staff experience a Work Discussion Group?

The aims and purposes of the research have been met through the choice of qualitative methodology; interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

3.1.2 Qualitative research, ontology and epistemology

The purpose of this research is exploratory and therefore a qualitative approach is appropriate. Qualitative research is concerned with interpretation and meaning-making (Willig, 2017). The position of the researcher is of central importance in qualitative research, because there will always be a gap between the phenomena being explored and the researcher's understanding of it. This gap is explained by Woolgar (1998) as being made up of three problems, termed the 'three horrors', which are: indexicality (explanations are always specific to specific occasions and thus change along with occasions); inconcludability (accounts can always be added to, so the explanation is constantly in a process of change); reflexivity (how people characterise a particular phenomenon alters its meaning to them which therefore changes the way they characterise it, and so on). Therefore, Willig (2017) explains that: "qualitative data never speaks for itself and needs to be given meaning by the researcher." (p. 274).

3.1.2.i Ontology – what can be known?

The difficulty of the gap leads to a question of how possible it is to explore human experience (in this case, the experiences staff have of a WDG). This question of what we can know is linked with the idea of ontology; what is out there to know.

Typically, qualitative and quantitative approaches are held as having opposite ontologies – relativist and realist respectively.

A realist ontology presupposes a straightforward relationship between the world and our understanding of it. Phenomena is believed to exist outside of human subjectivity and can be observed and measured systematically. Conversely, relativism holds that phenomena can only be understood through individual meaning making. There is no single objective reality as all realities/ truths are subjective to the individual interpreting their own social world.

3.1.2.ii The phenomenological position and critical realism

An example of a qualitative approach is the phenomenological position. This approach aims to produce knowledge about the subjective experience of participants. This perspective assumes that there is more than one 'truth' to be researched as what could be seen as the same experience or phenomena (e.g. a WDG) can be experienced in many alternative ways: "there are potentially as many (experiential) worlds as there are individuals." (Willig, 2013). However, this extreme relativism potentially poses problems for research. Burman (2002) referred to a pure relativist stance as relativistic nihilism – if it is impossible to draw conclusions about

anything due to the uniqueness and multiplicity of experiences, then why investigate phenomena at all?

Critical realism is an approach which claims to stand outside of the relativist-realist continuum, potentially managing the tension between reductionism (posed by extreme positivism) and nihilism (posed by extreme relativism). Critical realism holds that there are phenomena that exist outside of human subjectivity. Nonetheless, understanding of phenomena is understood to be partial and multiple, as individuals experience the same phenomena in different ways.

The overwhelming relativism that potentially problematizes a phenomenological approach can be mediated through Heidegger's notion of 'minimal hermeneutic realism,' (Dreyfus, 1995, cited by Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006). This concept forms part of the theoretical underpinning of IPA, and can be considered as a branch of critical realism. Minimal hermeneutic realism holds that although things exist – objects are 'real' outside of human awareness - the question of their existence (and therefore their realness) is brought into existence because a collective human consciousness asks questions about their existence. Nothing is ever *anything* – real or unreal – until it is brought meaningfully into the context of human life. Reality can therefore be thought of as: "What is thought about things in general." (Bohm, 1980). This position seeks to collapse the dualism between subjectivism/objectivism and relativism/realism.

In this way, there is no 'objective' reality because no-thing exists outside of human consciousness waiting to be discovered – subject and object (discoverer and

discoveries) are brought into meaning together within the encounter. Heidegger's (1962/1927) notion of *Dasein* ('there being') rejects the dualism between subject and object and suggests that humans are always 'there being'; continuously located within a context. What is thought to be 'true' or 'real' is dependent upon the intellectual construction shaping the encounter between the questioner and phenomena (Larkin et al., 2006).

3.1.2.iii Epistemology – how phenomena can be known

This links with epistemological positioning, in that what being discussed is the relationship between knowledge and those seeking knowledge. This researcher's understanding of what can be known and how, is to some extent aligned with the social constructionist assumption that knowledge is constructed, culturally and historically situated, and relies upon shared assumptions (or notions of 'common sense', Blyth et al., 2008). Thus, any knowledge will be reliant upon the discursive practices of linguistic communities, reflecting dominant values and ideas, and imbued with power (Burr, 2003). Phenomena experienced by any individual is not entirely individual in the sense that experiences rely on shared, pre-constructed discourses (indeed, the very notion of the 'individual' can be troubled, in the same way as the dualism between subject and object can be brought into question (Larkin et al., 2006). Furthermore, writing with reference to IPA, Eatough & Smith (2008) explain that: "sociocultural and historical processes are central to how we experience and understand our lives, including the stories we tell about these lives," (p. 184). Nonetheless, Willig (2013) suggests that even though 'truth' is always

subject to interpretation - flexible and constructed - experiences nonetheless have the feeling of 'truth' or 'realness' to the individual experiencing the phenomena.

3.1.2 iv Position of the researcher

The hermeneutic circle is a useful concept in clarifying the epistemological position of this researcher. This image seeks to illuminate the relationship between the part and the whole: "to understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2012, p. 27). Knowledge can be identified at these different levels – the levels of the 'part' (the individual), and at the level of the 'whole' (discourses), because the different levels are *dynamically related and cannot be thought of except in relation to each other*. The individual (or human consciousness) and discourse (or reality) are both brought into existence only through their encounter (as with the theory of minimal hermeneutic realism).

This researcher is interested in learning something about how individuals experience the phenomena of the WDG. The aim is to engage with the, 'three horrors' (Wolgar, 1998) of qualitative research (indexicality, inconcludability and reflexivity), rather than denying the gap between phenomena and researcher. Thus, the knowledge generated will reflect the sense-making of the individual as circumscribed by their unique positioning (indexicality). The reality that is generated by the encounter will be partial and unfinished (inconcludability) and also dependent upon this researcher's own part in the intellectual construction shaping the structure of the encounter (Larkin, et al., 2006). Through the process of

interpretation, it is recognised that the meaning of the phenomena will shift for the individual (reflexivity).

The messiness caused by the gap between researcher and phenomenon is present in all research, regardless of the approach. In keeping with the notion of the hermeneutic circle, this researcher suggests that individual sense-making endeavours can aid in making sense of the wider whole – the contextually situated community within which it occurs. Indeed, Husserl (1927), writing with reference to the phenomenological approach, suggested that if we can ‘go back to the things themselves’ - casting aside a desire to slot experiences into a preordained system of categories and instead examine an experience in its own right – we might allow an understanding of an experience within which we can identify some essential qualities which might transcend the particular circumstances of that experience and therefore illuminate a similar experience for others (although, the ‘essential-ness’ of the experience would be necessarily located within a particular community, rather than an inherent quality located within an experience that can be discovered if only one delves deep enough).

3.1.3 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: a theoretical introduction

3.1.3. i IPA in context

Lyons and Cole (2007) propose that qualitative methods can be conceived as a continuum from the experiential to the discursive. IPA has the phenomenological aim of producing knowledge about the subjective experience of participants. Thus, it

is concerned with the detailed examination of the lived experience of individuals, and the sense individuals make of experience. Descriptive phenomenological approaches therefore sit at the experiential end of the continuum.

However, the 'I' in IPA – the interpretative – means that IPA shares an understanding with social constructionist approaches, in that the way we experience phenomena (and thus the sense we make of it) will be dependent upon sociocultural and historical discourses. Indeed, Shinebourne (2014) notes the commonality between discursive psychology and IPA, in that both approaches view the research process as a hermeneutic process, in which participants and researchers are engaged in interpretative activities that are delineated by cultural and social discourses. Eatough & Smith (2006) thereby locate IPA at the: “light end of the social constructionist continuum,” (p. 118-9).

Although IPA deals with the experience of the individual, this is not a fetishization of the individual consciousness – as though some pre-existing individual subjectivity can be accessed through careful inquiry (Larkin et al., 2006). Instead, there is the notion that the individual and phenomena are co-constructed through the encounter (Heidegger, 1962/1927). There is more space for individual consciousness than when positing that the individual is constructed through discourse (as with constructionist approaches).

3.1.3 ii Three areas of IPA

IPA draws from three areas of philosophy of knowledge:

“The approach is phenomenological in being concerned with participants’ lived experience and hermeneutic because it considers that experience is only accessible through a process of interpretation on the part of both participant and researcher. IPA is also idiographic as it is committed to a detailed analysis of each case.” (Smith, 2010, p. 186).

- *Phenomenological*

The phenomenological aspect is drawn from Husserl (1982), Heidegger (1962) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), and captures the individual lived experience of participants. Participants are understood to be the experts of their own experience. It is necessary to temporarily ‘bracket off’ the researcher’s preconceptions during the descriptive phase; the aim is to capture ‘the insider’s perspective’ (Smith et al., 2012) and obtain a sense of the participants’ life-world.

It is not possible to fully ‘bracket off’ preconceptions; instead a researcher strives to be reflexive, whilst acknowledging the inevitability of the researcher co-constructing knowledge alongside participants. Indeed, Smith et al. (2012) explain that certain researcher preconceptions may only become clear during the process of engaging with the material.

The researcher’s interpretations and ideas can later consciously begin an iterative dialogue with the participant’s record of their experience as part of the double hermeneutic (below). However, there will always be an extent to which the material will be filtered through the experiences and discourses available to the researcher

even at the descriptive phase before the process of interpretation has explicitly begun (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006).

IPA takes a curious and empathic stance towards participants in the belief that no matter how they construct their accounts or how enmeshed they are within cultural ideology, their accounts of experiences are meaningful to them. However, the participant's cultural located-ness and enmeshment (and the researcher's) is a crucial aspect of the interpretative process, discussed in the next section.

- *Hermeneutic*

There is a double hermeneutic in IPA, in that: "the participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world," (Smith, 2004, p. 40).

Predominantly, the researcher adopts an empathetic stance when interpreting the views of participants. However, there may be instances in which the researcher engages in the 'hermeneutics of questioning', in which the researcher's interpretations may be more questioning or critical. Larkin et al. (2006) stress that it is necessary to go beyond merely giving voice to the participants' versions of their life-world; it is necessary to be *interpretative* of their experience - contextualising it within their social, cultural, historical and physical environments, thereby making some sense of the co-constructed relationship between the individual and phenomena.

This links to IPA's concern with the relationship between part and whole, or the hermeneutic circle. Smith (2007) explains that: "to understand the part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the part ... Part of the attractiveness of the hermeneutic circle is that it speaks to a non-linear style of analysis and to the possibility of constantly digging deeper with one's interpretation,"(p. 5). Thus, by adopting an interpretative stance to make sense of the relationship between the individual and their world, the research should gain some further insight into the phenomena of interest. Furthermore, the notion of the triple hermeneutic comes forth when the reader is involved in making sense of this interpretative offering by the researcher of the sense-making of participants.

- *Idiographic*

The idiographic nature of IPA refers to the fact that there is a focus on detailed, specific experiences. The focus of IPA is on: "attempting to capture particular experiences as experienced for particular people," (Smith et al., 2012, p. 16). Thus IPA research tends to involve a small number of (somewhat homogenous) participants. However, as IPA has links with critical realism, there is an understanding that within a community of people who share some characteristic there will be similarities as well as differences. Knowledge that is generated about a particular group's experiences through an IPA study can be applied to others in a similar community through what is called 'theoretical transferability' (Smith, et al., 2012). Theoretical transferability is described as the process by which a reader can

explore links and dissonances between the research and their own experiences, allowing meaningful understandings to emerge.

3.1.4 Rationale for using IPA

IPA is focused on eliciting the detailed exploration of idiographic lived experience; exploring how individuals make meaning, whilst critically interpreting the meaning-making endeavour. This is in keeping with the interpretative position of the researcher. The concept of minimal hermeneutic realism is central to this research - managing the tension between the realness of individual experience and its enmeshment with social forces (as well as the 'double hermeneutic' introduced through the researcher's enmeshment with the phenomena being explored as well as with the experience of researching).

IPA is particularly suitable for research exploring: "the uniqueness of a person's experiences, how experiences are made meaningful and how these meanings manifest themselves within the context of the person both as an individual and in their many cultural roles," (Shaw, 2001, p.48). This research is interested in staff's unique experience of the WDG and how they make meaning from the experience within the context of their roles within the educational institution/ teaching as a profession/ society (however this arises from the data). Moreover, the outcomes highlighted through the notion of theoretical transferability align with the aim that this research will be of interest to EPs, as this will provide insight into staff experiences of WDG which can be draw on in relation to an individual's practice.

3.1.5 Criticisms of IPA

It is necessary to consider criticisms of IPA in order to be transparent, and to engage with potential limitations.

Smith (2010) attempts to improve the rigour of future IPA research through providing an overview of features that demonstrate quality research. Smith (2010) focuses on how well IPA principles (outlined below in the methods section) were applied during the research process.

Brocki and Weardon (2006) offer a critique of the methodology itself. Brocki and Weardon (2006) conducted a review across 52 articles from the field of health psychology, in which IPA was used. Brocki and Weardon (2006) highlight issues with reflexivity and transparency, for example researchers not clearly expressing their own views and preconceptions. Furthermore, issues with interviewing were identified. Limited descriptions of the process meant that it was difficult to evaluate how the process influenced responses. In some research, they felt that final themes reflected the topics on the interview schedule. These points are addressed later in this chapter when the approach for interviewing is outlined.

Brocki and Weardon (2006) suggest that individual aspects of participant data could be lost through the process of looking for similarities and differences across a sample. Through this process, the particular feel and quality of each participant's experience could be diluted or lost. This tension is inherent to the IPA approach and

is discussed in relation to this research in the reflection section of the findings chapter.

Psycho-social approaches to qualitative research potentially highlight a limitation in IPA research. Unconscious processes always underpin an individual's experience, however, their account of their conscious experience will not expose these elements. Though this is accurate, there is also value in engaging with the experience as it is consciously experienced by participants; engaging empathically with the meaning-making of participants as they say they view it. This has value from an ethical perspective; giving voice to accounts that may not have been widely heard, as well as from the perspective of informing the work of EPs in this area. The interpretative aspect of IPA also allows the scope for a consideration of unspoken, or unconscious, underlying impetuses (further addressed in the Discussion chapter).

3.1.6 Rationale for IPA over alternative methodologies

IPA is focused on eliciting the detailed exploration of idiographic lived experience, and how individuals make meaning from experience. This is in keeping with the phenomenological position taken by the researcher and aligns with the research question.

The use of discourse analysis would change the meaning produced by my research. An IPA approach would yield an understanding of the meaning of teaching staff's experiences of the WDG. Whereas adopting Foucauldian analysis, for example, would produce an understanding of how the staff's accounts of the WDG are

constructed by power structures enmeshed in the language used. Although IPA is interpretative, it nonetheless takes an open and empathic approach towards the meaning-making of participants, acknowledging that whilst all accounts are located in a socio-political niche, it feels real to the person having the experience (Willig, 2013).

Grounded theory and psycho-social approaches were considered. Robson (2011) states that a more exploratory approach than Grounded Theory is valid when there is limited research on an issue. However, this is open to interpretation, and clearly not the position taken by Elfer (2012).

A psycho-social approach could also be adopted (Hollway, 2004). This involves exploring both the intrapsychic and social aspects of an individual's experience, and the way in these interact. A psychoanalytic lens is employed to interpret unconscious processes that take place between these internal and external dimensions, and between participant and researcher. Like IPA, psycho-social research provides interpretation and does not provide a claim to 'truth.'

However, as the purpose of this research is to explore experiences of the staff, as they claim to have experienced it, perhaps IPA is most appropriate. This approach hopefully allows the researcher to 'bracket off' psychodynamic theoretical assumptions that inform the literature around WDGs to hear how staff experienced the WDG.

A psycho-social approach would understand the subjectivities of respondents through the exploration of unconscious and conflictual forces rather than simply the conscious narrative presented. This would be an interesting area for exploration in future research. However, given the limited literature, it seems useful to investigate the conscious sense-making of the teachers in order to explore what they understand they have experienced participating in a WDG, and the way they have made sense of this in relation to practice, even if this is troubled in the interpretative stage of analysis.

3.2 Part B – Procedure

3.2.1. Particulars of the WDG experienced by participants

As IPA is interested in exploring a phenomenon, it is necessary for the participants to be selected purposively; to have experienced the phenomena in question. I ensured that participants were purposively sampled as they shared the feature of having participated in the same WDG.

3.2.1.i Contextual information about the provision within which the WDG took place

All participants took part in the same WDG that took place in an inner-city provision for secondary aged pupils with SEMH needs. Pupils attending the provision have an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) as an identified need; some pupils also have additional learning, communication and sensory needs. The large majority of pupils attending the provision are boys. The pupils come from a mix of ethnic backgrounds, with some coming from homes in which English is not the first language. The majority of students are eligible for the pupil premium (this provides additional government funding to support pupils eligible for free school meals and children in local authority care). Some pupils are in local authority care. The majority of pupils have experienced a number of school placements before attending the provision.

All participants worked within the provision as either mentors or teachers. Both mentors and teachers spend the majority of their day with the pupils. Teachers have a teaching qualification and a more 'academic' role within the provision. The

mentors' role is to provide additional support for pupils to access learning; this may encompass academic support as well as pastoral support.

3.2.1 ii Structure of the WDG

The WDG was held fortnightly for ten weeks. The WDG was held fifteen minutes after the end of the school day and lasted one hour. The day, time and location were consistent. The membership was closed (after the sessions began new members were not admitted). Membership was voluntary, although members were expected to commit to attending each session, although there were instances of unavoidable absence. The model of the WDG followed the writings of Jackson (2002, 2008, 2010, 2015) who has written extensively on WDG in educational settings. The task was understood by the facilitators as the discussion of experience, leading to experiential learning through a consideration of the feelings evoked in the worker by the task (Bradley & Rustin, 2008). The group was facilitated by two facilitators; the researcher (a Trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) in the second year of training) and a qualified EP. The qualified EP led the sessions with the trainee EP offering reflections where appropriate, and being freed to take up more of an observational position.

Facilitators contracted the space in the opening session (with regard to the aim and task of the WDG; issues around confidentiality and participation). This discussion was revisited when appropriate. Re-contracting occurred in the second session in response to a desire from the group to feedback themes to the management team.

Further re-contracting with management was also necessary when a member of the management team entered the group without prior discussion.

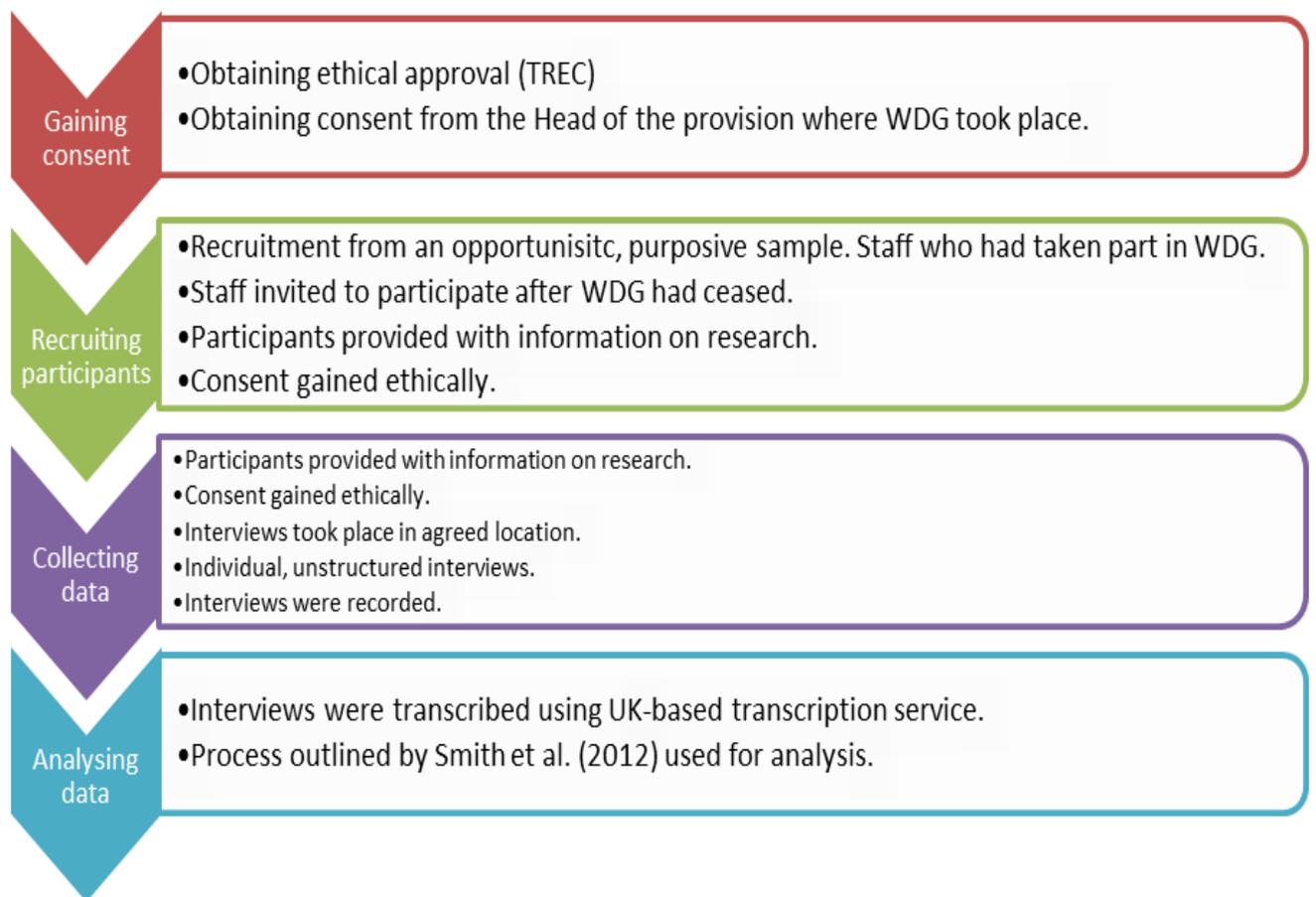
The sessions were initially intended to follow the structure of beginning with a revisiting of the previous week and a 'check-in' with staff, followed by an individual presentation of an issue by a staff member, which would then be reflectively unpacked by the group as a whole, with the facilitator offering further reflections where appropriate. In practice, the 'check-in' often seemed to become the session, as a theme would emerge that would be thought about by the group as a whole.

This is a "structural adjustment" (p. 67) to the traditional Tavistock model (Jackson, 2008) that Jackson (2008) has also found necessary in his work in schools. Jackson (2008) explains that rather than focusing on presentations, the group may need to be structured around a 'check-in', during which the group can air preoccupations allowing a decision on where to begin and what to focus on. This is consistent with the findings of Ellis and Wolfe (2019), who discuss the need for WDGs in complex organisations to be flexible and follow an 'adapted model', that is, rather than having individual presentations which are then responded to reflectively by the group, Ellis and Wolfe (2019) suggested that staff seemed to find it safer to come together as a group to reflectively discuss common themes. This is also consistent with Hulusi (2007) who highlighted that asserting an overly rigid model with an anxious group can prove unhelpful and un-containing, and who advocates a flexible approach.

Following each session both facilitators had an hour-long reflective debrief. During this debrief, issues such as the structuring of the discussion were reflected upon. For example, facilitators reflected on the need to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the group, whilst wondering whether the deviance from the original model was un-containing and potentially aligning with Ba group processes (does coming together as a group feel safer for less helpful reasons?). These reflective debriefs also allowed facilitators to reflect openly on emotions and feelings generated during the process, and to think about processes such as projective identification, splitting and group life.

3.2.2 Overview of procedure

This overview of the procedure is provided to orient the reader with regard to the steps taken in this research.



3.2.3 Gaining ethical approval

This research complied with the Code of Human Research Ethics (2014), British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct and the Data Protection Acts (1998 & 2003). Ethical permission to undertake the study was granted by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust ethics committee (Appendix H). The process of seeking external verification helped to ensure that moral and ethical perspectives were considered, reducing the risk of unethical research. Further discussion of the ethical process is addressed below.

3.2.4 Gaining permission for research

I sought permission from the Head of the provision to conduct research. I arranged a meeting with the Head, during which I explained the purpose and aims of the research using the information sheet (appendix I). I explained the process of gaining ethical approval for the research, and explained the process of staff providing their consent for participation. The Head was satisfied and granted his permission for the research to go ahead.

3.2.5 Participants

The participants were recruited opportunistically following the final WDG meeting. There was some homogeneity to the sample, in that they had experienced the same phenomena, although they would necessarily have made sense of the experience differently. Six participants were recruited, suggested by Smith et al. (2012) as an appropriate number for doctoral level research. This was also felt to be a realistic number in terms of achieving a sufficient depth of analysis.

3.2.5 i Inclusion and exclusion criteria

All seven members of the WDG were invited to participate in the research; six agreed to participate. The inclusion criteria was being a member of the WDG and there was no exclusion criteria.

3.2.5 ii Sample size

IPA research tends to focus on a smaller number of participants in more detail. Brocki & Wearden's (2006) review of IPA studies reports that the sample size can

vary from one to thirty, however, they suggest a tendency to have a smaller sample size. This study had six participants.

3.2.5 iii Recruitment

Participants were invited to take part following the final WDG meeting. No mention was made of the research prior to this. This was because taking part in the research was not a precondition to participating in the WDG (and the researcher did not want the participants to feel as if it were). Furthermore, the researcher did not want the experience of the WDG to be influenced by the knowledge that it may lead to research. The research was explained to participants, including the voluntary nature of participation, and participants were provided with an information sheet (appendix I) and an opportunity to ask questions.

3.2.5 iv Epistemological reflexivity and ethical considerations pertaining to participants

The participants were known to me as I co-facilitated the WDG with another EP. However, as a trainee I was less active in the WDG than my colleague (further reflections on my positioning can be found in the discussion chapter). It is not problematic in IPA research for the researcher to be grounded in the experience being explored. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2012) suggest that insider status is useful in IPA research, and that researchers should be concerned with whether they can meet participants: "it is worth thinking about the extent to which you can relate to, imagine, the likely experiences, concerns and claims of your participant group. IPA

does not require that you have 'insider' status ... though there is certainly a rich tradition of qualitative research carried out from that position." (p. 42)

I felt that having shared the phenomena with the participants (so having something approaching an 'insider' status, mitigated by the fact that I was a co-facilitator as opposed to a colleague) was in many ways beneficial to the process as I had an understanding of the context and the group, as well as a prior relationship with participants. However, it arguably made 'bracketing off' my preconceptions more challenging (discussed below). Furthermore, I was concerned that participants might feel reluctant to be honest as we had shared a working relationship. I tried to mitigate this by assuring participants that whatever they said in the interview would not be used by the EP service to evaluate either my practice, or that of my colleague, and that I was keen to hear about their genuine experience. Further reflections on the power dynamic between myself and participants are contained in section 5.7.2 Limitations and further reflections.

3.2.6 Data collection

3.2.6 i Conducting interviews

Before the interview participants were shown the information sheet again (appendix I) and invited to ask questions. Issues around confidentiality, anonymity and withdrawal were reiterated, as per the consent sheet (Appendix J). Participants signed consent forms prior to the interview. I explained that the interview would be recorded, and would follow an open structure and that I would respond to their contributions and might take brief notes.

The interviews ranged in length, with the shortest interview lasting approximately 20 minutes, the longest lasting just over an hour, and the remainder lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were recorded.

Five of the interviews took place in an annexe to the main school building, after school hours. This was suggested by a WDG member and agreed to by participants. It was felt that the annex might be quieter than the main school building, but perhaps also provided some literal and psychological distance from the main school building, which may have influenced responses. I reflected that perhaps this space was a good balance in the sense that it offered some security as it was still part of the school and therefore perhaps felt 'safe' (unlike, perhaps the Educational Psychology Service offices, which were also suggested as a venue), but were disconnected from the main body of the school, allowing space and potentially freedom to speak more freely. One of the interviews took place in the Educational Psychology Service office as the interview had to take place during the school day, so that it was not possible to use the annexe.

3.2.6 ii Individual unstructured interviews

IPA frequently utilises the interview as a method of data-collection as it can lead to a rich exploration of an individual experience (Smith et al., 2012). Unstructured interviews were used in order to increase the likelihood of data being inductive; coming from the participants' themselves. Constructing an interview schedule potentially risked predetermining the nature of the knowledge offered by participants. Smith et al. (2012) explain that the unstructured interview represents:

“an attempt to implement IPA’s inductive epistemology to the fullest extent [...] and is not structured around *a priori* issues or researcher-led assumptions or topics” (p. 70). There was one main question: *What was the experience of the Work Discussion Group like for you?*

3.2.6 iii Role of the researcher in the unstructured interview

After asking the main question, I tried to listen attentively and jot down brief words or phrases that seemed striking or important, or were noticeably repeated. From this first response to the question, the participants then constructed their own interview schedule, as I tried to pick up on things they had alluded to, and encouraged them to reflect on them in more depth. This method is outlined in Smith et al. (2012); they describe how a participant’s initial response to the core question is likely to lead to a series of ‘horizontal’ topics, which the researcher then encourages the participant to explore ‘vertically’, plumbing downwards to reflect on the experience in more depth. Whilst I inevitably steered the interview through referring participants back to comments that seemed significant *to me*, I did try to make my questions neutral and probing, as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2003), using questions like: *Can you tell me more about that? How did that feel?* The one open question I consciously used was consistent across interviews: *was there anything about the WDG that felt particularly difficult?*

Whilst I expressed interest and empathy, I refrained from offering overt interpretations. However, by picking up on certain things and necessarily neglecting

others, I was implicitly forming my own interpretations as the interview unfolded. The decision to conduct unstructured interviews was one I thought about in depth. I was aware that the unstructured interview felt more anxiety-provoking than the semi-structured interview. I was concerned that I would not obtain the “rich” (Smith et al. (2009) data that IPA research depends upon. I was concerned that without the security of a semi-structured interview I would fail to ask the ‘right’ questions and the interview would subsequently miss some ‘key’ data. However, I believe that these thoughts were borne of an understandable anxiety about the importance of interviews for IPA research, and my own thesis, but that they do not align with my epistemology, or that of IPA. That is, the idea that I might fail to obtain some key data presupposes that there is a predetermined ‘truth’ about the participant’s experience and understanding of the WDG experience that I have failed to uncover. However, as Smith et al. (2009) explain, “understandings accessed in interviews are not held to be ‘the truth’ – but they are seen to be ‘meaning-full’, and in IPA we do recognise them as originating from the situated concerns of our participants.” Thus, I do not conceive of truth as a thing to be found, but as something that is multiple and changing and co-constructed in the interview. How could I ever know whether an interview has failed to get at the truth of the WDG experience for a participant, as I can never know their experience of the phenomena? I was preoccupied with the inevitable selectivity of the ideas or key words that I selected to probe the participant on in more detail, as these would unavoidably have seemed interesting to me for a reason. However, I nonetheless felt that this was still truer to the participants’ experience than pre-determined interview questions, as the broad

landscape of ideas and images came from participants, even if I chose where to direct the spotlight for further illumination. This is not to say that at occasionally in an interview when I felt unmoored that I did not ever ask a more general question that did not lead directly from what a participant had said previously, but I did try to avoid this, and the open question was consistent across interviews: *was there anything about the WDG that felt particularly difficult?*

Additionally, I conceive of knowledge to be co-constructed and multiple, so I felt that I would be getting a particular version of the 'truth' of participants' experiences, but that would always be so, and perhaps this 'truth' would be closer to the 'thing itself' than the 'truth' elicited by a semi-structured interview schedule. This is in keeping with IPA's understanding that it is not possible to directly access another's experience. Rather, the participants making sense of their own experience is followed by the researcher making sense of the participants' sense-making. There are levels of interpretation and the research process can be seen as a dynamic and iterative dialogue between the meaning-making of researcher and researched (Gee, 2011; Smith, 2011a).

To contain my anxiety (and to therefore help me listen attentively and be present in the interviews), I came up with reminders to read to myself before each interview:

1. Trust in your participant – they are the experts in the reality of their experience. Try to really listen and follow their recollection of their experience; they are telling you the sense they have made of the WDG.

2. Everything is data. If the interview goes off in an unexpected direction, this does not make it 'wrong', as this presupposes that there was a 'correct' truth that you have failed to get to. Truth is multiple and co-constructed – you are engaged in an iterative dialogue – you will have arrived at some truth even if it does not fit your preconceptions (which you should have bracketed off anyway!).
3. 'Truth' is co-constructed. You will ask some questions and neglect to ask others, in line with your own socio-cultural experiences and biases. This is unavoidable and also does not invalidate the data. It is consistent with IPA's idea of the double hermeneutic.

3.2.6 iv Reflective practice in relation to data collection

Following each interview I reflected on how I felt the interview had gone (referring again to the statements above) and wrote down my reflections in a research diary. Again, this was to attempt as far as possible to 'contain' each interview as a separate entity and to 'bracket off' any preconceptions from entering subsequent interviews. Prior to the interviews I conducted a practice interview with my supervisor to practice using the above technique, and to experience what it might feel like ahead of interviewing participants. I was able to reflect on my own anxiety and how this potentially affected my ability to listen, and to experience the challenge of responding in the moment. My supervisor was able to feedback on when he had felt truly listened to, and points that felt more formulaic. I believe that this practice allowed me to feel more confident and reflective before interviews.

3.2.7 Data analysis

3.2.7 i Steps of analysis

I used a UK-based transcription service in order to transcribe the data. Following this, I used guidance from Smith et al. (2012) in order to analyse the data.

Smith et al. (2012) outline the steps of analysis as:

- a. Reading and re-reading each transcription;
- b. Initial noting of descriptive, semantic and linguistic content on an exploratory level.
- c. Re-reading the transcript as a whole again and highlighting any phrases that 'jumped out' at me. I felt that this was in keeping with the iterative nature of the IPA process and marked a shift from a focus on the fragmented content, back to the whole.
- d. Developing emergent themes by mapping interrelationships, connections and patterns in exploratory notes;
- e. Searching for connections across emergent themes (through abstraction, subsumption, polarisation²) and grouping them to form subordinate themes;
- f. Repeating steps (a) – (e) with each transcription.

² Abstraction can be understood as the process through which the researcher aims to think about connections and disconnects through moving from ideas that are more concrete to those that are more abstract. Subsumption can be understood as the process through which the researcher subsumes more minor emergent themes within others. Polarisation can be understood as the process through which the researcher helps delineate emergent themes through looking for oppositional relationships.

- g. Looking for patterns across all the cases to form superordinate themes, created by searching for connections across subordinate themes. Following a further process of abstraction and subsumption to produce eight overarching themes.

In practice I reached stage g and discovered that I could distil my subordinate themes further and went back to stage e to further condense the subordinate themes. This perhaps highlights the challenge of abstracting the information in order to identify commonalities, whilst also holding onto the specificities of each interview, which is central to an idiographic approach.

An example of step b is available at appendix K. Step e is captured in appendix L.

Steps e through to g are captured in the diagrams in section 4.1.4 *Diagram for each overarching theme, mapping movement from subordinate to overarching themes.*

3.2.7 ii Interpretation and reflexivity

Smith et al. (2012) explain that in IPA the researcher aims to move beyond a description of what participants have said and seeks to offer deeper meaning through *interpretation*. This is a deliberately subjective act, which requires the researcher to draw on their own personal resources. There is a tension however, in that the researcher aims to offer an illuminating interpretation that still remains rooted in the texts themselves. As Smith et al. (2012) suggest, in order to stay as distanced from the interpretative stance as I could during steps a. through e., I

recorded personal observations and reactions to the data (a process referred to as 'bracketing off'). Some extracts from these observations are included below:

- Feelings of anxiety about the messiness of the themes – acceptance that this is an iterative process, and that things could and would have been done differently by a different researcher.
- Wondering whether constantly reshuffling could be a defence, and could lead me to becoming overly invested in these themes.
- Resisting 'bracketing off' ideas when you have been wrestling them for a long time
- Feeling critical towards participants who express different ideas about teaching pupils with SEMH needs.
- Feeling frustrated by participants who do not share my ideas about supporting teachers within the workplace.
- Being drawn to aspects of experience that I could relate to – eg. Gendered experience of teaching; workload; relationships with pupils.
- Feeling upset/ shocked at participants' experiences.
- Feeling angry at how participants were sometimes treated by their organisation.
- Wondering how my role as a facilitator / trainee/ professional may have influenced what the participant's said.
- Anxiety regarding how my interpretations will be received by participants.

By surfacing these observations they were hopefully owned and then placed aside allowing me to continue to be led by participants' experiences as described by them. Nonetheless, this is an imperfect process and – as with all interpretative endeavours, there would have been unconscious processes influencing this interpretative process (Hollway, 2004).

3.2.7 iii Interpretation and credibility

In keeping with the qualitative methodology, I was focused on ensuring the credibility of interpretations. There was no process of inter-rater reliability as this does not align with the conceptualisation of a situated researcher engaged in a subjective process of meaning-making. However, in keeping with Elliot et al.'s (1999) guidelines for the evaluation of qualitative research, I have been mindful of the need for credibility checking, whereby researchers consult with another's interpretations of the data, such as other researchers. I used research supervision to discuss the origins of my interpretations with relation to the original data, in order to check that interpretations seemed credible.

The research was not shared with participants. This method of evaluation assumes that agreement with the interpretation establishes trustworthiness. However, a participant would not necessarily recognise their experience following the *interpretative* part of the IPA process. Even an empathic reading of transcripts involves the researcher in the process of the double hermeneutic, which may also distance the participants from the findings.

3.2.8 Validity and reliability

Yardley (2000) suggests four dimensions by which studies using qualitative methods can be assessed: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; impact and importance. These benchmarks have been endorsed by Smith et al. (2012) with regard to IPA research.

1. *Sensitivity to context.* This relates to the researcher being transparent and reflective with regard to the context of research (the socio-cultural, theoretical and research contexts). Yardley (2000) also highlights the importance of considering the social context of the relationship between investigator and participant (see discussion chapter). It also relates to ensuring there is an audit trail so the reader can clearly see how conclusions were arrived at (see appendices K and L).
2. *Commitment and rigour.* This refers to considering thoughtfully the process of data collection and analysis, as well as applying rigour in the sample selection, question development and application of the methodological approach. An IPA approach emphasises a significant level of homogeneity for participants in order that interpretations between and across experiences can be meaningful (see section on participants, below). Smith et al. (2012) state that there is an overlap in how IPA addresses Yardley's criteria so that a commitment can be demonstrated through sensitivity to context. In IPA research, commitment can also be evidenced through the iterative process of the analysis in which repeated re-readings of both whole and parts of the

transcript are undertaken. Refining of emergent and subordinate themes potentially illustrates a time-consuming commitment. Moreover, rigour can be demonstrated through interview technique; holding the balance between 'closeness and separateness' and being consistent in terms of probing and attentive listening (Smith et al. (2012).

3. *Transparency and coherence.* This refers to the researcher providing detailed descriptions of all stages: from selecting participants, through the construction of the interview questions, the method of the interview and stages of analysis (Shinebourne, 2011). Coherence can be demonstrated through the weight of emerging interpretations and how they align with textual evidence (Smith, 2011). With reference to IPA, the balance between phenomenological and interpretative should be clear (Shinebourne, 2011). In the case of this research, the aim was to capture the phenomenological experience within the findings section, and reserve more interpretative readings for the discussion chapter.
4. *Impact and importance.* This refers to how useful or relevant the research is in terms of being applied within a real life context. This has an ethical component as it is unethical to waste participants' time with research without impact. This means ensuring that the research can be applied usefully within a real life context. Theoretical transferability suggests that the findings of this research should be relevant to EPs and other professionals delivering WDGs.

3.2.9 Ethics

Willig (2013) suggests five key ethical considerations for research. These considerations are outlined below and related to this research:

1. *Informed consent*: BPS (2009) states that informed consent should be gained from all participants. All participants were given an information sheet a week prior to the interviews (to give ample time to consider whether to provide consent) outlining the research aims and process, detailing the time requirement and allowing them an opportunity to ask further questions (appendix I). This sheet was highlighted and explained in person again before the interview began. Ethical considerations were clearly outlined, which included assurances that personal data would be anonymised and that information would be kept confidential. Participants signed a consent form (appendix J).
2. *No deception*: As outlined above, the researcher aimed to ensure that the process of engaging with participants was transparent, in order that they could make an informed decision about consenting.
3. *Right to withdraw*: BPS (2009) states that participants must be made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage during the research without having to give a reason. This was made clear to the participants in the information sheet and in person.
4. *Confidentiality*: Data was handled according to the Data Protection Act (1998). Digital files were anonymised and stored on password protected devices. All identifying information was known only to the researcher. Participants' data will

be stored for a minimum of 10 years (as recommended by Research Councils UK (RCUK)).

5. *Debriefing:* As suggested by the BPS (2009) guidelines, the experience was reflected on with each participant following the interview. All participants were informed that they could request further debriefing if they wished.

However, in the case of qualitative research in particular, “the existence of protocols and ethical review committees should not lead researchers to think that the ethical uncertainties in qualitative research can be removed through appeal to a ‘tick box approach’ to ethical standards,” (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2017, p. 264). Ethical considerations (and uncertainties) should be reflected upon at every stage of the process. This researcher has aimed to be reflective and considerate of ethical concerns throughout the entire process; reflective sections permeate this thesis rather than being isolated within the discussion section.

4. Findings

4.1 Chapter overview

After outlining contextual details of participants, this chapter describes the findings of the analytical process, outlining the over-arching themes produced with supporting quotations from participants.

4.1.2 Contextual details of participants

The table below captures some of the details for each participant. Details are necessarily brief and generalised to preserve anonymity. All participants took part in the same WDG that took place in an inner-city provision for secondary aged pupils with SEMH needs. All participants worked within the provision as either mentors or teachers. Both mentors and teachers spend the majority of their day with the pupils. Teachers have a teaching qualification and a more 'academic' role within the provision. The mentors' role is to provide additional support for pupils to access learning; this may encompass academic support as well as pastoral support. Section 3.2.3. *Particulars of the WDG experienced by participants* provides further contextual information.

The table is colour coded in keeping with the practise of colour coding participants' responses throughout the findings section.

Raymond	Raymond is a male in his 50s. His ethnicity is White British. Raymond is moderately experienced as a teacher. Raymond has had experience of what he describes as 'circle time', but not a WDG.
Bethan	Bethan is a female in her 20s. Her ethnicity is White British. Beth has a couple of years' experience teaching. Bethan has had experience of what she describes as 'circle time', but not a

	WDG.
Colin	Colin is a male in his 40s. His ethnicity is Eastern-European. Colin has a lot of teaching experience. Colin has had no prior experience of a WDG.
Mark	Mark is a male in his 40s. His ethnicity is Black British. Mark has taught for a few years. Mark has had no prior experience of a WDG.
Steven	Steven is a male in his 40s. His ethnicity is Black British. Steven has a lot of teaching experience. Steven has had no prior experience of a WDG.
Jen	Jen is a female in her 30s. Her ethnicity is White Other. Jen has moderate experience as a teacher. Jen has had no prior experience of a WDG.

4.1.3 Overarching themes

The organisation of overarching themes is displayed below using a visual diagram, depicting how overarching themes can be broadly divided into three aspects of the experience of the WDG: Themes relating to experience within the WDG, Themes related to the experience of the process of the WDG; themes related to the experience of the WDG interacting with the organisation. The visual representation depicts the interacting, overlapping nature of the themes.

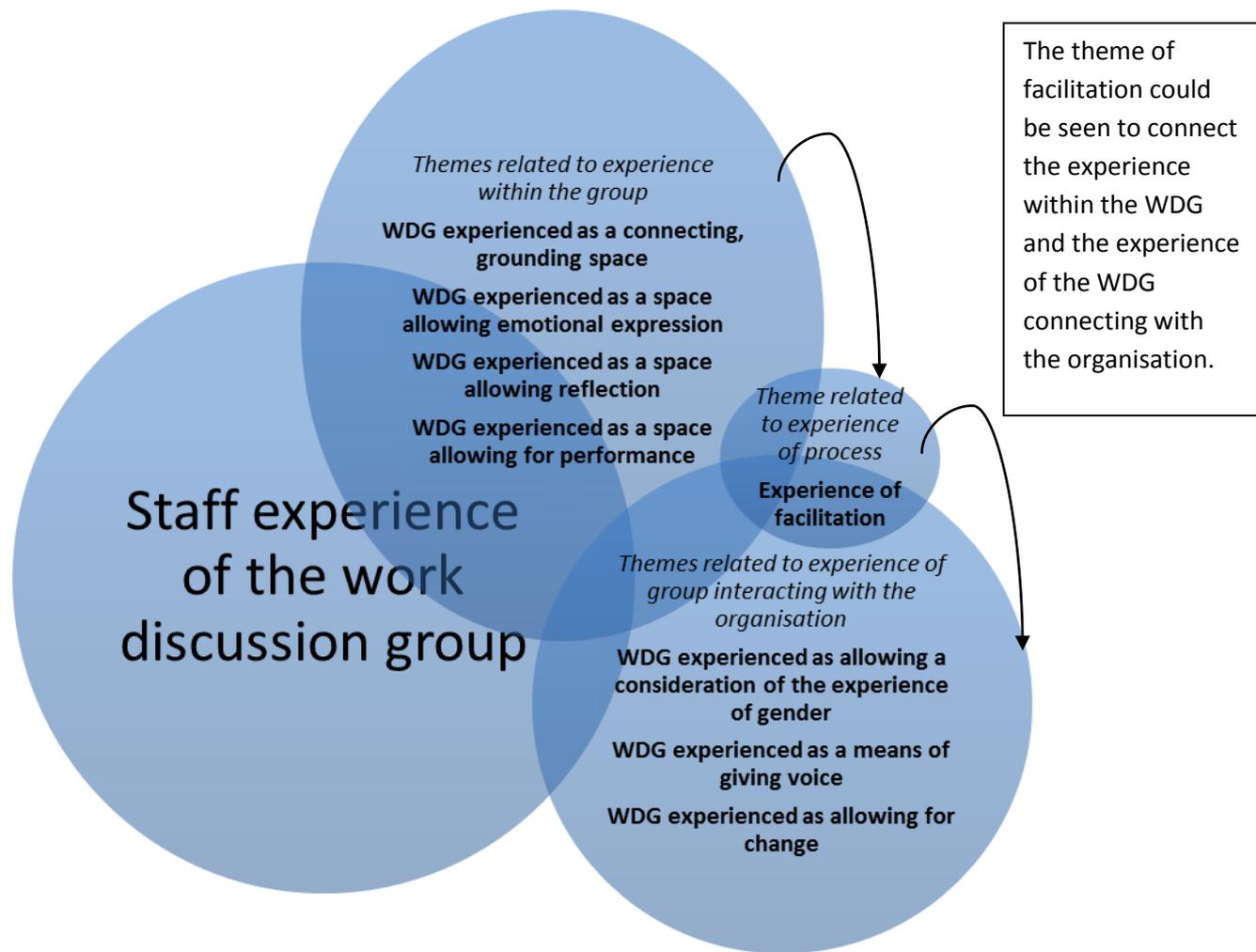
4.1.3.i The order in which the themes were presented

The spheres were organised in this way as it felt appropriate to move outward from experiences within the group to experiences of the WDG interacting with the organisation; with the experience of the process bridging the two.

Within each sphere, overarching themes have been listed according to their perceived level of importance within the data, determined in terms of the number

of subordinate themes making up the overarching themes, as well as the extent to which the themes are representative across participants (for example, although the theme *WDG experienced as a space for allowing for emotional expression* seems more dense in terms of subordinate themes incorporated, it does not represent all the participants and so is placed after the theme *WDG experienced as a connecting, grounding space*. Section 4.1.4 provides a diagram for each overarching theme, mapping the movement from subordinate themes to superordinate themes to overarching themes, colour coded by participant (so that the representativeness of the theme is made apparent). A table mapping the movement from emergent to subordinate themes (with illustrative quotations) is available at appendix L.

4.1.4 Visual diagram showing organisation of overarching themes



4.1.5 Diagram for each overarching theme, mapping movement from subordinate to overarching themes

Below follows a diagram for each overarching theme, following the organisation depicted in the visual diagram above. The diagrams depict the movement from subordinate theme through to superordinate theme through to overarching theme. The subordinate themes are colour-coded according to participants. The key is as follows:

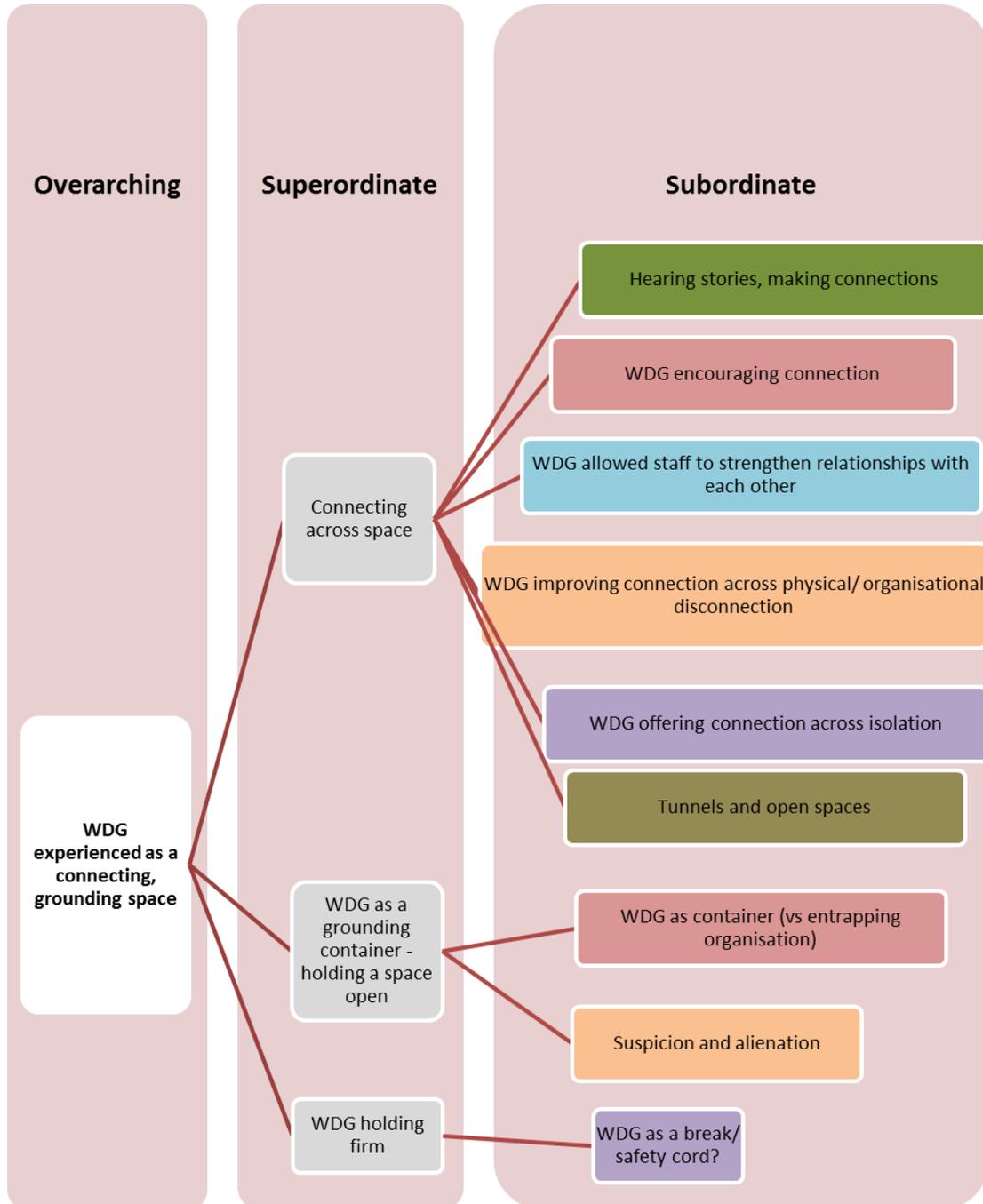
Raymond

Bethan

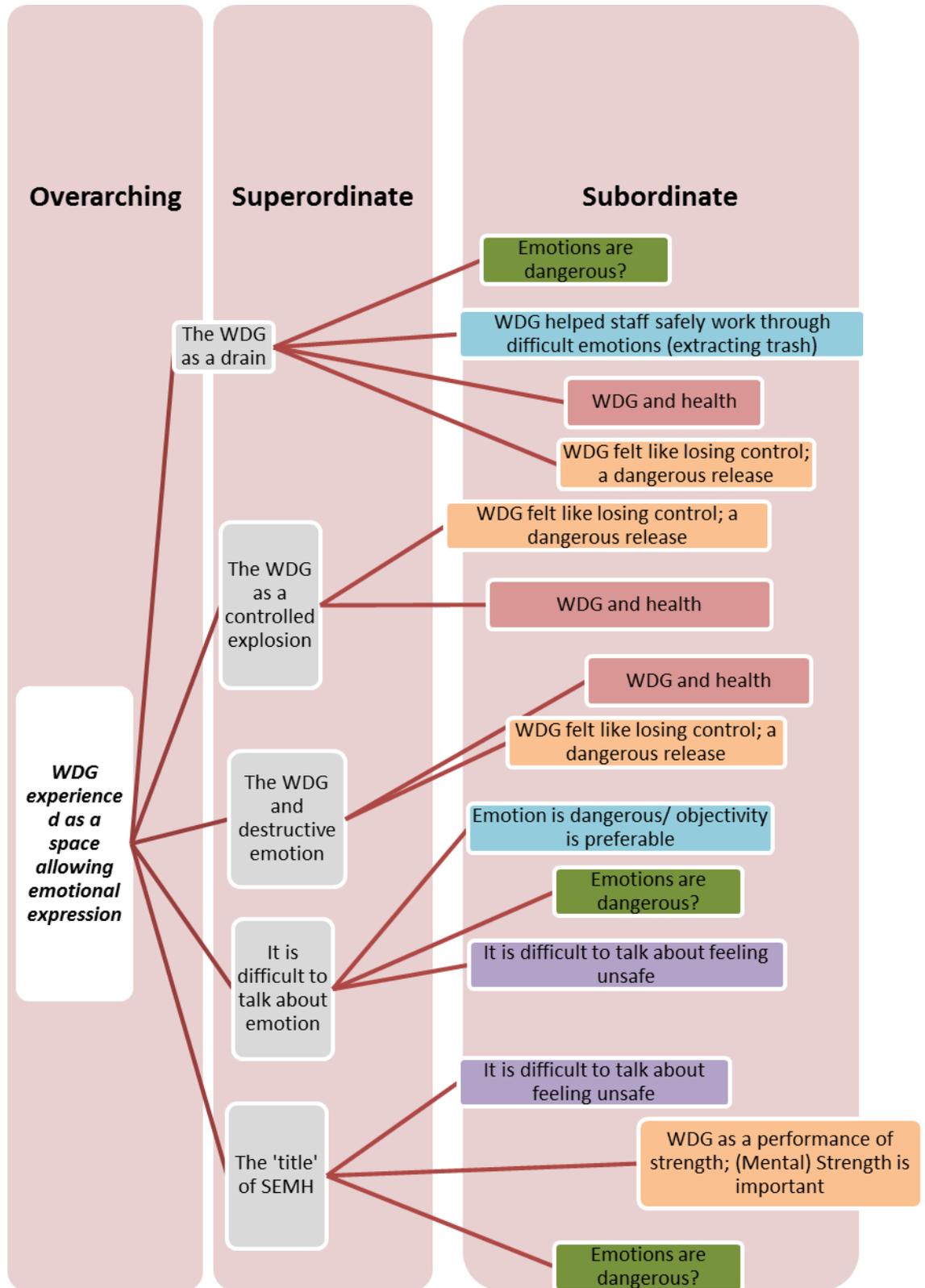
Colin
Mark
Steven
Jen

4.1.5. i Overarching themes related to experiences within the group

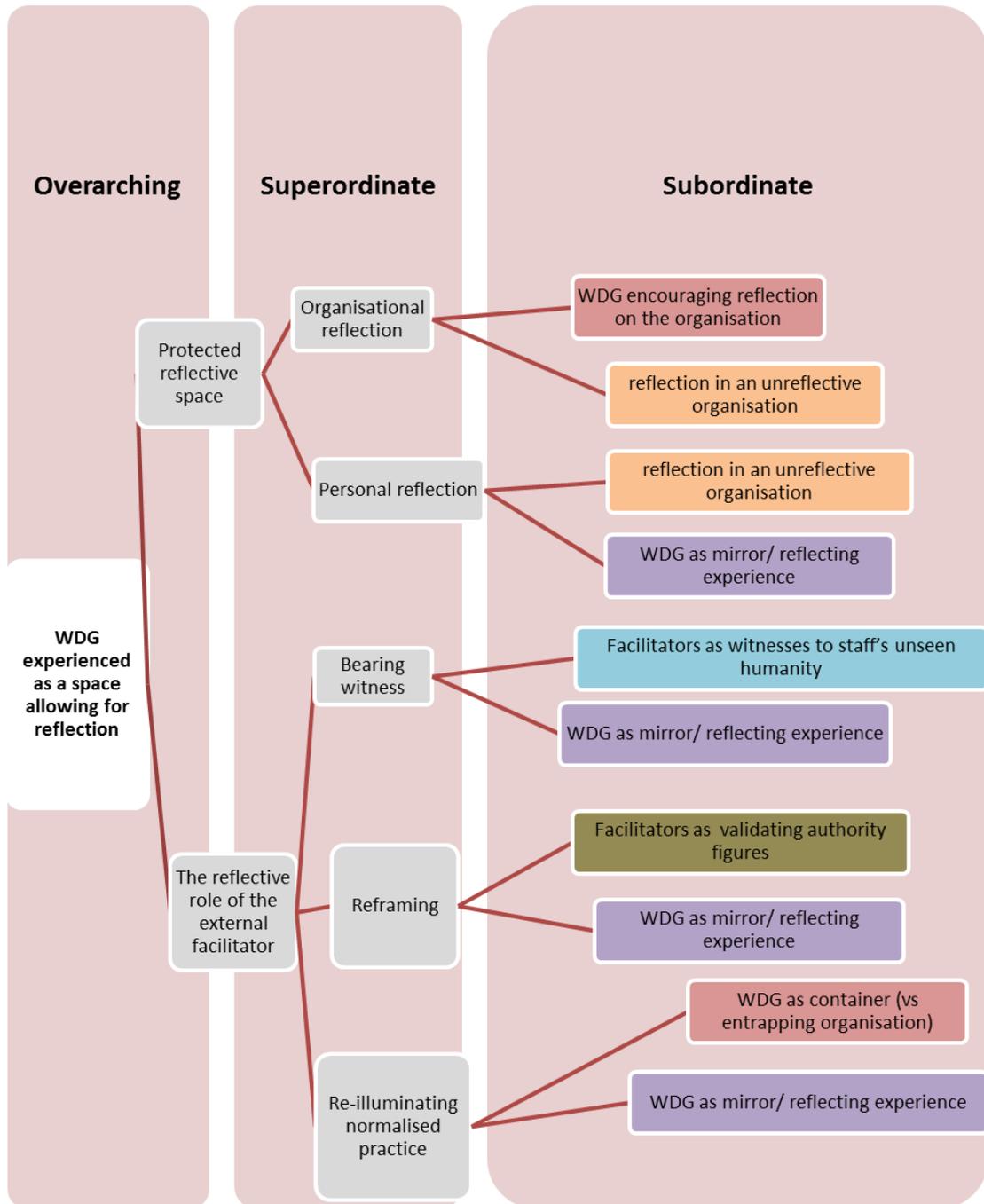
WDG experienced as a connecting, grounding space



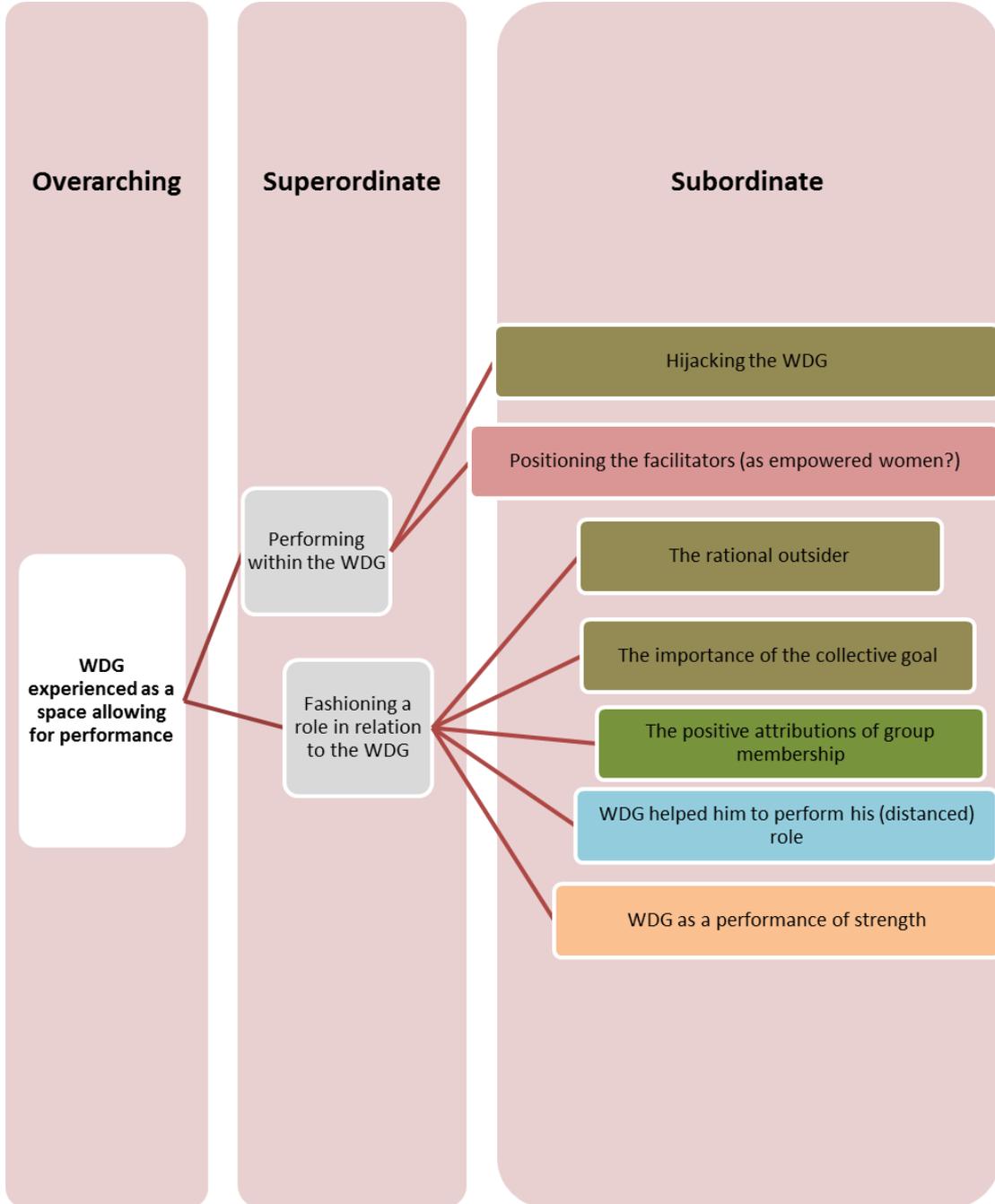
WDG experienced as a space allowing for emotional expression



WDG experienced as a space allowing for reflection

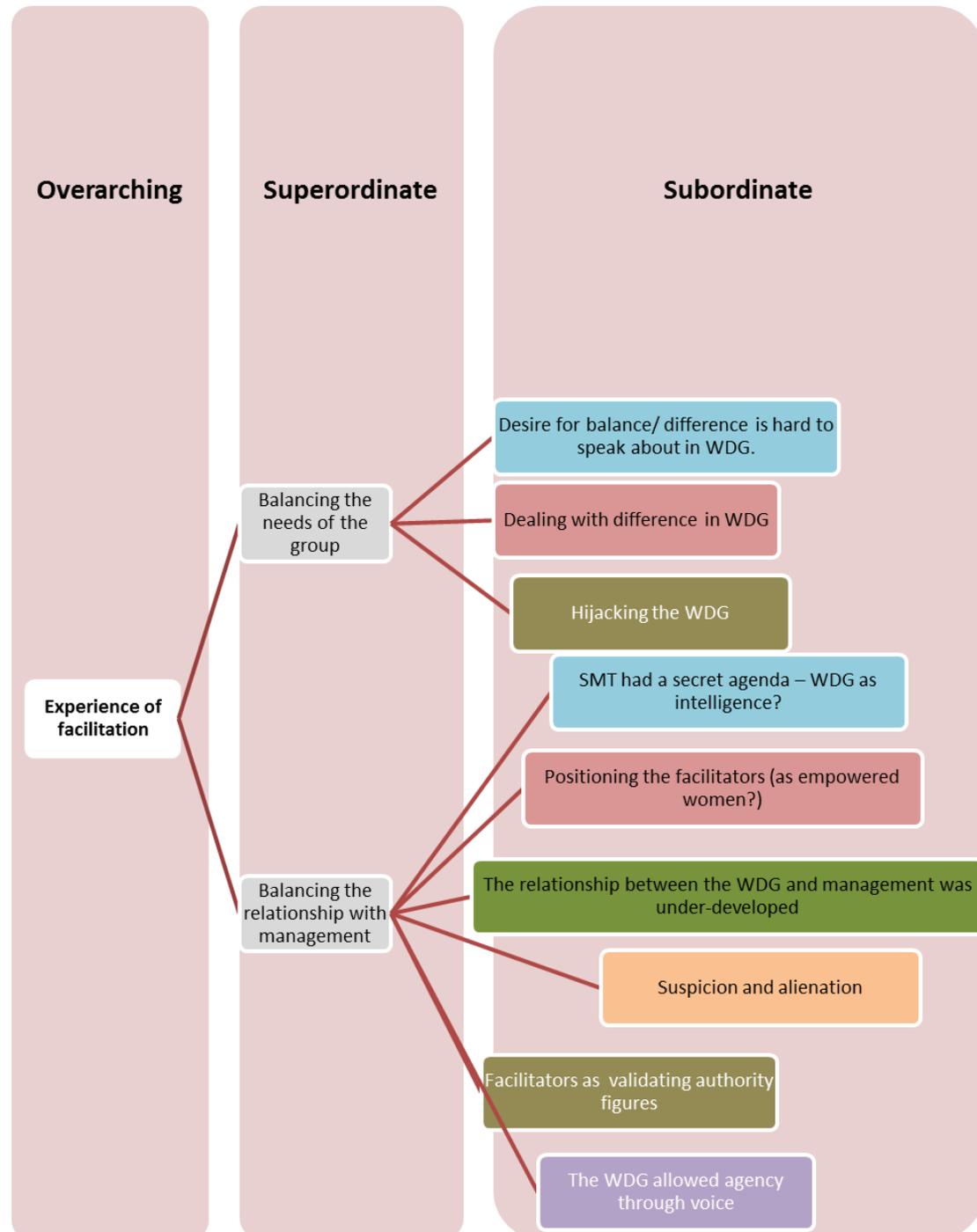


WDG experienced as a space allowing for performance



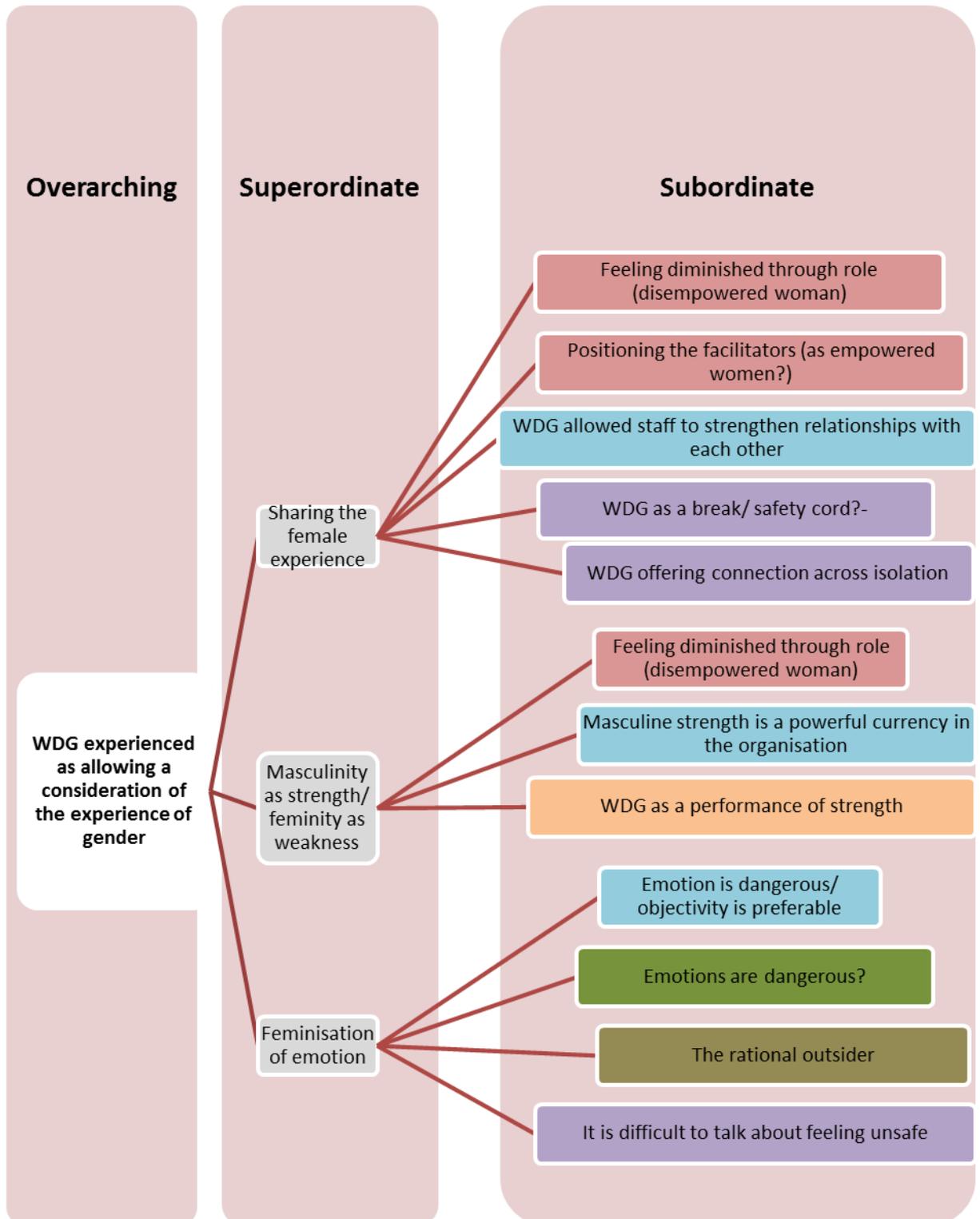
4.1.5. ii Overarching theme related to experience of process

Experience of facilitation

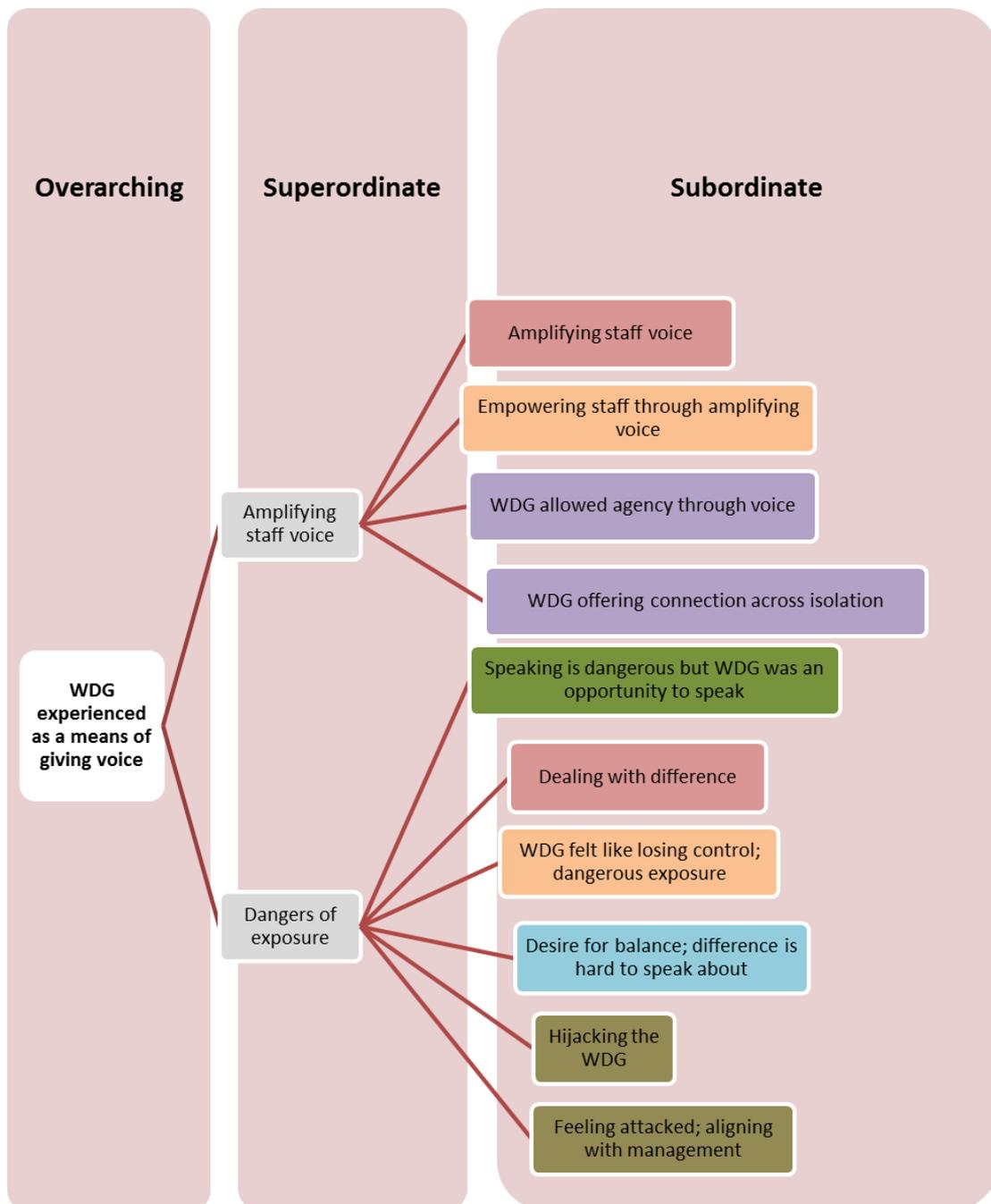


4.1.5. iii Overarching themes related to experiences of group interacting with the organisation

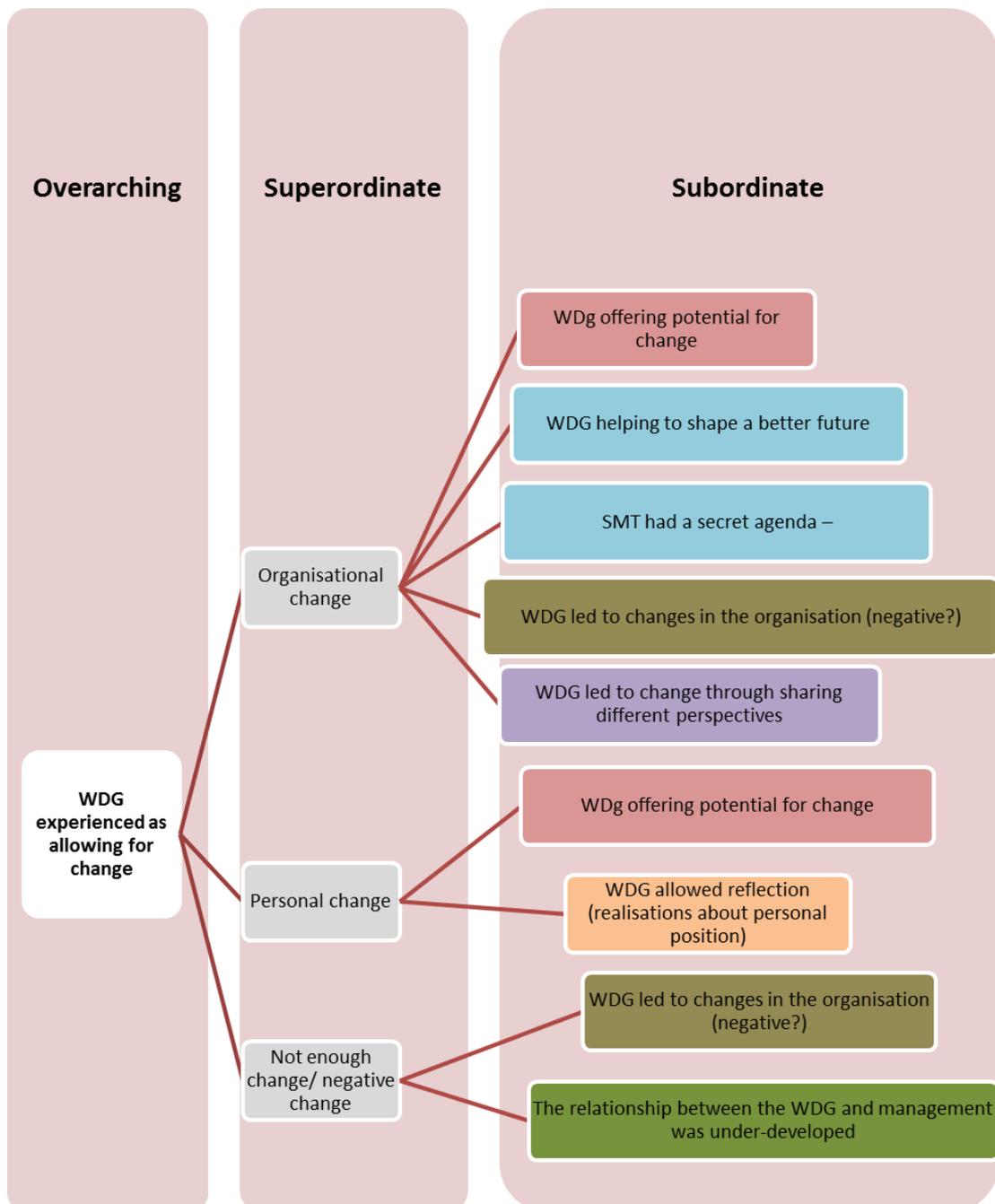
WDG experienced as allowing for a consideration of the experience of gender



WDG experienced as a means of giving voice



WDG experienced as allowing for change



4.2 Reflection on the process

4.2.1 Idiography and generalisations

Interviews were full of rich data. By nature of the process of analysis, nuances within individual accounts have been sacrificed as decisions have been made regarding inclusion and exclusion. For example, some of the subordinate themes of individual participants were not represented in the later stages of analysis as I felt that the themes were less relevant to the research question (these subordinate themes can be identified in appendix L; they are highlighted in yellow). The process of looking for links also necessarily reduces some of the compelling differences – a source of tension in this process. Indeed, whilst evaluating IPA, Wagstaff et al. (2014) describe the: “uncomfortable dualism or opposition between ‘theme’ and ‘idiography.’ The tension between the espoused idiographic focus and the development of general themes was [a] frequently cited dilemma, and the search for common themes was considered to reduce the idiographic focus.” (p.11). In this vein, Jones (2003) notes the challenges in identifying helpful components of the WDG across sample, as the group seemed to provide different functions for members. This speaks to a potential challenge in identifying commonalities of experience across members of the same WDG.

There is also the difficulty of delineating boundaries between themes; they are often inter-related and borders could be marked elsewhere. Linked to this, the participants are often talking about the WDG within the context of the overall

organisation - it is impossible to draw a hard boundary between the WDG and its context. As such, sometimes the experience of the WDG is also partly the experience of being within the organisation. This sense of overlap is encompassed in the visual diagram showing the organisation of overarching themes (4.2.1).

It is helpful to look to Smith et al. (2012), who explain that the process of *writing up* findings involves returning to the detail of participants' experiences. This can be seen as another stage of analysis as emphases shift in response to becoming reacquainted with the nuances of experiences. As such, experiences were brought to the fore, whilst others were back-grounded, as is apparent through the choice of particular quotations used to support overarching themes in the findings section. Willig (2017) explains that: "qualitative data never speaks for itself and needs to be given meaning by the researcher." (p. 274).

4.3 Themes

4.3.1 WDG experienced as a connecting, grounding space

The WDG was described in terms that located it within and across physical space.

The WDG was described as occupying space in two ways: in reaching across literal and metaphorical space to connect participants, and through functioning as a grounding structure, serving an anchoring and holding function for participants.

4.3.1.i Experience of WDG connecting across space

The WDG was described by many of the participants as offering physical and interpersonal connection. Mark and Raymond described how the WDG made them

feel less isolated in their departments. Mark describes how the WDG connected him to colleagues:

Knowing what other [...] teachers or mentors are going through what you're going through, yeah, you don't feel like an alien, like you're alienated (Mark, 1, 18-21³).

This is in contrast to other points where he describes feeling a sense of physical and interpersonal isolation in the organisation. Mark's sense of physical disconnect from the 'main school', is emphasised through the repetition of the phrases, "over there" (5, 20; 11, 17; 17, 22) and "over here" (Mark, 1, 32; 10, 32; 15, 23). Raymond similarly speaks to this sense of physical separation: "But the school don't really take... don't take no notice about that 'cos, you know, we're over here out the way; out of sight, out of mind, innit?" (Raymond, 11, 26). Raymond similarly describes how the WDG leads to some sense of connection: "It was nice to, nice to hear like other people's problems, you know, and, and what they, they thought 'cos obviously... 'Cos we don't see many people over here." (Raymond, 12, 2 – 4).

Beth also describes feeling physically separated off within the organisation: "I'm in this role of mentor with the little crazy kids tucked away in a corner of the school and it doesn't feel like that's what I want... Why have I been put in that place?" (Beth, 14, 24- 27). For Beth, the WDG offers an opportunity to connect with colleagues in the open; she describes how, without the structure of the WDG: "It's

³ The information in brackets refers to participant's name (pseudonym), transcript page number, transcript line number/s.

just bitching behind corridors [whereas] it's so much more healthy when it's out here and other people are hearing it." (Beth, 31, 9-12). Although "bitching behind corridors" seems like a linguistic slip, it gives an intriguing image of the "furtive" (Beth, 31,10) staff almost hiding in the fabric of the school. This contrasts with how Beth imagines the WDG as a structured holding space (below).

Steven similarly offers the image of the WDG bringing discussion out of the recesses of the organisation:

nobody usually talks about it actually on... like out in the open as, umm, usually you probably hear people talking like in corners, you overhear conversations, but you're not actually part of the conversation, but it's when you get a group of a mixture of people who work all over the school come together and it's like they've got c... you've actually got common ground.
(Steven, 9, 12-18).

Again, in this image we can see the WDG allows Steven to connect with his colleagues, finding a "common ground" (Steven, 9, 18) compared to feeling left out of conversations happening in corners.

In contrast to this image of bringing discussion into the open, Steven also offers an image of the WDG that seems more constricting. Steven frequently refers to the "tunnel vision" (Steven, 10, 21; 14.28; 14, 29, 22, 16-17) of another member, which caused the conversation to feel locked on a particular course - the discussion is described as unable to consider issues in the periphery, (Steven , 22, 19) and as

unable to move forward (Steven, 22, 20). This suggests an experience of simultaneously speeding unthinkingly forward without due concern for the surroundings, whilst feeling blocked from making progress.

4.3.1.ii Experience of WDG as a grounding container - holding a space open

Beth conceptualised the WDG in spatial terms as she repeatedly referred to the WDG as being a space held open for staff.

It gave a space where people were expected to talk about those things so they did. (Beth, 4, 3-4).

To just have the space held for people's frustrations and them not being given an answer but a solution to them because there's so much work to just keep doing in school, [...] There's no space to just go, "Yes, but it is really hard and I don't understand". To have that space held and heard by a whole group, I think it's quite an important grounding, actually. (Beth, 21, 3-14).

The grounding function of the WDG is repeated by Beth (21, 14; 21, 15; 22, 3), who attributes this to feeling as though a space is being held where people's difficulties can be heard. This holding function is also described by Jen (below). Beth describes how the structured nature of the discussion in the group was also experienced as a valuable aspect of the WDG.

That forum is really structured. It's very clear. (Beth, 29, 12-13)

It felt very structured and healthy and multiple voices. (Beth, 29, 18-19)

I think because it's structured and it can't just descend into meaningless bitching. (Beth, 33, 6-7)

This image of a firm structure holding space open is in contrast to some aspects of her experience in the organisation, in which things are not always felt to be anchored down. She describes how: "So much in passing in the corridor is just really quickly, "This isn't normal, you know this isn't normal, it's okay"" (Beth, 4, 23-26). This gives an image of transient staff members hurriedly trying to reassure each other whilst passing each other in the liminal space of the hallway. Beth's description of conversations potentially, "descend[ing] into meaningless bitching" (Beth, 33, 7) also implies that communication outside the WDG has the potential to fall away into spiteful senselessness. The need for a grounding space is also potentially alluded to by Mark's descriptions of the organisation: "I dunno, there's something about this place, something ain't right," (25, 10-11); "God, this is crazy, it's crazy" (Mark, 40, 33-34).

Beth also describes her ambivalence about how communicating with the management will continue after the WDG has ended, commenting that: "everything just goes out the window in the summer." (Beth, 29, 27-8). Again, this is an image of things not being anchored down – rather, flying out of the window. Beth seems to be describing how she feels as though the progress of the WDG (in communicating with management) will be hard to hold onto without the grounding space of the WDG.

4.3.1.iii Experience of WDG holding firm

Jen describes how the facilitators and other group members re-punctuated her experience, repeating the phrase “hold on”:

[J]ust having someone there to listen and to go, “Hold on, is that really what your job consists or your role extends to or in your remit? (Jen, 6, 3-5)

[T]he male staff members were like, “Well hold on, that’s not what’s supposed to happen,” (Jen, 8, 7-8)

You’ve said something and then somebody else went, “Oh hold on, that really shouldn’t be like that and something needs to be done,” (Jen, 12, 4-7)

The repeated phrase is suggestive of a halting, arresting function; as though she has been pulled up short by her experience in the WDG and is re-appraising her understanding of the organisation. It is included in this section as it is possible to interpret the phrase as suggestive of being physically held onto. As well as having her automatic assumptions challenged, it is being done in a way that feels protective and containing. It is as though the boundaries of her role (or herself) are being held firm by the group. This is suggested by the context, as the phrase “hold on,” is used in relation to the verbal abuse that she describes suffering at work. (Jen, 6, 3-5; 8, 7-8). She explains that although she had, “just blocked [the verbal abuse] out,” (Jen, 8, 4) it is experienced as, “really shocking,” (Jen, 8, 1) by other group members, with Jen recalling male staff members saying: “Well hold on, that’s not what’s supposed to happen,” (Jen, 8, 7-8). Jen describes how, following this exchange in the WDG,

“other staff members would jump in as soon as there’s any type of, you know, abuse, verbal abuse going on,” (Jen, 9, 2-4). Again, this suggests that, following the WDG, Jen feels more secure in the organisation.

4.3.1.iv Summarised response to research question

The teaching staff appeared to experience the WDG as offering physical and interpersonal connection within an organisation that could feel fragmented. The WDG was experienced as providing an anchoring function and as holding a protected space open for discussion. Beth and Jen in particular seemed find the containing function supportive.

4.3.2 WDG experienced as a space allowing for emotional expression

The WDG was described as a way of processing emotions; as a way of draining emotions, or as letting them out in the manner of a controlled explosion.

4.3.2.i Experience of the WDG as a drain

Colin used extensive metaphor when describing what he felt was a key function of the WDG; the opportunity to talk about stressful experiences in order to eject negative affect:

I think that everybody else talked about their stressful events as well. They’ve just to get it out, just get the raw feeling out, you know, and then the cup... the full cup starts to empty it out.

[...]

Then you've got room to start filling the cup with positive vibes instead of negative vibes. So I think the cup was full of more of the negative vibes than the positive vibes, you know, so now it's finding more of an equilibrium.

(Colin, 25, 6-16).

Colin later describes his role in the WDG as being willing to say: "Get all this trash out," (Colin, 26, 30) to inform management how people were feeling within the organisation. Again, this metaphor suggests that some individuals were feeling full of "trash," or "negative vibes," with the group acting as a space where these feelings could be voided, and members could begin "filling [their] cup[s] with positive vibes." (Colin, 25, 13-14). Colin felt strongly about the impact of the stressors of the job, describing how multiple pressures could potentially drive people to suicide (Colin, 3,8). This perhaps links to the powerful metaphors he uses to describe the extraction of negative emotion.

Raymond and Mark also allude to the WDG as a means to release negative emotion. Raymond describes how: "the staff have got a lot of things off their chest" (Raymond, 3, 25). Mark explains that the WDG acted as a "release," for staff members who were able to share difficult experiences (Mark, 42, 13-14).

Beth similarly refers to the idea of emotional health in relating to the processing of emotion, repeating the word healthy. She particularly describes how the group offered a space for men to express their feelings, in contrast to, "the macho thing" (Beth, 12, 17) that pervades: "this school is so male and even people don't talk about those things." (Beth, 12, 4-5). Beth describes how speaking is healthier than

not speaking. She also describes how the structure of the WDG felt “healthy” as it was supportive of voices that might not be heard (Beth, 32, 22-23), encouraged openness, (Beth, 31, 18-19) and felt like a clear process (Beth, 31, 6-8). Beth describes how, in the absence of the WDG, the forum for communicating is the pub:

That is the only mechanism we have, really, at the moment. Obviously, everyone’s tanked up on four pints so, at nine o’clock when we’re all cycling back hammered, it’s like, “I don’t even know what I said to [the deputy head] this evening, what’s going on?” (29, 6-11).

There is an interesting contrast in terms of the lack of health offered in this alternative mechanism for communication. Rather than feeling healthy it is described as disorientating: “what’s going on?” (Beth, 29, 11). “Hammered,” and “tanked up” are also quite violent - possibly masculine - metaphors to describe drunkenness, suggestive of being bludgeoned or armed by alcohol – as though it both brutalizes and emboldens. This perhaps links to the, “macho thing” (Beth, 12, 17) in the organisation she earlier referred to.

4.3.2.ii Experience of the WDG as a controlled explosion

The WDG was also depicted as a space where more volatile feelings could be expressed in a controlled manner. This was illustrated by Mark:

[I]t’s good to express yourself. If you’re gonna express yourself... You’re like a balloon, innit, you’re full of air, you’re gonna burst sooner or later, make sure it’s the right person. (Mark, 42, 10-13).

The facilitators and group members are the, “right” people to “burst” in front of. Again, expressing yourself, or releasing your feelings, is viewed in a positive manner when done in the right environment. The function of the WDG as a place to release hot air is also alluded to in Jen and Steven’s descriptions of the WDG as a place for ‘venting’. Jen describes how she valued the group as a place: “to be able to vent once a week.” (Jen, 3, 6-7). Steven explained that the group functioned as a space where group members could vent emotions like frustration or anger, so that they could then have, “breathing space” and then be more responsive to solutions. (Steven, 11, 27-31). Indeed, Beth similarly explained that it was sometimes necessary to express all of the negative emotions before being able to consider a more meaningful response:

There’s so much negative build-up that there needs to be a long period of people just venting the negative before any reasoning is put into it. (Beth, 35, 22-25).

Beth also felt the structure of the sessions helped to shape people’s experiences in a way that encouraged meaning to be derived from emotional experiences:

I think because it’s structured and it can’t just descend into meaningless bitching or just frustrations that become a bit blah. You’re talking to people, you have to, actually, formulate your idea so, in that way, people have to be articulate and that helps the thought process, doesn’t it? It’s less emotional, I think. (Beth, 33, 6-12).

4.3.2.iii Experience of the WDG and destructive emotion

Alternatively, sometimes participants seem ambivalent regarding how emotions were expressed. Beth describes how sometimes it felt as though members of the WDG created difficulties through the pooling of negative affect:

Sometimes it would feel like if we all talked too negatively, because school is hard, sometimes it doesn't help to talk because it just makes it more hard and you get other people's negative on top of your negative and it feels like we create this big hurricane of stuff that's not happening. (Beth, 3, 11-17).

Beth's use of hurricane imagery potentially links with the image of the hot air being vented by members, perhaps illustrating what could happen if hot air becomes whipped up in an uncontrolled way.

The potentially negative generative effect of the WDG is also alluded to by Mark. Mark describes how the WDG led to a "release" (Mark, 20, 4) encouraging discussion: "That was good. That was good. 'Cos she kept... Yeah, she kept putting fuel on that fire, kept it, kept it burning." (Mark, 19, 21-23). The facilitator is referred to as a petrol station (Mark, 20, 7) and Mark additionally describes how the facilitator was able to talk, even without a drink (the researcher assumes he was referring to alcohol) (Mark, 51, 16). Mark describes these aspects of the facilitator in an appreciative way (indeed, he repeats the phrase, "that was good" three times (Mark, 19, 21) and "It was good" four times (Mark, 20, 17) calling her, an, "inspiration" (Mark, 51, 20)). However, the image of the facilitator adding fuel to the

fire of the discussion could be suggestive of a destructive or uncontrolled experience. The reference to alcohol possibly suggests a feeling of inhibition. Alcohol, like petrol, is also inflammatory, and Mark possibly creates an image of the WDG as dangerously ablaze with emotion. Perhaps therefore, the images of chemical-fuelled fires and hurricanes imply that the WDG felt, at times, like a potentially dangerous (albeit enlivening) space.

4.3.2.iv Experience of the difficulties talking about emotion

Jen's emotional experience seems difficult to articulate at points. She breaks off from sentences, punctuates her utterances with fillers and lightens a difficult topic (verbal abuse) with laughter:

The main thing is just kind of like the verbal abuse, umm, and that to me... So I just kind of... I got to the point where I just blocked that out, it doesn't even affect me anymore (Jen, 8, 2-5).

I felt like, umm, I particularly went through, umm, more kind of abuse (Jen, 6, 9-12).

I became very aware that there is definitely a culture where, umm, female staff members have it a little bit harder than male staff members, as it were. (Laughs) (Jen, 6, 19- 7, 2).

Jen's description of blocking out verbal abuse suggests that she feels as though is preferable – perhaps protective - to cut off any emotional response. It also seems difficult to name or label the experience of abuse, as it is preceded by fillers

suggestive of uncertainty (“umm”) or hedged with phrases that seem intended to lessen the impact (“kind of”, “as it were”).

Colin also seems to view emotion as something to guard against. Colin positions emotion in opposition to being objective – and in touch with reality - stressing his ability to choose the latter: “I don’t always work on my emotions; I can be objective,” (Colin, 7, 35-36); “I can unload but I can also be objective. [...] And I think it’s, it’s, it’s kind of good to be objective and see the reality” (Colin, 8, 7-12).

Like Jen, Colin seems to suggest that he can distance himself from his emotions, becoming almost mechanistic: “I’m like a cog in the wheel and I don’t always work on my emotions; I can be objective.” (Colin, 7, 34-36). Colin seems to suggest that work can entail an element of emotional labour, but that it is possible for him to instead operate like a piece of machinery in the greater system of the school.

Raymond also explains that emotional disclosure at work did not work for him. He describes how he has previous experience of counselling but felt that sharing in a group would not “help [him] mentally” (Raymond, 14, 24), instead explaining that he felt: “there is certain sort of stuff that you are obviously gonna keep to yourself all the time, ain’t ya?” (Raymond, 15, 7-8).

4.3.2.v Experience of the ‘title’ of SEMH

Jen describes how she finds it hard to talk to people outside the organisation about the impact of her job, as they are distanced by the nature of the school. She describes how people respond when she finds out where she works: “Oh you work

with students for..." (Jen, 10, 9) the trailing off perhaps suggestive of the difficulty of others in articulating students' SEMH needs, or perhaps her own ambivalence around naming this.

The ambivalence around identifying with mental health needs is also present in the interviews of Raymond and Mark, who both refer to a discussion in the WDG, in which a member described taking approved time off work, referring to it as a Mental Health day. Raymond brings up the topic of Mental Health Day – "I'd never heard of that before in me life" (Raymond, 15, 21) directly after describing, "the man thing" (Raymond, 15, 13) (which he explains might prevent men talking about how they feel in a group setting). Raymond possibly feels that there is some link between upholding a male image of not divulging feelings before others, and not having knowledge of a Mental Health day (although he attributes his lack of knowledge to a lack of communication). Mark suggests that there would be negative attributions made towards those taking a day on Mental Health grounds:

Listen, this is mental health days, that's a... that's a big statement. (Laughs)
"What's wrong with you then? What, you can't hack the job? You should go and see your doctor." "I don't fit in." "This job ain't quite right for you." See, there's the other, there's the other side to it, so I'll leave that alone, I'll leave that alone. It's nice to have days off if you can and if you need to, no problem, but not under that title. (Laughs) (Mark, 47, 33 – 48, 6).

Mark feels that the “title” of mental health is a “big statement” that could have repercussions for your employment prospects. From Mark’s perspective, the title of mental health is one that can be applied to pupils, but not staff, without the risk of being viewed negatively by those in management.

4.3.2.vi Summarised response to research question

The teaching staff appeared to experience the WDG as a healthy, structured space to process or let out emotions. At times there was ambivalence around exploring negative emotions as part of a group, as well as some concern about being associated with the SEMH title.

4.3.3 WDG experienced as a space allowing for reflection

The WDG was described as a space that allowed for reflection. Furthermore, participants described the role of the facilitator in reflecting back experience in an illuminating way.

4.3.3.i Experience of a protected reflective space

Beth describes valuing the reflective space, whilst finding the honesty surprising: “It was quite interesting to think, “This is, actually, going to be about us” (Beth, 1, 31).

Beth explains that the WDG offered a chance for people to reflect on what their day had “actually been like” (Beth, 7, 12-13). Beth explains that staff tell each other, “the story of management” (Beth, 8, 13), as a way of coping, however, the WDG offered a chance to get beneath the frequently shared dominant narratives and share something of their personal experiences: “less about telling a story about the school but more about our own experiences.” (Beth, 9, 4-6). Mark explains that a reflective

space is not available within the school; school meetings are described by Mark as, “automatic” (Mark, 41, 21), “you’re listening but you’re not listening.” (Mark, 49, 30).

Reflecting on the system

For Mark, the WDG offers a space to reflect on the procedures of the school. He explains that the inconsistencies in practice across the system were highlighted (Mark, 17, 9). He also explains that joint reflection allowed him to consider his own position in relation to the school: “You say, “Alright then, it’s not only me going through it and you’re going through the same thing I’m going through so it’s not that I’m doing something wrong, it’s just the way the system is or the way things, the way things are happening.” (Mark, 16, 33 – 17, 3). Beth explains that sharing experiences led to a deeper understanding of her role in relation to the school as a whole (Beth, 2, 12-13).

Personal reflection

Mark explains how taking part in the WDG and learning about the system through the experiences of colleagues led to him reflecting on his future: “Is it structured for me, is it... am I meant to be here? I’ve gotta really, really think about it.” (Mark, 30, 15-16). Beth and Jen also used the space to reflect on their own conceptualisation of their roles, particularly in relation to being women in a male-dominated environment, (explored in the section on the *WDG and gendered power*).

4.3.3.ii Experience of the reflective role of the external facilitator

There was importance placed on having an external facilitator to facilitate reflection.

The facilitators were described as having a function of: bearing witness to difficult experiences; re-illuminating practice that had become routine/ normalised; reframing experiences; and on re-focusing on alternative perspectives and ideas.

Bearing witness

Colin strongly voices the human needs of the staff:

we've got families to take care of and stuff like that, you know, and he's, he's got a couple of kids I think as well, you know, little ones, and, you know, losing your job and then, you know, having to find a new job... [...] So all these pressures can drive somebody to suicide so, you know, in that sense I think it helped a bit to maybe take this anger, this frustration and stuff out, you know (Colin, 3, 4-10).

Colin's use of the emotive phrase, "little ones", and the dramatic possibility of somebody being, "driv[en] [...] to suicide" perhaps emphasises the humanity of the staff, and how their needs might not be met by the organisation. Colin views the WDG as a space where group members could reclaim their humanity: "I think working in this sort of place, it's easy to forget that we're human beings" (Colin, 6, 22-23), as well as facilitating a space where staff could consider one another, "not just in [...] a working mode but as people," (Colin, 6, 17-18) Colin also views the

external facilitator's role as one in which the human anger of the group could be understood, validated and reported to management:

“So this stuff coming out and then you're going and reporting, you know, and then learning like, you know, why are we like this, you know, why... you know, why we're so angry.” (Colin, 26, 35 – 27, 1).

Jen explains that one of the aspects she valued was having an external perspective drawing attention to aspects of work that had become less visible to those within the organisation, and to empathise with her experiences:

“Because I think one of the things that we, we discussed at length is how we kind of get desensitised being in the environment that we are and actually an outsider just saying, “But hold in, that must be very stressful, that must be...” You know, you'd just kind of like talk it through and then you realise, “Yeah, what I am doing is actually... it's a lot to deal with.” (Jen, 4, 3-9).

Beth similarly describes valuing having her feelings reflected back, as well as the, “sense of concern,” she felt from the facilitators (Jen, 21, 22).

Re-illuminating normalised practice

In the above quotation, Jen refers to the idea of becoming “desensitised.” This links with the re-illuminating function of the WDG as posited by participants. Jen describes how sharing her experience of verbal abuse with colleagues in the presence of external facilitators was: “enlightening because [...] you get so desensitised and you get so... you get to the point where it's just you don't really

question it anymore.” (Jen, 7, 15-17). Jen repeatedly refers to the, “outside(r) perspective,” in her interview, suggesting she particularly values reflecting on her experience with the support of an external lens.

Beth similarly describes how she found it reassuring to have an outsider perspective to remind her about difficulties in her role:

...to hear these people from the outside world reminding us that that stuff is really bad and it is really hard, that's always reassuring to think, "Okay". You tend to normalise it all and get on with it and think you're not dealing with it well but, actually, it just is really hard. (Beth, 4, 8-14).

Reframing

Steven highlights the way facilitators reframed experiences to highlight positives:

“Even though they’re complaining, you see... you can actually see the positives in what they’re saying [...] It was good because not everything’s doom and gloom.”

(Steven, 23, 33 – 24, 2). Similarly, Jen explains: “an outsider view that listened to you and then just kind of reframed things and put it into perspective for you was really, really helpful.” (Jen, 10, 15-17).

Jen explains how the WDG allowed her to reflect on alternative perspectives that might not ordinarily be shared (Jen, 3, 8). Steven similarly explains how the facilitators’ reframing of staff’s ideas to management allowed them to be considered when they might not have been: “it’s easier to hear it from someone who’s from the outside.” (Steven, 36, 12-13).

4.3.3.iii Summarised response to research question

The teaching staff appeared to experience the WDG as a space for personal and organisational reflection not otherwise available within the organisation. The mirroring function of the facilitators was valued, and experienced as a means of bearing witness to their difficulties; showing concern; and offering an external perspective. The external role of facilitators was valued as it served to re-illuminate normalised practice and offered alternative perspectives.

4.3.4 WDG experienced as a space allowing for performance

Beth and Steven describe how the WDG sometimes felt as though it were used by individuals to perform a particular narrative. Additionally, it seemed that some participants used their participation to perform or present a particular version of themselves or their role, in relation to the group. Perhaps the WDG was used by some individuals in the moment as a place for performing a particular role, whilst others used the space of the interview to retrospectively reflect on their role in relation to their participation in the group.

4.3.4.i Experience of performing in the WDG

Beth describes how one member used the WDG to: “tell the story of management.”

Beth felt that he was not using the space reflectively, but rather performing a familiar routine for the benefit of the facilitators:

Sometimes when [he] would start, we'd be like, "Okay, go on, do it again, we all know this". I felt like he was telling you guys more rather than us sharing with each other. (Beth, 9, 6-10).

Steven also raised the issue of an aggrieved staff member using the WDG to tell a one-sided version of events to make himself feel better within the organisation:

And if I'm telling, if I'm telling the story I'm gonna say it to my benefit because I don't wanna feel like I'm the bad person. (Steven, 30, 17-18).

Steven explained that he felt uncomfortable whilst this member delivered his version of events, but did not feel able to offer an alternative narrative.

4.3.4.ii Experience of fashioning a role in relation to the WDG

Some participants presented themselves within a particular role in relation to the WDG. This presentation may also have arisen as a result of reflecting within the interview in the presence of the researcher.

The Dr/ scientist

Colin views himself as somewhat separate to the rest of the group, as he positions himself in the distanced (and perhaps superior) roles of doctor and of researcher.

Colin describes how his main motivation for joining the group was:

"to feel the pulse of the school and the best way to find the pulse of the school is to actually listen to what people have to day, you know, in a non-invasive way." (Colin, 3, 23-24)

This provides an image of Colin tending to the organisation as a doctor might to a patient, with the phrase, “non-invasive” also suggestive of a medical procedure.

Colin later describes himself as a “Dr” (Colin, 9, 5), using his, “listening ear” (Colin, 8, 34) to help his colleagues hear: “emotional vibes” (Colin, 9, 3).

Colin also figuratively describes himself as a computer in order to describe what he feels is his distanced role:

I would just listen and weigh up what people said [...] Not just with my emotions but more scientifically, analysing the [...] data, a bit like a computer
(Colin, 8, 18- 19)

This image recalls the positivist idea of a scientist, objectively analysing and calibrating the contributions of others.

The realist/management representative

Like Colin, Steven also views himself as an outsider, describing himself taking a “back seat”, (Steven, 22, 3) and being “on the outside and [...] looking in.” (Steven, 10, 27).

For him, being an outsider seems to afford a broader, more balanced perspective: “if you’re from the outside and you can see over a period of what’s been going on.”

(Steven, 25, 28). Like Colin, Steven seems to view himself as taking on a role of surveying the good-health of the school, although his metaphor seems to position him as something like an engineer:

for me it was just basically getting a gauge of how the s... other members of staff felt about how things were running. (Steven, 1, 6-8)

Steven seems to view himself as the realist, explaining that other members' protestations against changes and management decisions were pointless: "you'll resist as much as you can but eventually you're gonna have to change regardless." (Steven, 4, 33- 34).

Steven also seems to take up the voice of management within the interview, although it is not clear that he was able to take up this position within the WDG. Steven's use of pronouns seems to indicate an alignment with management in opposition to other staff members whose behaviour he disagrees with. For example, Steven explains, "They're costing so much money, we can save money here," (Steven, 27, 30) in relation to the savings that could be made in firing unproductive workers; his use of pronouns potentially seeming to align himself with management. Steven appears frustrated with the reaction of others to organisational changes implemented by management, saying: "[e]ven though this is what they was complaining about in the first place, they seem to forget all of that when reality hits." (Steven, 31, 25). Again, the use of 'they', distances him from group members he feels cannot cope with reality.

Steven also seems to view the reactions of some staff as unreasonable. For example, he explains that the school is working towards a shared goal, but that some are "dragging [their] heels" (Steven, 4, 5). He also explains: "you can't always defend what's wrong if it's something there to help you" (Steven, 3, 21), suggesting that he feels that some staff do not take up the opportunities provided.

The ones who care/ the brave ones

The idea that some staff do not take up opportunities is also presented by Raymond.

He feels that attending the group was a matter of courtesy:

if someone's had the decency to put the time into, [...] try and do something nice for us, then you should have the courtesy to... well at least go and see what it's about. (Raymond, 17, 37 – 18, 3).

He describes those who did not attend the WDG but continued to speak critically as akin to those that do not vote but complain about the government: “If you can't be bothered to get out of bed to go and vote then really stop moaning.” (Raymond, 28, 8-9). This is also suggested by Mark who explains: “end of the day if you don't mention anything nothing gets done, yeah? (Mark, 24, 6-7)

Raymond positions himself and other WDG members in opposition to staff he feels could not be bothered to attend. He explains that the WDG members: “obviously care for the school; the ones who don't turn up are the ones who don't care” (Raymond, 26, 29 – 30). Mark similarly positions WDG members as those making an effort to improve the organisation: “We're putting in an effort to try and find a solution so we can make it a better school.” (Mark, 17,13). He also seems to suggest that the members are somewhat selfless, explaining that participation confers no, “brownie points” (Mark, 18, 27) and may in fact involve an element of risk (Mark, 18, 17), which had dissuaded other (less courageous?) staff members.

4.3.4.iii Summarised response to research question:

Some members experienced the WDG as being used by individuals to perform a particular role or replay a rehearsed narrative. It also seemed to be experienced as a way for individuals to use their participation in the WDG to perform or present a particular version of themselves or their role, in relation to other members (within or outwith the group).

4.3.5 Experience of facilitation

The idea of the need for facilitators to hold - or create - a sense of balance came across in interviews. Participants referred to the need to strike a balance between allowing people to share grievances whilst not allowing the group to feel as though it were hijacked by individuals. Another balance to be struck was in relation to communicating with management. Although this was not the original purpose of the group, the WDG was valued by staff as a mouthpiece (4.3.4). However, participants voiced their concerns around striking a balance in terms of how much to communicate with management – balancing confidentiality and the desire for systemic change. Participants also seemed to be weighing up the position of facilitators in relation to management and therefore their potential power; were they too close to management and thus objects of suspicion, or did having the ear of management mean that the facilitators potentially wielded power to create change? Alternatively, perhaps facilitators were more impotent than was desired.

4.3.5.i Experience of the balancing the needs of the group

Steven describes how, at times, the WDG had not felt like a space where a balanced argument could be held: “I just took a back seat and just let people vent” (Steven , 22, 3-4). He describes how sometimes it felt as though a particular individual had needed to present a one-sided story, to which he (and perhaps others) had not been able to offer a counter-narrative. (Steven , 30, 1-13). Conversely, he describes how the structure imposed by facilitators had allowed people to see outside of their, “tunnel vision,” (Steven ,22, 16-17) and view what was on: “the peripheral” (Steven ,22, 19), preventing them feeling stuck: “on the same page talking about the same thing over and over again.” (Steven , 22, 9-10). Beth also describes points when the group would step back and allow one individual to tell their oft-repeated “story” for the benefit of the facilitators. (Beth, 9, 6-10).

4.3.5.ii Experience of the balancing the facilitators’ relationship with management

Suspiciously close?

Participants seemed ambivalent regarding the relationship of the facilitators with management. Mark describes how he initially felt that the WDG was set up with a surveillance function: “people coming here just to find out information about the school where they can go and tell the headmaster.” (Mark, 23, 27-30). Mark also refers to a point in the group when a member of management entered a session and explains he believed he was “just trying to get a sneaky hearing” (Mark, 20, 28).

Colin also describes his belief in the ulterior motive of management in setting up the group: "Of course they've got a secret agenda" (Colin, 28, 11).

Colin describes management setting up the group in order to get, "the extra data" (Colin, 28, 22) to help with implementing new policies. Beth also says in her interview that the facilitators' role: "was always to feed back" (Beth, 4, 27), although this was not the intended role (from the facilitators' perspectives), and was a function that arose as the group progressed and was contracted with members. Her ambivalence around the facilitators' motives is also suggested when she says: "I think I trusted you both to be very professional with it [feeding back to management] and I think you were" (Beth, 22, 26-27). The repetition of "I think" here possibly suggesting a level of uncertainty.

Not close enough?

Although the communication of themes to management was valued as giving voice and leading to change, there was also ambivalence expressed regarding confidentiality. Beth mentions that some participants may have had misgivings about facilitators communicating with management: "I know some of them were really uncomfortable with that initially, weren't they?" (Beth, 5, 2-3). Raymond describes how some people would not have been able to speak freely for fear of losing their jobs (Raymond, 5, 35) as, "they're gonna know exactly who was saying what. But they're gonna know, they're gonna know quite, quite easy enough (Raymond, 5, 19-23) (his repetition of the phrase, "they're gonna know" also creating the image of a somewhat omnipresent management).

However, Mark and Raymond also seem to suggest that a greater management presence would have been preferable. Mark describes how he feels that it would have been profitable to have had management attend the final session to offer, “constructive answers and, and constructive resolutions.” (Mark, 22, 30-31).

Raymond also suggests that it would have been useful to have had management attend for part of the sessions to address issues (Raymond, 26, 3).

Collusion?

Raymond critiques the process, repeatedly referencing the fact that, although the groups’ ideas were thematically presented to management, the group did not receive a reply: “I thought it would’ve been better if we’d have had some sort of dialogue back” (Raymond, 7, 26). This was also picked up by Beth:

I suppose I'm quite interested, maybe, in how they did receive it. [...] What kind of experience it was to tell those things? (Beth, 22, 28 - 23- 1).

Beth is curious about management’s response and requests feedback within the interview. It is possible that Raymond feels as though the facilitators were withholding information from the group when he says: “Because obviously they had, they had their opinions on what, what we probably would’ve said.” (Raymond, 2, 26-27). Perhaps there is another imbalance being highlighted here by Raymond – the imbalance of who is given a voice, or possibly, who is choosing to speak – the staff have been given voice, but the management have not – and what message this

might convey – or be taken to convey – by the group. Beth also reflects on how the group never thought to request information regarding management’s response:

Actually, often the group would just start and you guys would remind what you had fed back and we would just go on. That’s interesting. Why did none of us pick up on that? Was that intentional? (Beth, 23, 18-20)

Beth wonders whether it was because the members did not expect to have been given a voice but rather just wanted to be heard. She also wonders whether this ties into a sense of apathy. (Beth, 23, 5-9). The question to the interviewer may suggest that on some level she suspects some collusion between the management and facilitators.

Raymond also refers to the fact that they received messages outside of the group about its reception: “You know, we had a couple of funny comments from [a member of management] “Oh we’re going off to the moaning group now.” (Raymond, 20, 8-10), an incident also alluded to by Beth, who hopes that the manager was joking, although states that it is the: “sort of public male banter that does [...] head in at that school.” (Beth, 26, 13-14) Although the facilitators cannot have control over public comments made by management, perhaps the lack of management voice within the WDG created a vacuum for participants that felt disquieting.

4.3.5.iii Summarised response to research question

The teaching staff appeared to experience the WDG with some ambivalence. The balance of individual and group needs was sometimes experienced as imbalance. Furthermore, the facilitators' relationship with management also seemed to be viewed with ambivalence; viewed as both too close and not close enough.

4.3.6 WDG experienced as allowing for a consideration of the experience of gender

For some participants, the WDG allowed for reflection on, and greater understanding of, organisational culture, in relation to gender.

4.3.6.i Experience of sharing the female experience

Female participants expressed how gender formed an important aspect of their experience. This may have been linked to the organisational context, as women were felt to be under-represented in the staff (and pupil cohort).

Jen describes how her participation in the WDG led to a greater awareness of her gendered experience, and the 'culture' of the organisation in relation to women:

What I've realised is that there's definitely a culture in our school... Because we work with, you know, almost exclusively just with boys, I felt like, umm, I particularly went through, umm, more kind of abuse, umm, than, than the other male members of staff, and having the two other female members in there kind of made me aware that they go through exactly the same thing. I was getting to the point where I thought, "Well maybe I'm the problem or the

way that I handle situations or react to different things might antagonise or frustrate students," but I, I became very aware that there is definitely a culture where, umm, female staff members have it a little bit harder than male staff members, as it were. (Laughs) (Jen, 6, 8 – 7, 2).

Jen felt that sharing her experience led to a greater awareness of this gendered experience in male staff members, which led to feeling more supported by male colleagues, and consequently more protected in her role:

Now staff was made aware of that [the verbal abuse], especially the male members of staff, they would like step in to situations a lot more faster than they did, you know, or they wouldn't have in the past, so there was that kind of... You know, it was nice being a female because you kind of felt like almost like somebody's got your back, you're a bit more protected, you're a bit more kind of... you know, you've got support, which is... Ultimately I think that was the thing that, that for me that was lacking, is knowing... I didn't know that I had the support from other staff members (Jen, 17, 4-14).

Beth also used the WDG to explore feeling disempowered and infantilized. She describes feeling reassured that other people felt similarly, and reassured by the revelation that her narrative was not shared by colleagues:

I tend to feel that way, like a silly little girl, pathetic thing just day-to-day in school and so it was definitely reassuring to be able to say that anyway and hear little comments, little encouragements from it and, also, that others feel

similar. I guess I showed myself that that was just a story that I'm telling myself. That's not the truth of the situation, which is always really great, isn't it, when you learn that you're telling yourself this stupid little thing that's debilitating but it's just made up. (Beth, 11, 17-27).

Beth seems to describe deriving some internal empowerment from participation in the WDG (moving from feeling like a “pathetic thing” (Beth, 11, 18) to occupying a “daring” position (Beth, 10, 27)), whilst Jen describes more external supports being put in place as a result of her participation in the WDG.

4.3.6.ii Experience of masculinity as strength/ femininity as weakness

At points, participants reflected on gender in a way that seemed to set up a dichotomy of masculinity as strength/ femininity as weakness. Beth explains how she experiences her role working with the nurture group:

Day-to-day in a school, I always feel like, “I'm a silly little girl, what am I doing here? Everyone thinks I'm really weak, I just can't cope with the big boys” and all that kind of stuff, “I've been put with a little group” and so I feel quite pathetic in a way. (Beth, 10, 15-20).

She describes feeling infantilized and marginalised with the little group. It feels as though part of her wants to be with the big boys as this will somehow validate her as able to ‘cope’. Here, Beth seems to align herself with the pupils she works with – they are all “little” – and in the process denigrates herself and her group as weak and pathetic. It seems as though she has internalised the, “macho thing” (Beth, 12,

17) that she is critical of at other points. Here, she feels pathetic being placed with a little group, those identified as in need of nurture. Perhaps on some level she (and the group/ organisation) equate the nurturing role with femininity, and thus weakness.

This is explored by Colin, who explains how he encourages pupils to adapt their behaviour towards women by altering his behaviour: "I had to educate him so I pretended that I was really weak, you know, and I took a more of a feminine role, if that makes sense." (Colin, 21, 8 – 10). Colin explains how taking part in the WDG led to him hearing the experience of a female colleague and attempting to influence male students positively:

Well it's good to listen to the women in the sense that if, for example, one, one female is being, is being treated really badly, you know, let's say by a male student, then obviously I'm gonna try to, as a role model, a male role model, to teach that child the right way about being gentle with women, you know? And also teach them that as a young man shouting at another female it makes them scared and makes them feel vulnerable. (Colin, 17, 26-32).

Whilst Colin stresses the importance he places on being respectful towards women, he also identifies the importance of strength when working with, "big lads" (Colin, 14, 14), highlighting his martial arts training (Colin, 15, 9-13), as well an ability to withstand frequent physical attacks from pupils (Colin, 22, 16-17). He also explains the importance of recruiting strong men as well as more women: "You can get more women in but make sure you've got some really strong men as well." (Colin, 14, 17).

Mark also describes participation in the WDG in terms of strength – participants are described as those willing to take a risk (“Life’s a risk; if you want things to improve you’ve gotta take risks,” (Mark, 17,15) as the group could lead to “shocking” the management (Mark, 43, 20). He describes the members of the group in terms of courage and self-sacrifice (there are no “brownie point[s]” (Mark, 18, 28) to be gained). This echoes his own approach to his role – he describes how it is necessary to be, “strong-minded” (Mark, 46, 24) and to: “soldier on”. (Mark, 47, 15)

4.3.6.iii Experience of the feminisation of emotion

Beth and Raymond refer to a male tendency to avoid emotional expression. Beth recalls a discussion in the WDG in which two female members described going in tears to management with problems, to which a male member of staff asked Beth what men were meant to do. Beth recalls:

“My instinct says, “Well, go in tears to [management]”. Then, actually, I thought that they can't for whatever reason and there is this macho thing in the school. In that sense, I felt like it was daring even for those men to offer themselves in that group” (Beth, 12, 14-19).

Beth feels that it is courageous for the men to display emotional openness, as they are perhaps pushing against the expectations of the “macho” (Beth, 12, 17) school culture, in which only women are allowed to be emotionally vulnerable. This idea is echoed by Raymond, who refers to “the man thing” (Raymond, 15, 13) which he explains could prevent men talking about how they feel in a group setting.

This links with Beth's description of the drunken communication that occurs in the pub (section 4.3.1). Beth deploys aggressive metaphors: "hammered," and "tanked up" (Beth, 29, 6-11) are suggestive of being bludgeoned or armed by alcohol – as though it both brutalizes and emboldens. Perhaps this feels safer within the context of the "macho" (Beth, 12, 17) culture, or more congruent with, "the man thing" (Raymond, 15, 13). Perhaps this is perceived as a less threatening alternative to "go[ing] in tears" to management or talking about feelings in a group setting.

In addition to this notion of emotionally inexpressive men is the idea of objectivity as the (preferable) counterpoint to emotionality. This is presented in Colin's interview, as he describes how he can choose objectivity over emotionality: "I can unload but I can also be objective. [...] And I think it's, it's, it's kind of good to be objective and see the reality" (Colin, 8, 7-12). Thus, objectivity is linked here with being in touch with reality.

4.3.6. iv Summarised response to research question

Staff appeared to experience the WDG as a space that allowing discussion of the gendered experience, and the 'culture' of the organisation.

4.3.7 WDG experienced as a means of giving voice

The WDG was seen by some participants as an effective way to amplify staff voice and communicate with management in the school, in an organisational context where communication was felt to be limited. However, the flip-side to the

amplification of staff voice was felt by some participants to be a loss of control and risk of exposure.

4.3.7.i Experience of amplifying staff voice

The WDG was particularly valued by Jen as a means of amplifying staff voice, who describes it functioning as: “a mouthpiece, [...] directly to senior members of staff,” (Jen, 2, 15), and transmitting messages effectively to senior leaders like a: “communication portal” (Jen, 3, 4).

Similarly, Beth explains that the WDG helped provide a louder voice for the things she felt (Beth, 29, 29-30), and Mark describes how the group’s impact came from uniting staff voice so that it was heard: “You’re good in numbers [...] when there’s three, four, five of ya they sit up, they take note, they take notice.” (Mark, 9,31 – 10,2).

Validating staff voice through external facilitators

As well as being perceived as an efficient and impactful way of communicating to the management team, the process of having the staff voice communicated by an outside facilitator was described as a validating experience:

It feels like you’re listened to, it feels like, you know, you’re, you’re valued, your opinion’s valued. So in... I think, umm, (sighs) because it’s sometimes you don’t have, you know, the time or the relationship or whatever to kind of talk to a senior member of staff, that just seems to, to have worked in this,

this, umm, way because it didn't come from a staff member directly, it came from an objective point of view (Jen, 11.12- 19).

This idea of the facilitator-as-messenger validating staff voice is also expressed by Steven, who uses the analogy of being in a relationship to explain how the facilitator's role was useful in validating and communicating staff ideas to the management team:

It's like if you're with your partner, umm, they've got an issue, you say, "Well why don't you do this, why don't you do that?" they don't listen to you and then one of their friends comes to say exactly the same thing that you said and they say, "Oh yeah, that's a good idea." (Steven, 35, 21-25)

One could question whether the empowerment they felt will be on-going, or whether it was reliant on the presence of the facilitators. It is not clear whether the WDG led to a permanent re-framing of staff voice in relation to the management team, or whether, in the absence of the facilitators, the staff will revert back to being the ignored partner, as envisioned by Steven. Indeed, this is voiced by Beth:

I guess that makes me think how will that go on without the group there because it doesn't feel like there's a... As outsiders and as a structured group, you two were able to be a voice to [senior leaders] that, I guess, we don't feel like we have so much as staff. [...]What's going to happen instead? (Beth , 5, 24 – 6, 4).

The unspoken

In contrast to the WDG offering a unifying, amplifying function, there was also reference to unspoken aspects of the organisation omitted from discussion. Colin admitted that the organisation had some history of racial tensions that had not been raised: “this is dynamite stuff so you’ve gotta be very careful what you’re... Yeah?” (Colin, 10, 24-26). With respect to Colin’s wishes, specific information in relation to this has been redacted and not used in the research.

4.3.7.ii Experience of the dangers of exposure

As well as there being, “dynamite stuff” (Colin, 10, 24) that could not be raised in the WDG, there was a sense that what was said could entail some personal risk. Threats were perceived as potentially coming from within the group or externally.

Dangers within-group

Beth describes the anxiety of exposure attendant to speaking openly: “You have to be very daring in a circle like that to be able to say what you actually feel, don’t you? You never know how you’ll be received” (Beth, 10, 27-30). This was similarly voiced by Steven, who spoke about how at times he had found it too difficult to speak and had remained silent instead:

“[I]n some points, some points, umm, it did feel a bit uncomfortable because it just seemed like, umm, if someone’s got their agenda obviously if it’s, if it’s personal to them and they have their own agenda of getting things off of their chest so it’s not for me to actually... It’s not actually for me to say, “Your opinion’s wrong.” (Steven, 3, 4-10)

He also describes feeling grateful for the opportunity to express himself outside of the group, again suggesting that he had a desire to speak but did not feel free to:

You pulled me aside just to ask me how I felt about the situation 'cos obviously you thought that me bringing it up in the conv... bringing it up in the actual session may cause conflict, so that was a good... [...] You could see that there was, there was a little bit of tension but it was addressed without the, umm, the group. (Steven, 2, 13-21).

At another point, Steven also felt, “a bit defensive” (Steven, 13, 34) about the way in which a process was spoken about, as his role was instrumental in the procedure. However, he describes feeling able to speak about his role in this instance and put his perspective to the group (Steven, 13, 36-7).

Mark spoke about how the risk from speaking felt like it came from within – or perhaps in the interaction between himself and the facilitator:

Oh she'd make you come out of your shell and she'd make you, umm... not say... she wouldn't make you say certain things but she'd open you up and then you, you, you just, you just release on it. And then when you'd stop and think, "I ain't got nothing else to say," she'd just say a few words and you're back on it again. She's like a petrol station; you run out of petrol and you just go and refill it again and you're off again. (Laughing) (20,1 – 20, 8).

Mark describes feeling impelled to speak; there is something vulnerable and potentially involuntary in the image of being “open[...]ed up”, particularly when

linked to the earlier image of coming out of one's shell. Mark explains that he was not made to say certain things, but there is something of the image of a clam being coaxed open, and not, 'clamming shut.' There is potentially some ambivalence in whether he wanted the, "release" of being, "open[ed] up."

There is potentially a loss of control in the description Mark offers of feeling as though he has nothing more to say and then finding himself, 'refuelled' after a few words from another person. This is suggested in the metaphorical language related to conflagration: the facilitator is a, "petrol station", refilling the speaker, the facilitator is described as: "putting fuel on that fire, [she] kept it, kept it burning." (Mark, 19, 22-23).

This could be interpreted as offering an image of the speaker being consumed in the flames, or perhaps being engaged in arson; an experience that feels potentially both exhilarating and destructive. This image recalls the phrase *inflammatory language* and perhaps hints to how it can feel dangerous to begin to speak your mind in any group, in case you lose control and find yourself burned by your words. This links to the next section which relates to the dangers of exposure that come from outside the group.

External dangers

Raymond spoke to the difficulties regarding confidentiality posed by facilitators feeding back to management: "They would know who's gonna say things, you know, at that group." (Raymond, 20,14). The repetition of the phrase "they know"

(Raymond, 20,14; 20,16; 20,21; 20, 22; 21,3) in relation to the management team being aware of who spoke highlights Raymond's lack of confidence in the ability of the facilitators to feedback anonymously, and highlights the potential dangers of speaking (and perhaps a deeper suspicion of management generally). Raymond explicitly highlights the dangers of speaking: "everybody's saying nothing, knowing that their... you know, their job could be on the line anyway." (Raymond, 6, 6-7). Raymond suggests that there is potential danger to your livelihood in raising your voice, and that this had a silencing effect on the WDG, with staff: "saying nothing," or perhaps only speaking in terms acceptable for outside consumption. Raymond feels that he is able to be one of the, "vocal ones in the school" (Raymond, 5, 25) because he is one of: "the ones who don't really, don't really, umm... are not really bothered about their jobs too much." (Raymond, 5, 29-30).

This potential risk of one's voice being heard by management was also raised by Mark, who describes a member of the management team coming into a WDG session, for the purpose of: "sneaky hearing" (Mark, 20 21-22). Mark explains how he initially thought the WDG had been set up: "to find out information about the school where [the facilitators] can go and tell the headmaster." (Mark, 23, 29-31). He explains that participation in the WDG was a necessary risk: "Life's a risk; if you want things to improve you've gotta take risks." (Mark, 18, 17-18). Colin also speaks about the ulterior motive of the WDG: "So when I say 'ulterior', you know, like a secret agenda [...] It doesn't mean it's a negative secret agenda but you can have a secret agenda." (Colin, 28, 11-13). Colin explains that the management used the

WDG to benignly survey the staff mood: “find the extra data” (Colin, 28,22), so that the school could run, “hunky-dory” (Colin, 28,4).

4.3.7.iii Summarised response to research question

The teaching staff appeared to experience the WDG as a valuable means of uniting and amplifying staff voice in a way that could be heard by management. The external facilitator role was felt to validate staff voice. The WDG was also experienced as a space where it could be dangerous to express yourself; there was potential threat from within the group, and externally in terms of how the views were perceived by management.

4.3.8 WDG experienced as allowing for change

Some participants described the WDG as leading to organisational and personal change. However, there was some disagreement with regards to changes; whether change was desirable, or whether it had gone far enough.

4.3.8.i Experience of organisational change

Jen describes how the WDG led to change as it encouraged more transparency from leadership:

You could definitely see an impact kind of straightaway as to, you know, school rules, umm, being a bit more kind of clear, umm, transparent, with decisions being made (Jen, 2, 19- 3, 3).

After each session there would be a, a feedback to senior members of staff and then kind of almost immediately there would be kind of like, umm, new things implemented or, you know, kind of rules being, umm, kind of re... re-established. (Jen, 11, 4-8)

She refers to a safeguarding issue being addressed as a result of the WDG (Jen, 13, 8), as well as transparency around exclusion processes (Jen, 13, 15). Jen also describes a, “massive change” (Jen, 9, 6) in how verbal abuse towards female staff members was reacted to by other male members of staff (Jen, 7, 4-10) and senior staff (Jen, 8, 11-12). She describes feeling more supported to deal with verbal abuse from students and describes an improvement in her relationship with male staff members in the WDG.

Beth describes how the WDG had some impact in terms of changes to the system, also mentioning the exclusion process as an example of a change in organisational practice (Beth, 5, 18-23). Steven refers to areas of change as a result of the WDG (the way in which successful job applications are communicated with staff in the context of the restructuring process (Steven, 33, 8-10); the induction process for pupils (Steven, 18, 29-34)).

Beth also referred to how people want to talk, but, “really want action as well.” (Beth, 7, 6) She describes how the WDG had both functions and wonders “what will serve that purpose now that that’s finished.” (Beth, 7, 7-8)

Beth describes that, as well as leading to change the WDG offered the hope of change to members:

Actually, I think there was a feeling of hope in it in that, when we're just chatting at breakfast, nothing will ever get achieved by that except that we will have mutual frustrations but there would be a feeling, maybe, about if you guys are going to feedback, maybe something will change. Maybe something will get done. (Beth, 18, 14-21).

Although Beth explains there were some changes, perhaps the WDG had not led to the level of change she had hoped for, possibly explaining her concern over what might replace the WDG, as well as her description of the experience as:

A flash in the pan doesn't feel like it properly but there's a thing that worked quite well in these ways and then it won't happen. What's going to happen instead? (Beth, 6, 1- 4).

Steven also expresses his belief that the WDG should have been continued, "I think it should have been an on-going thing, really and truly" (Steven, 32, 7). He cites organisational changes that occurred, explaining that it would have been helpful to have continued opportunity to share information about changes, and communicate their feelings with management.

Colin also seems focused on the future, although he appears more sanguine. His belief was that the WDG was set up so that management could, "tap into" (Colin, 9, 12) the staff mood, "to find out how things can be made right." (Colin, 9, 10). He

hopes management have gained the information they require to make positive changes for the future. He adds that there may be future changes that are partly a result of the WDG, although it will not be possible to directly attribute the changes to the group (Colin, 28, 35-6).

4.3.8.ii Experience of personal change

Beth describes how participating in the WDG facilitated personal change as it led to honest reflection in relation to roles and the organisation (Beth, 2, 12-13). She describes how initially this felt like a move away from an ordinary way of working and felt somewhat uncomfortable:

It was quite interesting to think, "This is, actually, going to be about us". [...] To think, suddenly, here are people who I don't work with every day and we're all going to be honest, that, at first, was a bit like, "Oh". (Beth, 1, 31 – 2, 5).

Mark describes how participating in the WDG led to personal reflection about the future direction of his career (Mark, 30, 12-16).

Beth and Jen describe personal changes in relation to the way they conceptualised being female within the organisation. Jen describes how she was beginning to believe that the verbal abuse she experienced was due to her being, "the problem" (Jen, 6, 17), whereas having a discussion within the WDG was "enlightening" (Jen, 7, 15) as she was able to identify commonalities in experience with other female members:

“I became very aware that there is definitely a culture where, umm, female staff members have it a little bit harder than male staff members” (Jen, 6, 19 – 7, 2).

Beth describes her feeling like a “silly little girl, pathetic thing just day-to-day in school” (Beth, 11, 17-18), and how offering this experience in the group allowed her to hear about other people’s vulnerabilities, and also to receive encouragement.

This led to her realisation that:

“That’s not the truth of the situation, which is always really great, isn’t it, when you learn that you’re telling yourself this stupid little thing that’s debilitating but it’s just made up. (Beth, 11, 23-27).

4.3.8.iii Experience of not enough change/ negative change

It is not clear that Steven felt that all changes occurring as a result of the WDG were positive. He explains that the settling in process for new students joining the school has altered; a change that he is not fully in agreement with (Steven, 9, 28-30).

Raymond strongly voices the opinion that not much changed in the organisation as a result of the WDG; it seems that he saw facilitating change as the primary function of the group.

Did anything come out of it to actually make us feel any better? Umm, I’d be very doubtful on that. (Raymond, 3, 36).

However, towards the end of the interview, Raymond refers to progress he has made with a pupil who he describes as formally uncommunicative and victimised; internalising emotions and engaging in self-destructive behaviour. Raymond then makes a link with the discussions they have with learners, and the discussions in the WDG, and describes how groups have an important role in surfacing problems and alerting management to the issues.

Like there's one learner, er, a few months ago couldn't, couldn't read, couldn't write, couldn't interact, he's now in here taking the micky out of us two. [...] it's good, 'cos he's come out of his shell, he's now confident enough to answer someone back. Whereas he'd walk down the street before, get on a bus, they'd nick his Oyster card and things like that and he'd get into a tantrum, hurt himself and that, no one else knew what was the matter, but now he can at least stick up for himself and... [...] So, you know, we have discussions in here, nothing like in the way you do your group, but yeah. So the discussion groups are always gonna be very good for, you know, bringing out the problems into the open air, then hopefully some of these do get back to the management or senior team but just next time if you could just see if you can get some answers back. (Raymond, 29, 1-20).

Although Raymond does not explicitly link the experience of the pupil to that of staff attending the WDG, he does connect the anecdote with the positive purpose of the group in airing problems.

4.3.8. iv Summarised response to research question

Staff appeared to experience the WDG as a process that enabled organisational change through amplifying staff voice and personal change through reflection. Some experienced the WDG as leading to less welcome changes, or as not leading to sufficient change.

5. Discussion

5.1 Reflection on interpretation

This section adopts an interpretative stance (the *I* of IPA), drawing primarily on psychodynamic and systemic thought. The researcher engages in the double hermeneutic, aiming to illuminate participants' experiences further with a: "dialogue with psychological theory" (Smith et al. 2012, p. 23). The grounding of the WDG is mainly psychodynamic; there is a theoretical congruence in utilising this theoretical lens. Applying psychodynamic theory in IPA research may feel controversial to some readers, potentially due to the following passage in an influential text:

"What IPA resists, certainly in the early stages, is top down interpretations, those that import theory before one has had a chance to dwell with the data and work towards disclosing meaning [...] This psychoanalytic meaning-making is not necessarily wrong but does go beyond the interpretative work of IPA and does risk severing the threads which connect the various possibilities of meaning and the account itself." (Eatough and Smith, 2008)

The phenomenological experience of the participants was empathically explored in the early stages of analysis and in the findings, before a more interpretative stance is employed here. It is recognised that through interpreting the data some connections between possibilities of meaning and the participants' accounts will be closed down; however the process of interpretation has this effect with any theoretical stance. Nolan (2011) troubles the apparent injunction against psychoanalytic theory in IPA

explaining: “My belief that, despite a body of protestations to the contrary, psychoanalysis comes less from ‘without’ and IPA comes less from ‘within’ than is popularly portrayed in IPA textbooks remains intact.” (p. 112)

Moreover, there is arguably a complementarity between the two: “Both IPA and psychodynamic psychology are from similar epistemological positions: being subjective, phenomenological and interpretative.” (Dennison, 2016, p. 124).

Psychodynamic theory has previously been utilised in research adopting an IPA methodology (Maggs, 2015; Nolan, 2011). Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) speak to the importance of pushing the interpretation in an IPA approach. It is hoped that this is achieved in this chapter, with the recognition that the interpretations offered are tentative, and that alternative interpretations are possible.

I frame my discussion of participants’ experience of the WDG by looking back to the themes drawn from the existing research literature on WDG, and by drawing on key psychoanalytic concepts that underpin the WDG model.

5.2 Functions of the WDG

5.2.1 Containment

At times, the WDG is experienced by participants as offering a grounding function, holding a space for reflective discussion and allowing emotional expression in a way that feels safe.

When the WDG is being spoken of in these terms, it brings to mind the function of the container. Containment can be understood as the process by which challenging or painful thoughts and feelings can be tolerated, and therefore made sense of

(Bion, 1967). Similarly, Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) discuss how their findings suggest that WDGs serve a containing function for participants.

Bion (1967) posits that this process begins with the initial mother-infant relationship, explaining that infants are overwhelmed by difficult emotions from events outside of their control, which cannot be processed and are therefore perceived as unwanted objects that need to be expelled (or split off and projected outward as in the paranoid-schizoid position). Bion (1967) suggests that through the containing presence of the mother, unprocessed sensory experiences can be thought about and given meaning; offered back to the infant as an opportunity for learning and further psychic growth. This shares similarities with Klein's (1932) explanation of an infant moving from the paranoid-schizoid position (dominated by split thinking – the mother is perceived of in disjointed parts in order to protect favoured parts from becoming tainted with negative experiences) to the depressive position (where thinking is more ambivalent and realistic, and the infant feels a sense of guilt and sorrow for the attack on the loved object). These ideas are further elaborated on in the introduction chapter.

Bion (1967) stated that the mother (container) required containment herself if she was to be able to provide this psychic holding function for her infant. Working in helping roles with distressed individuals (such as working as a teacher with students with SEMH needs) can lead to a worker becoming exposed to a barrage of projections (not least because the teaching role is reminiscent of the parental role, Baum, 2002), which can feel painful to acknowledge (and easier to avoid). Thus,

Hulusi and Maggs (2015) suggest the WDG can function as a container for the containers (teachers), who are constantly dealing with pupils' projections.

5.2.1 i The WDG as an experience of being seen

Klein, Bion and Winnicott present the idea of a mother who can bear the unbearable emotions an infant brings – who can tolerate the distress without becoming overwhelmed or disconnected - and can therefore help the infant to process its experiences. This sense of bearing the distress of the group is referred to when members highlight the importance of an external facilitator bearing witness to their experience. Colin viewed the external facilitator's role as one in which the very human anger of the group could be heard and learnt from: "So this stuff coming out and then you're going and reporting, you know, and then learning like, you know, why are we like this, you know, why... you know, why we're so angry." (Colin, 26, 35 – 27, 1). Beth similarly shares the, "sense of concern" she felt from facilitators (Beth, 21,22). Jen also describes how she experienced the facilitators as offering a chance to, "talk it through" and "remin[d] us that stuff is really bad and it is really hard" (Jen, 4, 12). She describes this in opposition to a tendency to adopt a defence of denial and: "normalise it all and get on with it" (Jen, 4, 12). Linked to this, Colin perceived the group as an opportunity for members to reclaim some of their humanity as: "working in this sort of place, it's easy to forget that we're human beings" (Colin, 6, 22-23). Maggs (2014) states that participants experienced a lack of containment in terms of their perception of the support they received when working with children with SEBD which was partly alleviated through participation in the

WDG. perhaps they had a similar sense of being seen within the WDG – that the stress and difficulty of their role could be acknowledged and held by the group.

5.2.1 ii The WDG experienced as a holding space

Beth and Jen both seemed to experience the WDG in a physical sense – it seems to have served a grounding and a holding function. Beth repeatedly refers to the WDG in spatial terms as a space held open for staff: “to just have that space held [...] To have that space held” (Beth, 21, 3 – 13). Jen also describes how the WDG caused her to re-appraise her experience in the organisation; the repeated phrase, “hold on”, implying that the WDG served a halting, arresting function; it is as though Jen has been pulled up short by her experience in the WDG and is re-evaluating her experience. I suggest that her description gives a sense of her being physically held firm by the group. This sense of the holding function of the group is also suggested by Beth who repeatedly emphasises the structure of the group serving an important function for her (Beth, 29, 12-13; 29, 18-19; 33, 6-7).

It is perhaps Beth’s vivid descriptions of the alternative methods of communication in school that illuminate the sense of physical containment she experiences from the WDG: “So much in passing in the corridor is just really quickly, “This isn’t normal, you know this isn’t normal, it’s okay”” (Beth, 4, 23-26). I find this an arresting image – the fleeting attempt to connect and reassure a colleague that they are ok – it is the situation (organisation) that is not normal. It is interesting that these snatches of reassurance are delivered in the corridor – a liminal space that feels open and un-

boundaried – a particularly un-containing space. She describes the, “descent into meaningless bitching” which the structure of the WDG helps prevent. Again, this is similar to Jen’s notion of being held firm. Beth’s concern about how to retain a line of communication with management after the cessation of the group also hints to the “grounding” (Beth, 21, 14) function of the group, as her metaphor depicts loss and disarray: “everything just goes out the window in the summer.” (Beth, 29, 27-8). Steven similarly highlights the spatiality of the experience, referring to the group as a patch of, “common ground” (Steven, 9, 18) in contrast to exclusionary conversations happening in corners. The way in which these participants emphasise the physicality of their experience – the group’s holding function; the experience of a held-open space as opposed to a sliver of corridor – brings to mind Bion’s (1967) notion of the container, and Winnicott’s (1964) image of the holding mother, in a particularly concrete way. Interestingly, when Beth is not experiencing the group as helpful, she uses the metaphor of a hurricane (Beth, 3, 17), which depicts an opposed experience of things becoming violently uprooted and displaced; discussed further in the section on group dynamics. This experience of the WDG offering containment in a difficult organisational context links with Maggs’ (2014) findings that a lack of organisational containment can be partly alleviated through participation in a WDG.

5.2.1 iii The WDG experienced as offering equilibrium

Colin’s metaphor of as the WDG as a drain where participants could recalibrate their emotional cups, emptying out “raw feeling,” (Colin, 25, 6-16) so there was, “room to

start filling the cup with positive vibes,” (Colin, 25, 6-16) and “finding more of an equilibrium” (Colin, 25, 6-16), arguably implies movement from a paranoid-schizoid position where everything is negative, to a position that feels more depressive – there is some sense of a balance reached. The WDG is a place where the “raw feeling” can be “got out” – this evacuation feels like a spilling out of indigestible experience that is then made sense of through the process of the group, in the way in which Bion (1967) describes the mother metabolising the overwhelming feelings of the infant.

5.2.1 iv The WDG experienced as an opportunity for sense-making

There seems to be a process described in the WDG similar to the experience of ‘alpha function’ described by Bion (1967). Bion (1962) gave the term ‘alpha-function’ to the mother’s process of containing fragmented aspects of psychic experience (beta-elements) and offering the experience back in a shape that lends meaning to the infant’s experience (alpha elements). This relationship allows the contained to develop her capacity for thinking or to regain a capacity for thinking that had been temporarily overwhelmed due to unbearable anxiety (Grinberg, Sor & Tabak de Bianchedi, 1993). Similar to the alpha function, at times the WDG is described as a space where evacuation of emotion can be held by the group and then processed in a way that allows further sense-making to take place. Linked to this, Hulusi (2007) explains that through the process of the WDG, teachers were supported to process and give meaning to their experiences as NQTs.

Beth speaks explicitly to the movement from the release of affect (the beta-elements) to the processing of experience in a way promotes sense-making and growth (alpha-elements). She describes how, after the necessary venting, “reasoning” can occur; she explains that the act of speaking to others in a structured process leads you to be: “articulate and that helps the thought process” (Beth, 33, 6-12). Jen also describes how the opportunity to express difficult feelings afforded by the containment of the group allowed the (psychic) space to be open to solutions, again potentially alluding to a move towards integrating experiences and sense-making (Jen, 11, 1). Beth also describes how within the school she does not feel that she is able to express challenges and incomprehension: “There's no space to just go, “Yes, but it is really hard and I don't understand.” (Beth, 21, 10-12).

Elfer (2012) found that the WDG offered participants opportunities to learn to tolerate uncertainty and discomfort rather than rush to positivity, and to continue thinking even when there were no immediate solutions. This seems similar to Beth's suggestion that the WDG was a place where uncertainty and feelings of overwhelm were accepted.

Elfer suggests that participants of the WDG felt psychologically held and so were able to tolerate ‘negative’ issues and to process difficult issues where previously, he suggests, there was a rush to unthinking positivity. This seems to link with Jen's experience of the ‘holding’ group, that seems to allow her to move away from a state of denial or avoidance with regard to the verbal abuse she was experiencing. She explains that although she had, “just blocked [the verbal abuse] out,” (Jen, 8, 4)

it is experienced as, “really shocking,” (Jen, 8, 1) by other group members, with Jen recalling male staff members in particular saying, “Well hold on, that’s not what’s supposed to happen,” (Jen, 8, 7-8). The group offers an alternative perspective, and re-punctuates her experience in a way that feels containing. The group allows her to make sense of her experience in an alternative way to “block[ing]” (Jen, 8,4) the abuse out – a process of denial or avoidance which is the absence of thought.

Perhaps the supportive space of the group helped her to feel safe enough to lower her defences and think about that which was “really shocking” (Jen, 8, 1) to others.

The experience of Beth and Jen links to Hulusi’s (2007) finding that teachers’ unmanageable concerns were psychologically held by the WDG allowing a process of giving meaning to experiences.

5.2.2 Venting

Linked to the function of containment is that of catharsis or ‘venting’. Maggs (2014) explains that the WDG had a cathartic effect for some, as the group was used as an opportunity to ‘vent’ and reduce occupational stress. Catharsis can be understood as the discharge of affect connected to a traumatic experience; allowing the release of difficult emotions which may have been repressed. Catharsis is arguably a more transformative process than venting, as such I am adopting the term venting as opposed to catharsis to describe the experience of participants in this research.

Mark experiences the group as a safe within which it feels acceptable to vent – how it felt like he was able to deflate his metaphorical balloon with, “the right person” (Mark, 42, 13). The WDG feels like a healthy forum within which to “express

yourself" (Mark, 42, 10) and avoid bursting in a more uncontrolled way. Maggs (2014) similarly describes how the WDG offered participants affective release.

Mark describes the affective "release" (Mark, 20, 4) offered by the WDG, and describes the way the facilitator encouraged discussion: "Yeah, she kept putting fuel on that fire, kept it, kept it burning." (Mark, 19, 23). Mark's metaphors involve petrol stations, alcohol and fires – a potentially explosive combination. It is possible that Mark is describing a destructive, uncontrolled, uncontained experience (akin to Beth's metaphor of the hurricane). However, Mark does seem to be extolling the skills of the facilitator, repeating the phrase: "It was good" four times (Mark, 20, 17) and referring to her as an "inspiration" (Mark, 51, 20). Perhaps the WDG did feel ablaze with emotion at times, in a way that did feel exhilarating and potentially incendiary – but perhaps that was still a healthy and important exploration of the emotional responses stirred up in the teaching relationship.

Indeed, Hulusi and Maggs (2015) argue that teachers require containment through a medium such as a WDG precisely if they are to be able to contain the powerful emotions stirred up in pupils through learning. Viewed in this light, it is possible that Mark's experience of the group is one in which potentially inherently incendiary feelings are given enough oxygen to burn in a healthy way, as opposed to being smothered; smouldering and releasing potentially toxic fumes. Perhaps the experience of the WDG as ablaze at times could be linked to this idea that the emotions associated with the relationships at the heart of teaching were allowed to be given voice as opposed to being repressed or denied, as Bibby (2018) suggests is the common response in schools.

Indeed, Jackson (2015) describes how WDG can function as containers where potentially taboo feelings and thoughts can be brought to the surface where they can be thought about.

Elfer (2012) does not describe the cathartic effect of the WDG, however he suggests that the opportunity to bring difficult emotions to a sanctioned place possibly allowed a release of affect, potentially reducing the likelihood of managers confiding inappropriately. It is interesting to consider Beth's description of the alternative mode for communication – the pub – in this light. It feels as though drinking with colleague might have a similar function of release, but that it does not necessarily feel safe (as is suggested by the violence of the adjectives (“tanked up”, “hammered” (Beth, 29, 7), and that no learning can come of it – you are left feeling disorientated – “what’s going on?” (Beth, 29, 11). It also does not feel like a “mechanism” for communication, but anti-communication – drinking until you cannot remember what you have said to someone, and them to you, erases any possibility of connection leading to growth. There are also implications around infringing professional boundaries, as suggested by Elfer (2012).

5.2.3 Reflection

Maggs (2014) explains that participants valued the protected reflective space, with some suggesting that this did not exist elsewhere. Similarly, Mark explains that this reflective space was not available within the wider school. The school's debriefing meetings are described by Mark as, “automatic” (Mark, 41, 21) - “you're listening

but you're not listening." (Mark, 49, 30). Beth and Jen similarly experienced the WDG as a reflective space to think about the organisation, and their role within that.

Maggs' describes how participants suggested that the reflective space of the WDG reduced feelings of isolation. Elfer (2012) similarly explains that participants valued protecting time for personal reflection and mutual support. Jones (2003) also highlights how hospice nurses valued the reflective space of the WDG.

Beth's experience of the WDG seems to be of a space in which it is possible to go beneath the surface and authentically making sense of their experience; implied by Beth when she describes how the WDG offered a chance to reflect on what their days had: "actually been like" (Beth, 7, 12-13). Beth refers to the: "the story of management" (Beth, 8, 13), a defensive tale staff utilise as a coping mechanism, however, the WDG offered a chance to burrow beneath the dominant narrative; it was: "less about telling a story about the school but more about our own experiences." (Beth, 9, 4-6). This chance to share authentic experience seems to connect with Maggs' suggestion that the reflective function of the WDG served to reduce a sense of isolation. The participants' experience of the reflective space of the WDG seems unique within the context of the provision. This is similar to Hulusi's (2007) comment that participants indicated that the WDG was the first time they had experienced help with thinking outside of line-management procedures.

5.2.4 Communication

Elfer (2012) describes how the participants valued the WDG as the opportunity to communicate with others. Consequently, this led to a reduction in competition

between individual nurseries, alongside a sense of comfort in realising that individuals from different nurseries also experience difficulties. Maggs (2014) explains that the teachers felt listened to within the WDG, which proved both emotionally containing and also improved practice; supporting shared experiences and collaborative working. Jones (2003) describes how participants valued the space to share commonalities of experience and explore difference.

As well as a space for grounding, holding, and safely expressing affect, it also felt as though the WDG offered connection across fractures in the organisation. Raymond and Mark in particular feel their department is separated from the main school, both physically and metaphorically - from the minds of management ("Out of sight, out of mind" Raymond, 11, 26). Mark describes how the experience of the WDG means: "you don't feel like an alien" (Mark, 1, 20). Similarly, Beth and Steven also describe feeling spatially and emotionally distanced from their colleagues. Beth's linguistic slip depicts staff, "bitching behind corridors" (Beth, 31, 9) an image that depicts hostile colleagues hiding in the fabric of the school. Steven similarly references: "people like talking in corners" (Steven, 9, 13) conversations from which he is excluded.

Participants' feelings of disconnection potentially links to the defensive process of splitting at an organisational level, explored more fully below. However, it is useful to identify the way in which the containing function of the group potentially allowed colleagues to move away from a fragmented (paranoid-schizoid) position to a more integrated (depressive) position, in which they were able to make connections with

their colleagues. Halton (1994) explains that by containing projections until they can be thought about, a consultant can promote integration and co-operation between groups – a shift from the paranoid-schizoid to depressive position. Thus, in Elfer's (2012) research the containing function of the facilitator served to reduce rivalry and promote mutual understanding and collaboration, in Maggs (2014) it arguably allowed teachers to feel safe to share aspects of their experience and cooperate in their work. Similarly, in this research, the participants seemed to experience the WDG as a space in which the alienation and fractures sometimes felt within the organisation could perhaps be temporarily overcome.

5.3 Difficulties with the Work Discussion Group

5.3.1 Experiencing the WDG: Within group issues

Maggs' (2014) describes how group dynamics were experienced as problematic by some members of the WDG. Participants perceived some group members as not participating fully. Maggs (2014) draws on Bion's (1961) concept of 'basic assumption mentality' to discuss the way members participated, or seemed not to participate, in the group. Bion's (1961) concept can also be usefully applied to explore the experience of participants in this WDG. At times, the WDG was not experienced by members as functioning in a helpful way. Bion (1961) explains that any group requires a task; in the case of the WDG the espoused task was the discussion of experience, leading to experiential learning through a consideration of the feelings evoked in the worker by the task (Bradley & Rustin, 2008). Bion (1961) explains that in any group there is an on-going tension between the task (work) and

the group's basic assumption: "The basic assumption is that people come together for purposes of preserving the group." (Bion, 1961, p.63). Any group is therefore continually switching between being in a task-oriented mode (work group) and a mode focused on ensuring group cohesion, or survival. This is elaborated further below:

As 'group animals' we struggle with our need for individuality and the exercise of individual responsibility and our need for belonging. This challenge is coupled with an awareness of relentless tension between work requirements (the psychological work of 'learning from experience') and valency for the 'basic assumptions' (a kind of tropism toward togetherness, fight/flight, and pairing). (Lipgar & Pines, 2003, p. 21).

The 'basic assumption' (Ba) modes were described by Bion as 'fight/flight' (BaF), 'pairing' (BaP) and 'dependency' (BaD). It is argued that all three types are used unconsciously by groups as defences against the kind of psychotic anxiety identified by Klein (1932) (anxiety linked to the paranoid-schizoid position); fear of annihilation and fragmentation. Bion explicitly links to Kleinian thought by stating that the group's processes for defending against these anxieties are: "characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position" (1961, p. 162), utilising mechanisms of splitting and projection. In the Ba group, the group's survival is paramount, with individual needs rendered secondary.

5.3.1 i The WDG experienced as a basic assumption group: Fight/flight

Group mentality is the unanimous expression of the will of the group, contributed to by the individual in ways of which he is unaware, influencing him disagreeably whenever he thinks or behaves in a manner at variance with the basic assumption. It is thus a machinery of intercommunication that is designed to ensure that group life is in accordance with the basic assumptions. (Bion, 1961, p.65)

There were times in which the group seemed to go in a direction that caused discomfort, perhaps hinting to Ba functioning. Beth explains that at points the group discussion seemed to gather momentum of its own: “you get other people’s negative on top of your negative and it feels like we create this big hurricane of stuff that’s not happening.” (Beth, 3, 13-17). The hurricane metaphor contrasts with the language she frequently uses to illustrate the group’s containing function. The length of her sentence feels almost breathless and suggestive of the experience of being in a group that is becoming increasingly het up. Furthermore, Beth speaks to the creative power of group life – in, “creat[ing] this big hurricane of stuff” (Beth, 3, 17), suggesting at points the group generated a situation that objectively appears to make their situation worse; one might wonder why a group brought together with the purpose of encouraging understanding and improving work life would seek to make it more difficult. Perhaps this is indicative of an incidence of the group in BaF mentality. In a BaF group, it is as if the group has met in order to battle or to flee an external peril; a mechanism that defends against the anxieties posed by the task. In

this case, possibly the group would rather engage in battling the external threat – everything that is wrong with the school outside the group - as a means to avoid engaging with their own authentic experience about what it is like for them personally to work within the organisation. Moylan (1994) explains that when working with clients who have experienced a lot of pain (such as the young people in the SEMH provision) staff become subject to painful projections. Rather than dealing with what has been projected into them (as it is incredibly painful) staff will rather avoid attempts at understanding and deal with unprocessed emotion by themselves resorting to a process of projective identification to be rid of unwanted feelings. In this instance, it could be suggested that staff are avoiding the task of thinking about the emotional experience of working with distressed young people by unthinkingly projecting the negative experienced out into the split-off organisation, which then becomes dizzyingly, overwhelmingly bad.

This could be seen as an unconscious group process as it seems irrational; the group's behaviour at this point appears to go against what Beth at least feels to be the reality of the situation, and, for her, appears to make their position feel even worse. Being at odds with the group does seem to influence Beth disagreeably, in the way Bion (1961) suggests. It also avoids the task of engaging with their experience. Indeed, Beth names her ambivalence regarding the task explicitly: "To think, suddenly, [...] we're all going to be honest, that, at first, was a bit like, "Oh"." (eth, 2, 2-5).

Mark also refers to the power of the united group: “You’re good in numbers [...] when there’s three, four, five of ya they sit up, they take note, they take notice.” (Mark, 9, 31 – 10,2). Perhaps this speaks to the difficulty of being heard in a hierarchical organisation – you have to unite to make any impact. However, there is potentially something of the BaF mentality present; something of the aggressive us/ them position which seems to split the (“good”) group apart from the (bad) management who are disinterested and need to be roused. The repetition of “they” possibly emphasises this us/ them split, and the varied verbs potentially gives the image of the group sending the management into scurrying action. Again, this could be seen as a Ba position because this suggests an experience of a primed group facing outward at a threatening management - group survival, as opposed to the task, appears to be the focus.

5.3.1 ii Experiences of within-group threat: silencing members

Maggs (2014) explores participants’ experiences of silent group members through Bion’s (1961) concept of Ba functioning; he suggests that the silent members might be understood as feeling uncontained and overwhelmed by anxiety and unable to contribute to the group; dependent on other members to think for them. Indeed as Bion (1961) explains, group mentality can influence the individual disagreeably at times when her thoughts do not align with the basic assumption. We can perhaps similarly see this at points in the participants’ experience when they describe the dangers of speaking in the group: “You have to be very daring in a circle like that to be able to say what you actually feel, don’t you? You never know how you’ll be

received.” (Beth, 10, 27-30). Steven speaks about feeling “uncomfortable” but unable to speak (Steven, 3, 4-10); he feels grateful to facilitators for allowing him to speak with them outside of the group as: “bringing it up in the actual session may cause conflict” (Steven, 2, 13). Steven explicitly speaks to his fear of causing conflict within the group by not aligning with the group’s predominant narrative. Colin also refers to the off-limit topic of race in the organisation – the “dynamite stuff,” (Colin, 10, 24) that was never alluded to in the WDG (which he nonetheless felt compelled to share with the interviewer). Perhaps this could be thought of as a psycho-social experience; the interplay of the unconscious power of groups and the social pressures that impinge upon individuals. These are Steven’s colleagues– his desire not to disgruntle them also has a perfectly rational, conscious basis. Beth too, may be speaking to the fact that her professional position may be influenced according to “how [she will] be received” (Beth, 10, 30). Addressing issues related to race *could* feel like dynamite – something that a group would perhaps consciously feel safer avoiding.

Raymond also seemed to feel silenced by the group process as he apparently chose not to ask about the lack of feedback on management’s reaction to the themes generated by the group. It is an issue that seems to have been paramount for Raymond; he repeatedly references the lack of feedback. Furthermore, Raymond describes himself as one of the, “vocal ones in the school” (Raymond , 5, 25) in a privileged position as he is not so concerned about his job (Raymond, 5, 30). It seems significant then that he felt unable to raise this, especially as this was a

curious omission; as Beth asks the interviewer: “Why did none of us pick up on that? Was it intentional?” (Beth, 23, 19-20). Significantly, it was not intentional on the part of the facilitators, which possibly further illuminates something about the group’s Ba functioning (discussed below). Thus, the facilitators were not aware of this omission, and none of the other interviewees claim to have been aware. However Raymond was aware, yet he did not speak. Perhaps he felt a pressure not to draw attention to something that the group might not welcome, possibly responding to a pressure to maintain a group fantasy about the position of the facilitators and their potential as benevolent alternative leaders to management (discussed below).

5.3.1 iii Experiences of roles within the group: valency

Maggs (2014) describes how some members of the WDG were perceived by some of participants as overbearing and dismissive. Maggs (2014) discusses how this behaviour could be indicative of underlying anxiety within the group, with the overbearing members attempting to deny anxieties associated with uncertainty through a display of denial and omnipotence (Klein, 1948). Bion (1961) introduces the concept of valency to explain an individual’s distinct tendency (or pre-disposition) to unconsciously adopt a particular role in a Ba group – for example, adopting the ‘overbearing’ role of as illustrated by Maggs (perhaps providing a function for the rest of the group who can become focussed on the member thereby avoiding the difficulty of the task).

Similarly to Maggs’ (2014) discussion of the overbearing group member, Beth describes how one member used the WDG to: “tell the story of management.”

(Beth, 8, 13). Beth describes how the group would: “be like, “Okay, go on, do it again, we all know this”. I felt like he was telling you guys more rather than us sharing with each other.” (Beth, 9, 6-10). Steven also refers to this group member who he describes as whisking the group along with his “tunnel vision” (Steven, 10, 21). This possibly suggests that this particular individual has a valency for taking up the anti-management position. Interestingly the group collectively let him tell the facilitators the ‘story’, perhaps upholding the BaF defence of attacking an external threat as a defence against attending to the task. The performance function also raises questions as to how facilitators are positioned by the group (discussed below). This individual’s narrative is experienced differently by Steven (perhaps due to his own tendency to somewhat align himself with the management) who feels uncomfortable about the discussion. His discomfort recalls Beth’s experience of the group as a hurricane. Perhaps these are moments in which they feel personally most at variance with the group’s Ba mode, but unable to assert their difference for fear of the group response.

Linked to this feeling of reduced personal autonomy is Mark’s experience of feeling impelled to speak: “Oh she’d make you come out of your shell and [...] she wouldn’t make you say certain things but she’d open you up and then you, [...] you just release on it” (Mark, 20, 8). The image of being opened up feels somewhat involuntary and potentially intrusive (like he cannot ‘clam shut’ but must be prised from his ‘shell’.) Furthermore, Mark again suggests a loss of control as he describes thinking that he has nothing left to say, before finding himself, “back on it again.”

(Mark, 20, 8). The “it” that Mark twice refers to here is curious; possibly the, “it” is the mechanism that the BaF group has mobilised in a defensive manoeuvre. Perhaps here Mark is finding himself taking up a position on behalf of the group; finding himself behaving in ways both surprising and possibly somewhat intrusive.

5.4 The role of the facilitators

In Maggs’ (2014) research the WDG was facilitated by an external facilitator – the researcher – in conjunction with the internal Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). Maggs (2014) considers that the advantages of joint facilitation were in the combination of the external facilitator’s perspective on issues relating to SEBD within the school, as well as his psychological knowledge employed both in reflecting on SEBD and in managing the group dynamics. Conversely, Maggs (2014) highlights the difficulties of split leadership suggesting a reduced sense of containment and increased uncertainty regarding the boundaries of roles. Maggs (2014) does not make a link to Bion’s (1961) *basic assumption – pairing* position, however, this seems relevant to his research, and is a useful lens through which to explore the experiences of participants in this current research.

5.4.1 The WDG experienced as a basic assumption group: dependency/ pairing

In the BaD position, the group behaves as if it has formed in order to be maintained by a dependable leader. At times, it felt as though the group may have adopted a BaD position, positioning the facilitators as “good” leaders in comparison with the school’s management. Furthermore, it is possible that the facilitators unwittingly colluded with this position through their actions (which illustrates the potential

power of group life, and could be useful information for other professionals delivering WDGs in educational settings). Consideration needs to be given to a whole systems perspective, as the groups' experience of the facilitators is likely to have been impacted by the way the group, and individual members, perceived the wider organisation (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

5.4.2 Facilitators – experienced as the preferred partner?

It is possible that in the act of containing the group members, facilitators were viewed (either consciously or unconsciously) in favourable comparison with management. For example, group members seem to share a sense of feeling cared for by facilitators: Beth valued the “sense of concern,” she felt from the facilitators (Beth, 21, 22), whilst Colin highlighted the value of a space where members could consider one another, “not just in [...] a working mode but as people,” (Colin, 6, 17-18).

There was a sense participants did not feel they had this experience of being heard by management. Jen explicitly compares her experience of being heard within the group with the difficulty in the organisation: “It feels like you’re listened to [in the WDG], it feels like, you know, you’re, you’re valued, your opinion’s valued. [...] because it’s sometimes you don’t have, you know, the time or the relationship or whatever to kind of talk to a senior member of staff. (Jen, 11, 12- 17). Jen refers to the relationship as a barrier to communication. This links with Steven’s interesting simile of school staff being like the ignored partner: “it’s like if you’re with your partner, umm, they’ve got an issue, [...] they don’t listen to you and then one of their

friends comes to say exactly the same thing that you said and they say, “Oh yeah, that’s a good idea.”” (Steven, 35, 21-25). Although this was delivered in a humorous manner, there is perhaps the indication of dysfunction and frustration in the communication between staff and leadership. The idea of a dysfunctional relationship belied by humour is also alluded to by Raymond and Beth who recount the, “funny comments” (Raymond, 20, 8) and “public male banter” (Beth, 26, 13) made by a member of leadership regarding the WDG.

The following explanation by Rao (2013), on the place of containment in the organisational context, is helpful in illuminating the experience of participants:

“Non-listening and non-communicating” exchanges happen in organisations where both managers and workers complain about fragmented communication and lack of information and containment. [...] Unless the management of an organisation is able to provide a clear definition of its purpose and a reliable container for the inevitably ambivalent feelings towards authority and the organisational task, the problems of the organisation can get expressed through the individual and interpersonal difficulties of its members. Rao (2013, p. 3).

5.4.3 The experience of transactions across the group boundary

There were organisational changes enacted due to the process of facilitators feeding back thematically to leadership; communicating across the group’s boundary into the wider school system. Indeed, for some members of the group, this was a valuable component of the WDG. Miller and Rice (1975) explain that any open

system, if it is to survive, has to communicate across its boundary and engage in intergroup transactions: “because the task for which they have met is real, they have to relate themselves to reality to perform it.” (1975, p. 55). However, there is a tension, as intergroup transactions – opening up the boundaries – has the potential of weakening (or destroying) the integrity of the group: “on the one hand, safety lies in the preservation of its own boundary at all costs and the avoidance of transactions across it; on the other hand, survival depends upon the conduct of transactions with the environment and risk of destruction.” (p. 55).

This ambivalence seems apparent in interviewees’ responses. Whilst there is a recognition that systemic change was valued and desired (with Jen stating there was, “massive change” (Jen, 9, 6) and Raymond strongly stating that there was not sufficient change) there is a sense that allowing communications to leave the group felt potentially dangerous. Beth mentions that some participants may have had misgivings about communications with management: “I know some of them were really uncomfortable with that initially, weren’t they?” (Beth, 5, 2-3), and Raymond describes how some people would not have been able to speak freely for fear of losing their jobs (Raymond, 5, 35). Mark also describes how he felt a member of management was attempting to get a, “sneaky hearing” (Mark, 20, 28) when entering a WDG session. Mark and Raymond appear to feel suspicious of management crossing the boundaries into the group in an uninvited way. However, they both suggest that a formalised management presence would have been useful (Mark, 22, 30-31; Raymond, 26, 3). There appears to be ambivalence around

ensuring the safety of group members from potential dangers of exposure, whilst desiring communication to leave the group for systemic change. Perhaps Raymond and Mark are alluding to the way in which the boundary of the group was managed by the facilitators, which will be addressed below.

5.4.4 Colluding with “non-listening and non-communicating”? (Rao, 2013, p.3).

With the purpose of reflecting on what can be learned from participants' experience to inform practice, it is useful to consider the interaction between the facilitators and the wider organisation. Jones (2003) highlights potential difficulties arising from a lack of organisational understanding of the purpose of the group leading to feelings of umbrage from colleagues. Jones (2003) therefore stresses the importance of collaborating with non-group members within the organisation, as well as the importance of gaining understanding and commitment from the wider organisation.

Reflecting on the experience of participants in this current research, it is perhaps possible that facilitators - although intending to make positive change for members - actually stepped into the role of the desired group leaders of the BaD group, thereby colluding with the paranoid-schizoid group (and possibly, wider organisation) and upholding the 'non-communicating' nature of the system. Although the facilitators were trying to improve communication within the organisation, by feeding back themes (which was desired by the group and leadership, and is suggested by Jackson, 2008), it is not clear that this served to improve long-term communication. Indeed, Beth asks: “how will that [communication] go on without the group there... As outsiders and as a structured group, you two were able to be a voice to [senior

leaders] that, I guess, we don't feel like we have so much as staff. [...]What's going to happen instead? (Beth, 5, 24 – 6,4). It is almost as though the facilitators became the alternative leaders of the split off 'good' group within the school, taking messages from the group to the leadership. But in doing so, the basic positioning of the actors within the system remained unchanged: the staff could still only be heard when being voiced by a validating external voice – an alternative leader. Perhaps this collusion with a dependent group did little to encourage staff to take up the power of their own voice, nor to encourage organisational leaders to do more to listen. Indeed, this appears not to align with the collaborative position as suggested by Jones (2003).

Facilitators may have mirrored the non-communication of the management through neglecting to feedback management's response to the group's themes. Raymond explains: "it would've been better if we'd have had some sort of dialogue back" (Raymond, 7, 26). In this way, the facilitators were reproducing the fractured communication that existed within the wider organisation within the WDG itself. This may have been problematic on a systemic level, because it potentially severed a cycle of genuine communication between the management and the group, which could have led to more lasting change after the WDG finished. As this oversight was not intentional on the part of the facilitators, and was apparently unnoticed by the group (except Raymond) it is perhaps suggestive of an unconscious process, with the facilitators being drawn into the group's BaD functioning. Beth expresses incredulity at this omission: "Actually, often the group would just start and you guys would

remind what you had fed back and we would just go on. That's interesting. Why did none of us pick up on that? Was that intentional?" (Beth, 23, 18-20). Beth reflects that this lack of response from the group may have been because members did not expect anything beyond being heard. She wonders whether this ties into a sense of overall apathy within the organisation. (Beth, 23, 5-9). It may have been both of those things, as well as being an example of the group – and facilitators - in the grips of irrational, unthinking paranoid-schizoid position, with the group behaving as if it has formed in order to be maintained by a dependable leader (BaD). In this case, the facilitators are drawn into the position of the, 'good' leaders, but find themselves unconsciously replicating the patterns of un-communication between leader and groups that is seen in the wider organisation. Additionally, it is possible that the paranoid-schizoid position of the group served to make the external school seem all the more threatening. Klein (1932) explains how projecting threatening aspects of the self onto the external world makes it appear more malign - perhaps evidenced by fears about feeding back themes - management's "secret agenda" (Colin, 28, 11) and Mark's sense that management were attempting to obtain a, "sneaky hearing" (Mark, 20, 28). Furthermore, by colluding with a Ba group, the facilitators cannot help members face, rather than avoid, anxiety-provoking issues brought forth by work. However, it should be reiterated, that groups move between Ba and work group functions, so this does not mean that the WDG was always in a dysfunctional position in relation to the organisation, but is a possible area for consideration for professionals running WDGs in schools.

5.4.5 Implications for EP practice

Hulusi (2007) notes that the functions undertaken by consultees in his WDG were similar to the consultant activities outlined by Farouk (2004), and considers whether the consultant role could be taken on by a group member. He concludes, as does Maggs (2014) that the dynamic aspects of the group cannot be managed without a practitioner versed in psychodynamic thinking. This research perhaps usefully highlights how those with psychodynamically informed training can also be drawn into unhelpful positions as a result of group life.

Bolton and Roberts (1994) explain that groups like WDG can remove the 'toxins' that staff are exposed to in their work when helping distressed individuals. However, they stress the need for facilitators to ensure that the group is being used to process 'toxins' attributable to the nature of the work (e.g. the teaching and learning relationship) rather than used to process toxins attributable to problems with the organisation as a whole. Indeed, they highlight the common tendency for consultants to get drawn into a "management gap," (p. 160) warning of the, "covert invitation to take up an unofficial management role."

The pull towards getting caught up in unconscious group and institutional processes, using groups to meet one's own needs rather than to further the task for which the group exists, is universal. Only if the consultants can disentangle themselves sufficiently from these processes to think, be aware of their failings without too much guilt or need to blame others, and maintain a reflective attitude towards their own feelings and behaviour as

well as toward the experience of the group members, can the group develop a similarly thoughtful, non-judgmental, self-scanning stance. (Bolton & Roberts, 1994, p. 165).

Although this refers to consultants delivering psychodynamically oriented support groups, it has relevance. In reflecting on the participants' experiences of the WDG there is perhaps a lesson to be mindful of the dynamics within the group and organisation as a whole, and to be continually self-reflective (and forgiving) of becoming caught up in unconscious processes.

5.5 Social defences

Elfer (2012), Hulusi (2007) and Maggs (2014) interpret findings from a psychodynamic perspective. Elfer (2012) and Maggs (2014) suggest that a WDG is valuable as it illuminates unhelpful social defences that can be used by group members. It is possible that these social defences can also be viewed as part of the experience of the WDG for participants in this research.

5.5.1 Splitting and projective identification

Elfer (2012) and Maggs (2014) describe how the issues raised in the WDG illuminated the tendency for participants to utilise the defence of splitting and the associated process of projection (Klein, 1948).

The experience of the WDG is that of a space where it is possible to bring an experience of what it feels like to be within the organisation. This is also similarly explored in the research of Elfer (2012) and Maggs (2014). In this research, participants' experience of the WDG as a space allowing for reflection, and for a

consideration of the gendered experience, means that processes of splitting and projective identification occurring within the organisation were brought to the WDG, forming part of their experience of the group. Below is a tentative interpretation of participants' experiences of the WDG as a space for a consideration of gendered experience, utilising the psychodynamic concepts used by Elfer (2012) and Maggs (2014), whilst rooting the interpretation in the participants' experiences.

Beth powerfully describes the way the experience of the WDG allowed her a space to describe her feelings within the organisation, how she feels like: "a silly little girl, pathetic thing just day-to-day in school." (Beth, 11, 17-18). Later she explains: "I always feel like, "I'm a silly little girl, what am I doing here? Everyone thinks I'm really weak, I just can't cope with the big boys" [...] "I've been put with a little group" and so I feel quite pathetic in a way. (Beth, 10, 15-20). Her experience feels distressing because it describes both vulnerability and shame – evidenced through the de-humanisation of, "thing" and the self-blame she attributes to her inability to cope - feeling pathetic. She explicitly links this sense of worthlessness to size and gender - she is a little girl, who cannot be with big boys. She has: "been put with a little group" (Beth, 10, 19) (the nurture group) a role which underscores her sense of inferiority. At other points, Beth is critical of the "macho" (Beth, 12, 17) culture in school, but here she seems to align with a value system that prioritises big boys over little girls – strength over weakness. It is interesting that nurturing is located within a split-off group, perhaps implicitly suggesting that nurture is less mainstream (although one suspects that pupils within a provision for SEMH needs all might

require this). Beth also speaks to an experience of feeling physically separated:

“with the little crazy kids tucked away in a corner of the school and it doesn’t feel like that’s what I want... Why have I been put in that place?” (Beth, 14, 24- 27).

“Tucked away in a corner” again suggests a sense of shame, as though she feels the organisation is hiding her away. This image also evokes the shaming practice of the ‘dunce’s corner.’

Projective identification is a psychoanalytic concept which refers to an unconscious interpersonal interaction in which those receiving a projection react to it as if the feeling is their own. The countertransference refers to the state of mind in which another’s experiences are felt as one’s own. Halton (1994) explains that within organisations, staff can find themselves acting out the countertransference resulting from projections they identify with: “the staff of an adolescent unit may begin to relate to each other as if they were adolescents themselves” (p. 16). In the countertransference, perhaps Beth feels the experience of her nurture group - marginalised, ‘little’, put away from the bigger boys (Beth refers to feeling liminal within the organisation), who are pathetic and full of shame according to a system that ranks individuals according to a “macho” (12, 17) code.

However, it is not just Beth who experiences this countertransference. Jen also explains that her experience with the WDG led to a realisation that: “there is definitely a culture where, umm, female staff members have it a little bit harder than male staff members.” (Jen, 6, 19 – 7, 2). Indeed, the experience of the nurture group boys could only happen within a “culture” (Jen, 6, 19) in which the denigration

of potential vulnerability is permitted. Jen explains that she was subject to “shocking” (8, 1) verbal abuse that was unchallenged before the WDG. She explains that since the WDG male staff members: “step in to situations a lot more faster than they did [...] You know, it was nice being a female because you kind of felt like almost like somebody’s got your back, you’re a bit more protected[...] Ultimately I think that was the thing that, that for me that was lacking, is knowing... I didn’t know that I had the support from other staff members (Jen, 17, 4-14). Jen describes feeling more protected as a result of her experience within the WDG, suggesting that she previously felt open to attack – now “somebody’s got [her] back,” a vivid image of embodied protection alluding to the sense of threat she previously experienced. Her slip from, “is knowing... was knowing” perhaps alludes to an on-going lack of certainty regarding support.

The experience of continuing precariousness of the feminine within the organisation is potentially referred to by Colin who explains his strategy for working with a student: “I had to educate him so I pretended that I was really weak, you know, and I took a more of a feminine role.” (Colin, 21, 8 – 10), he also describes how women are viewed (by pupils) as the, “weaker vessel” (Colin, 22, 18), and that he acts as a “male role model, to teach that child the right way about being gentle with women.” (Colin, 17,30). In this way, the female is equated with weakness, and a need for gentle handling. However, the problem seems to be located in the women, as opposed to the culture that persecutes vulnerability - they are essentialised as vulnerable and in need of special care. This could therefore be seen as an example of

splitting; vulnerability is arguably split off and located in the female staff members. Furthermore, we can see a parallel process whereby strength is perhaps split off and located in male figures. Physical strength seems to be valued by Colin; he identifies the importance of strength when working with the “big lads” (Colin, 14, 14) and highlighting his martial arts training (Colin, 15, 9-13). He also explains the importance of recruiting strong men as well as more women: “You can get more women in but make sure you’ve got some really strong men as well, you know, we need both.” (Colin, 14, 17). Locating physical strength with masculinity is also suggested through a described tendency for emotional expression to be located within women (described as the “man thing” (Raymond, 15,13) or “macho” culture (Beth, 12, 17) , whilst being simultaneously denigrated as less objective.

5.5.2 Denial and avoidance

Maggs’ (2014) describes how participants were able to bring their experience of an organisational: “culture of coping,” (p. 116) to the WDG; with teachers not seeking support from colleagues due to fears of repercussions. This was felt by some participants to lead to ‘burnout’. Maggs (2014) suggests that this culture can be seen as evidence of psychological denial – where the individual diminishes or entirely refutes the source of anxiety (Freud, 1961).

There seems to be a similar process of denial of weakness in the experience of participants in this research. This is perhaps evident in the way that the topic of mental health seems to be experienced by participants as difficult to think about, or conversely passionately disowned. Jen alludes to the difficulty outsiders seem to

have in addressing the SEMH needs of the pupils (Jen, 10, 9), while Mark responds to the subject of mental health day with an imagined conversation that feels incredibly persecutory: “What’s wrong with you then? What, you can’t hack the job? You should go and see your doctor” (Mark, 47, 33). For Mark at least, there seems to be a persecutory phantasy that any vulnerability will be punished by the organisation.

Furthermore, this seems similar to Maggs’ (2014) finding that teachers did not feel able to seek support due to fears of repercussions. Similarly, Jen’s experience of the WDG is a space that allowed her to bring her experience and receive support from her colleagues, which she had not previously experienced. Rather, she had been harbouring the idea that her difficulties were solely due to problems with her own practice. Sharing experiences with others led her to realise that there were commonalities of experiences shared with others in the school. Following her participation in the WDG, Jen explains that it feels: “nice being a female because you kind of felt like almost like somebody’s got your back, you’re a bit more protected, you’re a bit more kind of... you know, you’ve got support, which is... Ultimately I think that was the thing that, that for me that was lacking, is knowing... I didn’t know that I had the support from other staff members (Jen, 17, 4-14).

Similarly, Elfer (2012) explains that participants displayed processes of denial and avoidance through an expressed pressure to: “be positive for fear of a spiral of despair,” (p. 135). The managers reflected on the tendency to remain relentlessly positive to avoid unmanageable negative emotion. This denial of negative emotional responses is perhaps also present in the experience of participants in this current

research, in which emotion located within the feminine (split off so it can be denied by the wider organisation). Indeed, the men cannot “go in tears [to management]” (Beth, 12,14), emotion is not a “man thing” (Raymond, 15,13) and is sometimes denigrated (it is not “objective” (Colin, 7, 36), it is better to be removed, or distanced (Steven, 10, 27).

Furthermore, Elfer (2012) highlights the way in which the managers used the WDG to think about difficult emotional issues and effect on practice, rather than avoiding issues. For participants in this research there seems a sense that the experience of the WDG allowed for difficult experiences within the organisation to be named, and to begin to be reflected upon, in a way that felt particularly helpful to the women in the group. Indeed, Jen speaks about how the experience of sharing and reflecting on her experience in the organisation led to a powerful realisation regarding the destructive narrative she had been harbouring:

I tend to feel that way, like a silly little girl, pathetic thing just day-to-day in school and so it was definitely reassuring to be able to say that anyway and hear little comments, little encouragements from it and, also, that others feel similar. I guess I showed myself that that was just a story that I'm telling myself. That's not the truth of the situation, which is always really great, isn't it, when you learn that you're telling yourself this stupid little thing that's debilitating but it's just made up. (Beth, 11, 17-27).

5.6 Implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs)

This research usefully highlights the valued aspects, and more difficult aspects, of a WDG as experienced by participants. Through interpreting the experience of participants, it is suggested that EPs might consider utilising a WDG to potentially offer a containing space for staff, promoting connection and reflection. This is arguably a valuable focus for EP work given the current context relating to teacher retention and the increasing focus on Mental Health and emotional wellbeing in educational settings. This research also emphasises some of the difficulties in facilitating the WDG; challenges involved in managing group dynamics and the boundary of the group with management and the organisation as a whole. Thus, EPs may wish to consider the discussion around managing basic assumption groups, and in taking a systems psychodynamic perspective to understand the processes possibly occurring within a WDG embedded in its specific organisational context.

5.6.1. Locating the research within the current context

5.6.1. i WDG supporting teaching staff

The introductory chapter outlined how the theoretical literature makes a case for the use of WDGs in education, with the suggested implication that WDGs could help support teachers in their role, potentially going some way to supporting the retention of teachers in the profession. It was also highlighted that other helping professions involving 'emotional labour' (e.g. social workers, psychologists) have mandatory supervision to ensure the wellbeing of both practitioner and client (Hawkins and Shohet, 2012; Hulusi, 2007; Westergaard and Bainbridge, 2014). It was

suggested that teaching staff suffer the lack of the supportive function that supervision offers, potentially leading to burn-out (Steel, 2001; Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes and Salovey, 2010; Ellis, 2012) and loss of teachers to the profession (Westergaard and Bainbridge, 2014), or to teachers coping through denying their emotional responses (Kinman, Wray & Strange, 2011). A 2019 report suggests job related stress is higher among teachers than other professionals (Worth & Van den Brande, 2019).

This research suggests that the WDG was experienced, at times, as a space where emotional expression was allowable. The containing, venting, reflecting, and connecting functions of the WDG as described in the discussion section arguably provided a supportive function for participants, potentially going some way to address the problems of job related stress. Thus, through a process of theoretical transferability, EPs could consider a WDG as a tool to provide a supportive function for staff. Furthermore, the experience of the WDG as a space allowing for reflection is in line with DFES strategy to address workload through providing teachers with a space to reflect on classroom management (DFES, 2005). Westergaard and Bainbridge (2014) explain that teachers have few opportunities to reflect on practice. As such, the WDG model potentially provides space not often available to staff. Indeed, participants in this research experienced the reflective space as valuable within an organisation that did not have much space for reflection. It is likely that this lack of a reflective space is similarly experienced in educational establishments across the UK (Hulasi and Maggs, 2015; Jackson, 2015; Tucker, 2015).

5.6.1. ii Mental Health and emotional wellbeing in schools and the possible place for WDGs

The green paper issue (Department of Health and Department for Education, 2017) highlights the need for a whole school approach to supporting emotional wellbeing. The need to embed well-being throughout the culture of the school as well as in CPD is similarly highlighted in a House of Commons Education and Health Committee (2017) report. As explained above, the WDG was experienced as participants as a space which went some way to support emotional wellbeing.

A Public Health England report (2015) states that staff require opportunities to: “reflect on and to take actions to enhance their own wellbeing,” (p. 16). In this research it seems that the WDG was experienced as a space in which aspects of the organisation, and their role within it, could be reflected upon in a containing space. This arguably supported the wellbeing of the female members of the group in particular who were able to share and reflect on their difficult experiences of being female within the organisation. These participants were then able to go on to experience themselves differently within the organisation, which aligns with the recommendations of the Public Health England report (2015) cited above. Through a process of theoretical transferability, EPs could consider a WDG as a tool to support the sharing of experiences leading to reflection and increased understanding of the organisation and roles within it.

5.6.1. iii WDG and systemic work

Work Discussion Groups are congruent with systemic working and in terms of being a proactive and preventative intervention (British Psychological Society, 2015;

Health and Care Professions Council, 2015). The participants in this research experienced the WDG as a means of giving voice, and as allowing for change within the organisation. Thus, through a process of theoretical transferability, EPs could consider a WDG as a systemic intervention in an organisation that could support communication when communication seems difficult. However, this research also highlights potential challenges for the facilitator in managing the boundary of a WDG (discussed further below).

5.6.2 Managing group dynamics (a cautionary tale for EPs)

Practitioners considering WDG facilitation should reflect on their own capacity as a practitioner with regard to their competency to practice psychodynamically. There are possible ethical implications in adopting a psychodynamically rooted process without appropriate training. When working in a complex, anxiety-provoking organisation, it is also appropriate to consider dual facilitation as this helps facilitators to identify and resist processes of unhelpful projective identification. Moreover, this research highlights the way in which group processes can become difficult to navigate even for those with psychodynamically informed training. As described in the discussion, it is possible that the facilitators in this case became drawn into a “management gap,” (Bolton and Roberts, 1994 p. 160) perhaps falling foul of a, “covert invitation to take up an unofficial management role.” (Bolton and Roberts, 1994 p. 160).

Bolton and Roberts (1994) explain that groups like WDG can remove the ‘toxins’ that staff are exposed to in their work when helping distressed individuals. However,

they stress the need for facilitators to ensure that the group is being used to process ‘toxins’ attributable to the nature of the work (e.g. the teaching and learning relationship) rather than used to process toxins attributable to problems with the organisation as a whole. As described in the discussion, it is possible that the facilitators unconsciously colluded in a process of “non-listening and non-communicating”, which arguably reduced the containing function of the group as well as reducing opportunities for systemic change through severing a link of communication between management and the group. This is discussed further in section 5.4.5.

5.6.3 Theoretical transferability

Theoretical transferability is appropriate for an IPA study (Smith et al., 2012). Given the complexity involved in theoretical transferability, professional judgement should be used by professionals to determine the extent to which the findings of this research are relevant to their work and transferability appropriate. Potential guiding questions for facilitators of a WDG based on the findings of this research can be found below. These guiding questions are not exhaustive but rather offered as an additional tool for facilitators adopting a WDG within an educational setting. Furthermore, given the ‘live’ essence of the work, a mechanised approach to this way of working is antithetical. Thus, these guiding questions should be considered in conjunction with suitable psychodynamic training and supervision.

5.6.4 Possible guiding questions for WDG facilitators

Experience of	Possible guiding questions for WDG facilitators as arising from this research
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participants in this WDG	
Containment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does this space offer containment through boundaries? (e.g. consistency in terms of day, time, room, facilitators, group membership, commitment to keeping to timings). - Does the facilitator/s contain the group through the process of reverie? Are they able to hold the group and mirror their experiences in a way that is felt to be validating and attuned? - Have the boundaries of the group been thoughtfully contracted? Will the themes leave the system to be reported to management, or will the themes stay within the group? What is gained/ lost? Will this be reviewed periodically to ensure the function of the group still fulfils the needs of the group?
Group dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the group's relationship to the wider organisation? Does it feel integrated or split off? Might the group be in BA fight/ flight mode? - Have the boundaries of the group been thoughtfully contracted? Will the themes leave the system/ be reported to management, or will the themes stay within the group? What is gained/ lost? Will this be reviewed periodically to ensure the function of the group still fulfils the needs of the group? - Are defences against anxiety (e.g. splitting, projection, denial, avoidance) apparent within the WDG discussion? - Do particular members take up positions/ roles within the group?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does the facilitator/s feel they are being positioned? Might they be fulfilling the function of alternative leader for a BA dependency group? - What countertransference is the facilitator subject to? Do they feel angry, rejected, worthless, ambivalent, treasured, responsible, etc.? What might that suggest about the group/ organisation? - What is the group's approach to punctuality/ attendance? What might this reflect about the group or organisation?
Organisational defences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What anxieties might this organisation hold for society? - What might the likely anxieties be within this system? (What painful reality might be defended against?) - Are defences against anxiety (e.g. splitting, projection, denial, avoidance) apparent within the WDG discussion? - Do particular members take up positions/ roles? - Does the facilitator feel able to think? Does the thinking feel confused or blocked? - Does the facilitator feel ambivalent or over-involved in relation to the group, or over-/under- identified with particular group members? - What countertransference is the facilitator subject to? Do they feel angry, rejected, worthless, ambivalent, treasured, responsible, etc.? What might that suggest about the group/ organisation?

5.7 Project review

5.7.1 Strengths

This research sought to explore how staff experienced a WDG. By using IPA this was achieved. A particular strength of IPA is that as well as being able to find common experiences, differences can also be explored, fostering richness in meaning.

The use of unstructured interviews allowed for participants to somewhat structure the interview and bring a sense of their experience, helping to ensure that findings were not predetermined. What was brought by participants formed the development of themes and resulting implications, which I believe offered something unique to the literature.

Pushing the interpretation led to some unique insights into the experience of WDGs for staff. The inclusion of a systemic and psychodynamic lens, as well as a consideration of the abject subject, led to an exploration of this WDG in a way that is unique to the literature.

Reflecting on the process throughout meant that my own (conscious) experience and motivations were made apparent to the reader. It is hoped that this increased transparency.

5.7.2 Limitations and further reflections

The methodology of IPA does not allow generalisations to be made. The guiding questions above are not intended to do this, but offer some possible questions from the findings that may help theoretical transferability.

Burnham (2013) devised the acronym of the social GRRRAACCEEESSS to encourage reflexivity in social interactions. The social GRRRAACCEEESSS (Burnham, 2013) have developed over time and currently represent: Gender, Geography, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Class, Culture, Ethnicity, Education, Employment, Sexuality, Sexual Orientation, Spirituality.

Reflecting on this, I believe that gender may have influenced how participants interacted with me, particularly as this was a theme that surfaced. I wondered whether it may have been easier for female participants to raise these issues with a woman who they may have felt had more of an insider status. Thus my positioning as a woman likely led to the eventual inclusion of gender as a key part of the discussion.

It is likely that other social GRRRAACCEEESSS were present during the interviews (and thus the analysis and interpretation) that I was unaware of. This lack of awareness on my part is significant as it likely reflects a blindness that I hold as a result of my own privilege. I am conscious in particular that as a white female (in a professional role) interviewing participants from other ethnic backgrounds with different educational experiences, it is likely that race and class were also aspects of

difference present in the interviews. I am unable to identify specifically how it affected the interviews and overall research but this does not negate the possibility that it did. It is notable that race and class do not feature in this thesis. This speaks to the role of the researcher in co-constructing meaning (Heidegger, 1962/1927; Smith et al., 2012).

It is likely that my dual roles (as facilitator and researcher) affected what participants brought to interview. Within IPA, insider status is viewed as advantageous as opposed to problematic (Smith et al., 2012). I felt that my position of trainee EP was relevant, and related to the GRRRAACCEESSS in terms of how my age, ability and employment status were perceived by participants. I believe it led to a different power dynamic than had the interviewer been my EP colleague. I felt that I may have occupied a middle ground; separate to participants' fellow staff members and therefore potentially 'objective', or 'safe' to share to, but potentially less intimidating than a fully trained 'professional psychologist'. Furthermore, I tended to take up more of an observer position in the WDG whilst my colleague did more of the facilitation, which again supported this sense I had of occupying the middle ground. I also wondered whether participants would also feel more able to be critical of the experience of the WDG as I was still in the position of a trainee and therefore potentially less responsible for the group than my colleague. I also feel that the fact that neither my colleague or I were known to the staff in any other capacity (we were not EPs for the provision) may have allowed for participants to offer feedback without the sense that they may be impacting on us professionally.

At times, it felt as if I was re-experiencing the WDG within the interview. I was constantly reminded of the notion of the hermeneutic circle: “to understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts” (Smith et al., 2012, p 27). It felt almost as though the process of reflecting on the WDG was continuing the group’s work (part of the whole). This perhaps links with Smith et al.’s idea that the IPA interview encourages a reflective, phenomenological attitude which encourages “hot cognition” (2012, p. 33) - sense-making on the part of the participant – and getting “experience close” (2012, p.33). The hermeneutic circle also speaks to the difficulty of teasing apart the experience of the WDG from the experience of the organisation, as addressed above. Perhaps this enmeshment between the experience of the WDG and the organisation meant that insider status was helpful.

I was inevitably influenced by the theoretical grounding of my doctoral course in systemic and psychodynamic theory; this affected the lens through which I interpreted the data, which could have been viewed alternatively through different theoretical lenses.

It is possible that the use of psychodynamic approaches to interpret findings strays further from an IPA methodology than some readers feel comfortable with. I feel that this section pushes the interpretation in order to gain original insights.

I am left wondering about the unconscious processes that have driven my own interactions with participants and their data. This perhaps points to a potential area of future research; a psychosocial study of WDGs.

5.7.3 Further areas for research

To elaborate on points made above, future areas for research are:

- Further research into WDGs within educational settings as the research remains scarce, as is evidenced in the systematic literature review.

Furthermore, the methodology of IPA does not allow generalisations to be made, although theoretical transferability is possible. A stronger evidence base would help inform EPs and other professionals regarding the suitability of utilising a WDG. Furthermore, research that was explanatory, as opposed to exploratory in focus would also support further understanding of WDGs.
- A psychosocial approach to the exploration of WDGs. A psychosocial approach to the phenomenon of WDGs has not yet been undertaken. There seems to be a theoretical congruence between this methodology and the theoretical grounding of WDGs. Furthermore, when undertaking this research I felt that it might be useful for future research in this area to reflect on the unconscious processes underpinning the interactions between the researcher and participants/ data.
- Research into WDGs from alternative research positions. All of the research to date into WDGs has come from a qualitative standpoint. Quantitative research may help to provide further insight into WDGs. Furthermore, it may support EPs to make a decision regarding whether or not to utilise WDGs in a climate prioritising evidence based research, in which certain types of evidence can be seen as more powerful than others.

5.8 Conclusion

This research builds on the limited literature exploring staff experiences of WDGs. At times, the WDG was experienced by staff as a grounding, connecting space, allowing for emotional expression and reflection. The WDG was also experienced as a space in which the experience of being within the organisation could be explored. The experience of being given voice was valued, and seemed to be perceived as leading to some organisational change.

However, at times, the WDG was not experienced by members as functioning in a helpful way. Group dynamics were sometimes experienced as uncomfortable or unhelpful, and participants also experienced some ambivalence relating to the facilitation process, interaction with management and the permeability of the group boundary.

The discussion interpreted participants' experiences through the lens of systemic and psychodynamic theory. As addressed in the discussion section, the difficulty of disentangling the experience of the WDG from that of the organisation meant that at some points, the experience of the WDG was also associated with the experience of working within an organisation for pupils with identified SEMH needs.

This research suggests that, through a process of theoretical transferability, EPs could utilise WDGs as a tool to provide a containing, connecting, reflective function for staff. This seems particularly relevant given the current educational context; a climate in which the teaching profession is experiencing difficulties with retention,

alongside teachers reportedly experiencing higher levels of job related stress than other professions(Worth & Van den Brande, 2019), together with an increasing focus within schools on mental health and emotional wellbeing.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Reflections on separating theoretical and empirical literature

My decision to separate out these types of publication is not based on my value judgement but rather my deference to academic precedence (with an acknowledgement that I am upholding power imbalances inherent in academia in terms of respecting the discourse of empiricism and therefore what is considered to be 'knowledge'). The reader is directed to the methodology section for a thorough discussion of my epistemological position. I would like to highlight that my decision to place this information in a separate section is not in response to a crude division between this literature being subjective (and lesser) and the empirical research being objective (and thus worthier).

Appendix B: Search results for literature review question and whether the results meet the inclusion criteria.

Included results are highlighted for reference.

Search item	Database/s	Frequency of duplication	Included ?	Inclusion criteria not met
de Rementeria, A. (2011). How the use of transference and countertransference, particularly in parent-infant psychotherapy, can inform the work of an education or childcare practitioner. <i>Psychodynamic Practice: Individuals, Groups And Organisations</i> , 17(1), 41-56.	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research
Elfer, P. (2012). Emotion in nursery work: Work discussion as a model of critical professional reflection. <i>Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development</i> , 32(2), 129-141. doi:10.1080/09575146.2012.6	PsychINFO Education Source ERIC	3	Yes	

97877				
Hulusi, H. M., & Maggs, P. (2015). Containing the containers: Work Discussion Group supervision for teachers—A psychodynamic approach. <i>Educational and Child Psychology, 32(3), 30-40.</i>	PsychINFO Education Source	2	No	Not empirical research
Hulusi, H. M. (2007). A narrative analytic exploration of the effects of work discussion groups on the concerns raised by newly qualified secondary school teachers.	British Library EThOS	1	Yes	
Jackson, E. (2008). The development of work discussion groups in educational settings. <i>Journal of Child Psychotherapy, 34(1), 62-82.</i> doi:10.1080/00754170801900 191	PsycINFO PEP archive Education Source ERIC	4	No	Not primary research.
Lando, B. Z., & Schneider, B. H. (1997). Intellectual contributions and mutual support among developmentally advanced	Education Source	1	No	Different understandi ng of the search

<p>children in homogeneous and heterogeneous work/discussion groups.</p> <p><i>Gifted Child Quarterly</i>, 41(2), 44-57.</p> <p>doi:10.1177/001698629704100206</p>				terms used.
<p>Lubbe, T. (2014). Some considerations of the role of food in community work. <i>Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in South Africa</i>, 22(1), 70-91.</p>	PsycINFO	1	No	The researched group has not taken place within a setting for Early Years, Primary or Secondary school-aged pupils.
<p>Maggs, P. C. (2014). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of primary school teachers' experiences of work discussion groups in their</p>	British Library EThOS	1	Yes	

work with children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.				
McLoughlin, C. (2010). Concentric circles of containment: A psychodynamic contribution to working in pupil referral units. <i>Journal of Child Psychotherapy</i> , 36(3), 225-239. doi:10.1080/0075417X.2010.524772	PsycINFO PEP archive Education Source ERIC	4	No	Not empirical research.
Moore, M. (2018). Work discussion as a method for supporting peripatetic teachers of vulnerable children. <i>Infant Observation</i> , 21(1), 88–97. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698036.2018.1542832	PsycINFO	1	No	Not empirical research.
Shulman, G., & Green, V. (2008). Editorial. <i>Journal of Child Psychotherapy</i> , 34(1), 1-4. doi:10.1080/00754170801945097	Education Source	1	No	Not empirical research.

Appendix C: Search results for expanded literature search and whether the results meet the inclusion criteria.

Search result	Databases	Frequency of duplication	Included?	Inclusion criteria not met
Bailey, H. (2015). "I want my social worker" One child's struggles to find an available maternal figure: Reflections from a peer supervision group. <i>Journal of Social Work Practice, 29</i> (2), 223–229.	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research
Brunnauer, A., & Laux, G. (2012). Driving ability under sertindole. <i>Pharmacopsychiatry, 45</i> (2), 47–50.	PsychINFO	1	No	Different understanding of search terms (WDG = Wiener Determinationsgerät).
Chan, W. C., Law, J., & Seliske, P. (2012). Bayesian spatial methods for small-area injury analysis: a study of	PsychINFO	1	No	Different understanding of search terms (WDG =

<p>geographical variation of falls in older people in the Wellington -Dufferine-Guelph health region of Ontario, Canada. <i>Injury Prevention</i>, 18(5), 303–308.</p>				Wellington - Dufferine- Guelph).
<p>de Rementeria, A. (2011). How the use of transference and countertransference, particularly in parent-infant psychotherapy, can inform the work of an education or childcare practitioner. <i>Psychodynamic Practice: Individuals, Groups And Organisations</i>, 17(1), 41-56.</p>	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research
<p>Elfer, P. (2012). Emotion in nursery work: Work discussion as a model of critical professional reflection. <i>Early Years: An International Journal of Research and</i></p>	PsychINFO Education Source ERIC	3	Yes	

<p><i>Development</i>, 32(2), 129-141.</p> <p>doi:10.1080/09575146.2012.697877</p>				
<p>Emanuel, L. (1999). From individual to institution: How the psychotherapy of a mentally handicapped girl has informed my consultation work in a school.</p> <p><i>Psychoanalytic Inquiry</i>, 19(2), 185–200.</p>	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research
<p>Golding, V. (1987). A work discussion group with student psychiatric nurses.</p> <p><i>Educational and Child Psychology</i>, 4(3–4), 131–136.</p>	PsychINFO	1	Yes	Not empirical research
<p>Greco, A. (2018). ‘in the kitchen and around the table’: On the way towards commensal (mutually beneficial) relationships – a project encouraging</p>	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research

autonomy in young people with learning disabilities. <i>Infant Observation.</i>				
Harris, M. (2011). <i>Chapter One: The Tavistock Training and Philosophy (1977).</i>	PEP archive	1	No	Not empirical research
Hughes, L. (2012). Review of The reflection process in casework supervision. <i>Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17(2), 212–217.</i>	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research
Hulusi, H. M. (2007). A narrative analytic exploration of the effects of work discussion groups on the concerns raised by newly qualified secondary school teachers.	British Library EThOS	1	Yes	
Hulusi, H. M., & Maggs, P. (2015). Containing the containers: Work Discussion Group supervision for teachers—A psychodynamic	PsychINFO Education Source	2	No	Not empirical research

approach. <i>Educational and Child Psychology</i> , 32(3), 30–40.				
Jackson, E., & Klauber, T. (2018). New developments: Training in the facilitation of work discussion groups. <i>Infant Observation</i> , 21(2), 241–260.	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research
Jackson, E. (2008). The development of work discussion groups in educational settings. <i>Journal of Child Psychotherapy</i> , 34(1), 62-82. doi:10.1080/00754170801900191	PsycINFO PEP archive Education Source ERIC	4	No	Not primary research.
Jackson, E. (2005). Developing observation skills in school settings: The importance and impact of “work	PsychINFO Education Source	2	No	Not empirical research

discussion groups” for staff. <i>Infant Observation</i> , 8(1), 5–17.				
Jackson, E. (2002). Mental health in schools: What about the staff? <i>Journal of Child Psychotherapy</i> , 28(2), 126–146.	PsychINFO PEP archive Education Source	3	No	Not empirical research
Jones, A. (2003). Some benefits experienced by hospice nurses from group clinical supervision. <i>European Journal of Cancer Care</i> , 12(3), 224–232	PsychINFO	1	Yes	
Kraemer, S. (2018). Narrative matters: Stop running and start thinking. <i>Child and Adolescent Mental Health</i> .	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research
Lando, B. Z., & Schneider, B. H. (1997). Intellectual contributions and mutual support	Education Source	1	No	Different understanding of the search terms used.

<p>among developmentally advanced children in homogeneous and heterogeneous work/discussion groups. <i>Gifted Child Quarterly</i>, 41(2), 44- 57. doi:10.1177/0016986 29704100206</p>				
<p>Lisman-Pieczanski, N., & Blessing, D. (2011). News from Washington DC: Infant and young child observation program. <i>Infant Observation</i>, 14(2), 224–226.</p>	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research
<p>Lubbe, T. (2014). Some considerations of the role of food in community work. <i>Psycho-Analytic Psychotherapy in South Africa</i>, 22(1),</p>	PsycINFO	1	No	Not empirical research

70–91.				
Maggs, P. C. (2014). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of primary school teachers' experiences of work discussion groups in their work with children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.	British Library EThOS	1	Yes	
McLoughlin, C. (2010). Concentric circles of containment: A psychodynamic contribution to working in pupil referral units. <i>Journal of Child Psychotherapy</i> , 36(3), 225-239. doi:10.1080/0075417	PsycINFO PEP archive Education Source ERIC	4	No	Not empirical research.

X.2010.524772				
Miller, L. (2011). Editorial. <i>Infant Observation</i> , 14(1), 1–4.	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research
Moore, M. (2018). Work discussion as a method for supporting peripatetic teachers of vulnerable children. <i>Infant Observation</i> , 21(1), 88–97.	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research
Murray, J. (2011). Review of Work discussion: Learning from reflective practice in work with children and families. <i>Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy</i> , 25(1), 118–122.	PsychINFO	1	No	Not empirical research
Novakovic, A., Francis, K., Clark, J., & Craig, L. (2010). Community meetings on acute psychiatric wards: A therapeutic intervention or a meaningless exercise? <i>Mental</i>	PsychINFO	1	Yes	

<i>Health Review Journal</i> , 15(3), 45–53.				
O’Sullivan, N. (2018). Creating space to think and feel in child protection social work; a psychodynamic intervention. <i>Journal of Social Work Practice</i> .	PsychINFO	1	Yes	
Park, C. W., & Smith, D. C. (1989). Product-level choice: A top-down or bottom-up process? <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i> , 16(3), 289–299.	PsychINFO	1	No	Different understanding of search terms (WDG = well defined goals).
Serpieri, S. A., & Giusti, P. (2007). Education “on the Road”: Working with Adolescent Dropouts in an Experimental Project. <i>International Journal on School Disaffection</i> , 5(1), 11–15.	ERIC	1	No	Not empirical research.
Shulman, G., & Green, V.	Education	1	No	Not empirical

(2008). Editorial. <i>Journal of Child Psychotherapy, 34(1), 1-4.</i> doi:10.1080/0075417 0801945097	Source			research.
Simon, B., & Pettigrew, T. F. (1990). Social identity and perceived group homogeneity: Evidence for the ingroup homogeneity effect. <i>European Journal of Social Psychology, 20(4), 269– 286.</i>	PsychINFO	1	No	Different understanding of search terms (WDG = well defined group).
St. Clair, J. S. (2013). The witnessing of disenfranchised grief: Reliability and validity. <i>Journal of Nursing Measurement, 21(3), 401– 414.</i>	PsychINFO	1	No	Different understanding of search terms (WDG = witnessing of disenfranchised grief).
Trelles-Fishman, A. (2019). Towards emotional	Education Source	1	No	Not empirical research.

<p>containment for staff and patients: developing a Work Discussion group for play specialists in a paediatric ward. <i>Journal of Child Psychotherapy</i>, 45(1), 4–17.</p>				
<p>Trowell, J., Davids, Z., Miles, G., Shmueli, A., & Paton, A. (2008). Developing healthy mental health professionals: What can we learn from trainees? <i>Infant Observation</i>, 11(3), 333–343.</p>	PsychINFO	1	Yes	
<p>Warman, A., & Jackson, E. (2007). Recruiting and retaining children and families' social workers: The potential of work discussion groups. <i>Journal of Social Work Practice</i>, 21(1), 35–48.</p>	PsychINFO	1	Yes	

Appendix D: CASP Qualitative Checklist

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2018). CASP Qualitative Checklist. [online] Available at:

<https://casp-uk.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CASP-Qualitative-Checklist-2018.pdf>.

Accessed: Date Accessed 30.03.2019

Appendix E: Traffic Light System

0-10	Red	The methodology appears not to be sufficiently rigorous or there is not enough evidence of rigour in the paper. Paper excluded from review.
11-20	Amber	The methodology appears to be sufficiently rigorous to include with caveats.
21-30	Green	The methodology demonstrates a high level of rigour.

Appendix F: Coding of papers using CASP (first systematic review)

Elfer, P. (2012). Emotion in nursery work: Work discussion as a model of critical professional reflection. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 32(2), 129-141.

CASP subsection	Score	Methodological issues noted
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims	1	Not explicitly stated
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	3	Yes – the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and subjective experiences of research participants.
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	2	The researcher does not explicitly justify the research design, but it appears appropriate to the aims. Not clear why GT and not another methodology.
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	2	No discussion over recruitment other than they were managers that expressed an interest in WDG – how this prior interest affects the study is not discussed. Furthermore, no discussion over why a third of the participants in the WDG chose not to participate in interviews how this influences findings.
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	1	The researcher does not justify the methods of data collection. No information regarding the questions used in individual interviews (although this is provided for the questions guiding thematic analysis of the transcripts of the WDGs and diaries). No discussion of saturation of data which is relevant to GT.
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	1	The role of the researcher and their potential influence during the formulation of questions, data collection, sample recruitment etc. is not addressed. This is significant given that the

		researchers ran the WDG that they then evaluated. Furthermore, the presence of a Senior Local Education advisor (who commissioned the WDG0 being present in the WDG and involved in the evaluation potentially influences the findings.
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	1	This is not discussed.
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	1	It is not clear how themes were derived from the data. There is no presentation of the process by which the data was selected from the original sample. Furthermore, there is a limited amount of data presented to support findings. It is not clear how the particular guiding questions for the research diaries were developed. There is little reflexivity around this process.
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	2	Not really a discussion both for and against researcher's findings.
10. How valuable is the research?	3	This felt insightful and as though it offered something unique to the literature.
TOTAL		17

Hulusi, H. M. (2007). A narrative analytic exploration of the effects of work discussion groups on the concerns raised by newly qualified secondary school teachers.

CASP subsection	Score	Methodological issues noted
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims	3	Yes. Relevance and importance is explained.
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	3	Yes – the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and subjective experiences of research participants.

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	3	Yes – the researcher has justified the research design, explaining why it was chosen over other designs.
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	3	The researcher explains use of semi-structured interviews convincingly.
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	2	Saturation of data is not discussed.
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	2	Perhaps more could have been said regarding the power relationships present between participants and facilitator, given their respective roles as inexperienced NQTs and Senior EP. Although this was done in relation to ‘gatekeeping’ as the facilitator and possibly shutting down communication – this was a discussion in relation to the limitations of a phased approach to the WDG, rather than pertaining to the construction of the ‘knowledge’ within the research process. Again this was alluded to in the methodology as Hulusi takes a social constructionist stance, but less specifically with regard to this specific research – e.g. there were no examples of where this may have occurred.
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	2	Yes – but see above in relation to reflexivity and power.
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	2	Yes. Perhaps the researcher could further address potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation.
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	2	The discussion section perhaps felt underdeveloped and brief in comparison with the findings.

10. How valuable is the research?	2	Perhaps more valuable in terms of an exploration of the validity and usefulness of narrative analysis as a means of evaluating EP practice. I felt as though there was more to be drawn out regarding the change in the participants' narratives and the role of the WDG in this (however, this may also be as this is my area of focus).
TOTAL	24	

Maggs, P. C. (2014). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of primary school teachers' experiences of work discussion groups in their work with children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

CASP subsection	Score	Methodological issues noted
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims	2	Perhaps the inclusion of aims of the researchers' PEP made the aims more confused. But relevance and importance is explained.
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	3	Yes – the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and subjective experiences of research participants.
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	3	Yes –the researcher has justified the research design, explaining why it was chosen over other designs.
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	2	Yes. Although lacking in discussion regarding who choose to take part. It seems that out of a potential 14 participants taking part in the WDG five took part in the research. It may be that they were the only ones that fit the inclusion criteria but this is not made clear.
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	1	The researcher explains use of semi-structured interviews convincingly. There are no examples of a topic guide provided so it is difficult for the reader to evaluate the

		trustworthiness of the data collection. No discussion regarding saturation of data.
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	2	The researcher was also the EP facilitating the group supervision being researched and the school's EP. Furthermore, the researcher jointly facilitated the WDG with the school SENCO This clearly has implications for the participants' responses in the interview and it seems that this should be considered.
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	2	Reference made to informed consent and appropriate ethical guidelines. There is little reflection on the power relationships at play in the research and the ethical ramifications around individuals discussing their profession and the potential difficulties that might attend this (it is their livelihood and there may be some risk – real or perceived – in reflecting upon their practice).
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	1	There is an in-depth description of the analysis process, however, the process by which the researcher moved from raw data to initial coding is unclear. The researcher could do more to reflect on their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation – this is particularly important given that the researcher was also the facilitator.
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	2	There is a limited discussion of the evidence for and against the researcher's conclusions. Findings are discussed in relation to the original research question and credibility is addressed.
10. How valuable is the research?	2	The researcher could do more to identify new areas where research is necessary .
TOTAL: 20		

Appendix G: Coding of papers using CASP and MMAT (expanded systematic review)

Jones, A. (2003). Some benefits experienced by hospice nurses from group clinical supervision. *European Journal of Cancer Care*, 12(3), 224–232

Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (2018 version)

Screening questions (for all types)	Yes	No	Can't tell
Are there clear research questions?	✓ There are clear research aims provided.		
Do the collected data allow address the research question? <i>Further appraisal may be not feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.</i>	✓		
5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?			✓Unclear whether the quantitative element was able to fulfil evaluative research aim given the small study.
5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?			✓Little information on how qualitative and quantitative phases, results, and data were integrated

5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?			✓The integration is supposed to illustrate the added value of conducting a mixed methods study rather than having two separate studies. In this research it seems more like the lack of integration (or the difficulty in managing the inconsistencies) provides some added value.
5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	✓The inconsistencies form an interesting aspect of the discussion		
5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?			✓Unclear whether the quantitative element was able to fulfil evaluative research aim given the small study.

Novakovic, A., Francis, K., Clark, J., & Craig, L. (2010). Community meetings on acute psychiatric wards: A therapeutic intervention or a meaningless exercise? *Mental Health Review Journal*, 15(3), 45–53.

CASP subsection	Score	Methodological issues noted
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims	0	No - the aims of the WDG project that is described in the paper outlined, but not the aims of the research into this project.
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	0	It is not clear whether qualitative research is appropriate because the researcher has not outlined the research goal. E.g. is the goal of the research to examine the subjective experience of staff taking part in the project? Or is it to evaluate the factors deemed most helpful by participants? Or to evaluate the impact on their practice? Etc.
Is it worth continuing? No		
Total = 0		

Trowell, J., Davids, Z., Miles, G., Shmueli, A., & Paton, A. (2008). Developing healthy mental health professionals: What can we learn from trainees? *Infant Observation*, 11(3), 333–343.

Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (2018 version)

Screening questions (for all types)	Yes	No	Can't tell
Are there clear research questions?	✓There is an aim (although not succinct): “to explore whether engaging in regular individual or small group		

	<p>supervision and work discussion - where time is given to understanding the clients and their symptoms and behaviour, and to think about the impact of the work on the worker - enhances an individual's capacity for reflection and for reflective practice, which would reduce the personal stress of the work and so enhance 'well being'." (2018, p. 335).</p>		
<p>Do the collected data allow address the research question?</p> <p>Further appraisal may be not feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.</p>	<p>✓ Although with the proviso that it cannot provide causation – only correlation between increase in reflective functioning and increased</p>		

	wellbeing.		
5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?			✓ Rationale for adopting mixed method methodology is not addressed.
5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?			✓ Little information on how qualitative and quantitative phases, results, and data were integrated.
5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?			✓ No discussion of the added value of conducting a mixed methods study rather than having two separate studies.
5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?			✓ Not clear as divergences and inconsistencies are not addressed.
5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?			✓ For the qualitative component, there is not enough information provided

			regarding whether the findings are adequately derived from the data. Links between data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation are not clear.
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Warman, A., & Jackson, E. (2007). Recruiting and retaining children and families' social workers: The potential of work discussion groups. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 21*(1), 35–48.

Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (2018 version)

Screening questions (for all types)	Yes	No	Can't tell
Are there clear research questions?		✓	
Do the collected data allow address the research question? <i>Further appraisal may be not feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.</i>			✓

Appendix H: Letter of approval from the Tavistock Research Ethics

Committee (TREC)

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement

Directorate of Education & Training

Tavistock Centre

120 Belsize Lane

London

NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2548

Fax: 020 7447 3837

Sara Cannon

By Email

25th May 2017

Re: Research Ethics Application

Title: Exploring teachers' experiences of Work Discussion Groups

Dear Sara,

I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a horizontal line extending to the left.

Paru Jeram

Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee

Appendix I: Information sheet for participants

Information Sheet

Title: Exploring teachers' experiences of Work Discussion Groups (WDGs)

Who is doing the research?

My name is Sara Cannon and I am studying for a Doctorate in Educational Psychology. I am doing this piece of research as a part of my training.

Would you like to take part in research?

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the information carefully and decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the aim of the research?

The aim of my research is to explore teachers' experiences of Work Discussion Groups (WDGs).

Who has given permission for this research?

I am training at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust and they have given me ethical approval to do the research. It has also been approved by the Head teacher in your school.

Who can take part in this research?

I am looking for teachers who have taken part in a Work Discussion Group, to speak with me about their experiences of the group and their perceptions about whether or how it may have influenced their work.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part, and it is up to you to decide. You are free to withdraw up to the point at which your data is anonymised. You do not have to give a reason for withdrawing, and it would not affect you at work or with any further involvement with the Educational Psychology Service.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be invited to come and meet me for an interview in school. If you would feel more comfortable being interviewed elsewhere, we can discuss this. I will ask you some questions, but not very many as I am mainly interested in your thoughts and reflections about the experience of taking part in the Work Discussion Group. The interview will take approximately an hour and I will make audio recordings of our interview. The recordings will be stored anonymously, using password-protected software. You can ask for the recordings to be stopped at any time and deleted up until the point at which the data is anonymised. The recordings will be deleted once they have been transcribed.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There is currently limited published research exploring teachers' experiences of Work Discussion Groups. A possible benefit is that your shared experience will be a valuable

addition to the research into Work Discussion Groups, and may help to inform other EPs working with groups of teachers about the possible experience of teachers taking part in a WDG.

What will happen to the findings from the research?

The findings will make up my thesis which will be part of my Educational Psychology qualification. The thesis may be publically available for others to read. I will share some of the findings with my local Educational Psychology Service, so that they can find out about the experiences teachers have of WDGs. There might be times where I share the findings with other professionals. If you would like to be informed about the outcomes of the research I can share these with you.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with this research?

You can change your mind at any time and if you want to stop the interview, you can leave at any time without explaining why. If you wish to withdraw from the research and wish me to destroy your data, I will be able to do so up until the point at which the data has been anonymised.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. I will follow ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence. All information that is collected will be kept strictly confidential. All records related to your participation in this research study will be handled and stored appropriately. Your identity on these records will be indicated by a pseudonym rather than by your name. The recorded data will be destroyed once the transcription has taken place. Once the data

analysis has taken place I will destroy the transcripts appropriately. Data collected during the study will be stored and used in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998).

Are there times when my data cannot be kept confidential?

If you tell me something that makes me concerned about the safety of you or someone else then I might have to share that information with others in order to keep you or someone else safe. However, I would always aim to discuss this with you first when possible. Because I am meeting with a relatively small group of teachers, you may recognise some of the things you said in my research. To protect your identity, your name will be a pseudonym so that others are less likely to be able to recognise you and what you said.

Further information and contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of the research, please contact me:

Sara Cannon

Email: SCannon@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Telephone: 020 8496 5242

If you have any concerns about the research or conduct of the researcher then you can

contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance

(academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk).

Appendix J: Consent form for participants

Research Title: Exploring teachers' experiences of Work Discussion Groups

Please initial the statements below if you agree with them:

Initial here

1. I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I do not have to give a reason for withdrawing. I understand my data can be destroyed up to the point at which it has been anonymised. This is likely to be October 2018.

3. I agree to take part in one recorded interview.

4. I understand that my data will be anonymised so that I cannot be linked to the data. However, as the sample size is small, I understand that I may be able to identify anonymised contributions as my own.

5. I understand that interviews will be confidential unless I disclose something that suggests that harm to myself or others may occur.

6. I understand that my interviews will be used for this research and will not be accessed for any other purposes.

7. I understand that the anonymised findings from this research may be published and available for the public to read.

8. I am willing to participate in this research.

Your name.....Signed.....Date...../...../.....

Researcher name...Sara CannonSigned.....Date...../...../.....

Thank you for your help.

Key:

- Descriptive comments
- Linguistic comments
- Semantic comments

Appendix K: Example of analytic process steps B-D.

Steps B - D: Initial noting of descriptive, semantic and linguistic content on an exploratory level, moving to developing emergent themes

Text from transcript	Initial coding	Emergent themes
<p>It was quite interesting to think, “This is, actually, going to be about us”. I thought we were going to be talking about the kids or something, maybe. To think, suddenly, here are people who I don’t work with every day and</p>	<p>WDG – interesting “actually” – seems novel/ has import</p> <p>WDG – about staff not kids</p> <p>Different idea of WDG beforehand</p> <p>WDG not following the form expected</p> <p>“suddenly” – unexpected change in way of working</p> <p>Some of the group members were less familiar to her</p> <p>‘all’ – sense of group unity?</p>	<p>WDG allowed reflection</p> <p>Working outside of one’s comfort zone (personal change)</p> <p>Risk in speaking</p>

<p>we're all going to be honest, that, at first, was a bit like, "Oh". The fact that they were honest was really amazing. I thought, "This is brilliant".</p> <p>I really respect people who are able to be self-reflective. It was great to see that.</p> <p>Over the following weeks, I think it actually created a bit of a bond between us, maybe.</p> <p>There's that further level of understanding your</p>	<p>WDG – honesty expected</p> <p>"Oh". – suggests feeling taken aback?</p> <p>Increasing openness/ honesty with colleagues (movement from unfamiliar to sense of togetherness?)</p> <p>WDG/ honesty = brilliant</p> <p>She respects self-reflection</p> <p>WDG creating bonds over time</p> <p>A bit... maybe – hedging?</p> <p>"further level" – suggestive of development of understanding</p> <p>WDG helps understand role</p> <p>Seeing role within context of school</p> <p>Increasing sense of role within organisational context?</p> <p>WDG = leads to experience that they are all</p>	<p>Improving relationships</p> <p>WDG allowed reflection</p> <p>Improving relationships</p> <p>WDG supporting an understanding of role</p> <p>WDG leading to a greater understanding of school systems</p> <p>Developing insight into</p>
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<p>role and being able to see it in the school and knowing that we're all experiencing the same things.</p> <p>That was great over time. Some of us were there already, me and Jen, I guess, Steven, to an extent, [names staff members that began in WDG but left the provision prior to the research commencing], we would tend to always chat</p>	<p>experiencing same things</p> <p>WDG leading to a feeling of connection/ similarity of experience?</p> <p>Values sense of unity of experience – great</p> <p>She already had a sense of connection with some group members</p> <p>There already – sense of a destination?/ achievement</p> <p>Relationships within the WDG interacting with those outside the group</p> <p>Chatting over breakfast is like the chat in the WDG</p> <p>Taking in a certain way in WDG was a familiar experience</p> <p>Relationships within the WDG interacting with those outside the group</p> <p>'chat' suggests an informality which contrasts with</p>	<p>others' experiences</p> <p>Improving relationships</p> <p>WDG replaying old themes</p>
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<p>over breakfast anyway so that was very familiar to us to chat that way.</p> <p>Then, obviously, it's in a formalised setting which means that people's voices get really heard so that was easier a bit but it was the extra dynamic of having those other guys who I didn't know so well.</p> <p>In terms of that broader understanding of stuff</p>	<p>'formalised setting' (below).</p> <p>WDG experienced as 'formalised' in its set up.</p> <p>WDG experienced as a place where voices get heard</p> <p>'really' genuine sense of being heard?</p> <p>Process of WDG is experienced as formalised, which allows for being heard</p> <p>Values having colleagues she doesn't know so well as part of a group in which voices are heard.</p> <p>WDG broadened understanding of things in school</p> <p>"their experiences" – shifted from talking about herself</p> <p>"became" process – WDG increasingly experienced as helpful</p> <p>WDG allowing increasing sense of role within organisational context</p> <p>"if", "any" – hedging – reluctance to appear critical?</p> <p>Relationships within the WDG interacting with those</p>	<p>Formalised, facilitator-led structure</p> <p>Encouraged staff talk/diverse narratives</p> <p>Developing insight into others' experiences</p> <p>WDG leading to a greater understanding of school systems</p> <p>WDG supporting an understanding of role</p> <p>Developing insight into others' experiences</p>
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<p>in the school and their experiences, that all became really helpful. That was all really good. I think if there was any negative then maybe it's because I'm in a group who does tend to talk quite a lot anyway, there are times when I would leave the Wednesday thinking, "All of that was just a little bit too much bitching or something".</p>	<p>outside the group</p> <p>Talking within the WDG can feel like talking that already happens in her group</p> <p>"are" – tense slippage – re-experiencing WDG?</p> <p>"little bit, or something" – hedging, reducing impact of her critique, but "all of that" makes it seem more extreme.</p> <p>WDG could feel like bitching sometimes</p>	<p>Ambivalence about the different ways the group is used by members</p> <p>Overwhelming negativity in discussion</p>
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Appendix L: Example of analytic process step E

This follows Step E in the analytic process: Searching for connections across emergent themes and grouping them to form subordinate themes for each participant. Illustrative quotations have also been included.

Each participant has been coded with a colour to aid in interpreting the move between subordinate to superordinate themes in step G, captured in the findings chapter, section 4.1.4 . Some of the subordinate themes of individual participants were not represented in the later stages of analysis; these subordinate themes are highlighted in yellow. This is discussed in section 4.2.1 of the findings chapter.

Raymond		
Subordinate theme	Emergent themes	Illustrative quotations
The relationship between the WDG and management was under-developed	<p>Critical about the impact of the WDG – has anything been achieved?</p> <p>A desire for dialogue with management (feedback on feedback)</p> <p>A desire for a management presence in WDG</p> <p>Structural critique of WDG</p>	<p>1.11 “Is anything really gonna... really gonna come out of these?”</p> <p>7.26 I thought it would’ve been better if we’d have had some sort of dialogue back.</p>
Speaking is dangerous but WDG was an opportunity to speak	<p>Concerns/ambivalence around anonymity</p> <p>It’s difficult for some people to speak</p>	<p>20.14 They would know who’s gonna say things, you know, at that group.</p> <p>.6 everybody’s saying nothing, knowing that their... you know, their job</p>

	<p>openly (although he can speak openly)</p> <p>Speaking openly could carry financial risk</p> <p>The WDG helped to give staff a voice</p>	<p>could be on the line</p> <p>7.33 Well for a lot of people it's easier to say it in a group like that</p>
Emotions are dangerous?	<p>It's better to keep stuff to yourself</p> <p>Having prior experience of 'group work'</p> <p>Release of affect</p>	<p>14.25 Umm, I'm the sort of person who, who keeps most of me stuff to meself</p> <p>15.20 Mental Health Day, I'd never heard of that before in me life.</p> <p>3.25 the staff have got a lot of things off their chest</p>
Hearing stories, making connections	<p>WDG was an opportunity to hear from colleagues (reducing isolation?)</p> <p>Hearing about the problems of 'the school' (schadenfreude?)</p> <p>Building relationships with colleagues</p> <p>Feeling isolated in their department</p>	<p>13.27 you actually get to know the different staff better</p> <p>12.5 it's nice to know that they're, they're... you know, not everything is, is rosy over there.</p> <p>12.9 we're like a little tiny little school on its own.</p> <p>28.22 Umm, we take like a hell of a lot of shit over here</p>

	<p>Feeling different in their department</p> <p>Feeling abandoned in their department</p> <p>Communication is lacking within the school</p> <p>Disconnection is inevitable</p>	
Feeling validated by role	<p>Going above and beyond in his role</p> <p>Having a personal understanding of pupils experiences</p> <p>Having a personal mission to save pupils</p>	<p>22.9 ... It's a good job because at the end of the day if I actually... If I save one from going to prison then I've done me job like for the, for the year so it... You know, it works that way.</p>
The positive attributions of group membership	<p>Mentors don't contribute (put in time)</p> <p>The people attending the WDG were the ones who care</p> <p>You have to contribute (putting in time) if you want to be able to critique a system</p> <p>It's important to try things (like WDG) out</p>	<p>28.8 If you can't be bothered to get out of bed to go and vote then really stop moaning.</p> <p>27.13 if everyone took that attitude there would be no one in there.</p>

Staff mirroring pupils	<p>Disappointment at the missed connection with management (parents) – why don't you come over?</p> <p>Not being told (like a pupil doing exams)</p> <p>There has been some growth</p>	<p>23.26 It's like, er, doing your exams or something</p> <p>29.9 'cos he's come out of his shell, he's now confident enough to answer someone back.</p>
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Beth		
Subordinate theme	Emergent theme	Illustrative quotation
WDg offering potential for change	<p>Working outside of one's comfort zone (personal change)</p> <p>Leading to (organisational) change</p>	and we're all going to be honest, that, at first, was a bit like, "Oh".
WDG encouraging connection	<p>Developing insight into others' experiences</p> <p>Improving relationships</p>	It was great to feel like there were little bits of honesty between people in these different parts of the school that I haven't connected with before and just to find a bit more connection there
WDG encouraging	WDG supporting an understanding of role	<i>There's that further level of understanding your role and being able to</i>

reflection on the organisation	<p>WDG allowed reflection</p> <p>WDG leading to a greater understanding of school systems</p>	<i>see it in the school</i>
WDG as container (vs entrapping organisation)	<p>Formalised, facilitator-led structure</p> <p>Holding a space open</p> <p>Anchoring function</p> <p>Permeable boundary</p> <p>Staff feeling furtive</p> <p>Feeling marginalised in role</p>	<p>It gave a space where people were expected to talk about those things so they did</p> <p><i>passing in the corridor is just really quickly, "This isn't normal everything just goes out the window in the summer.</i></p> <p><i>Tense slippages suggesting the ongoing nature of the concerns/ conversations</i></p> <p><i>It's just bitching behind corridors</i></p> <p>I'm in this role of mentor with the little crazy kids tucked away in a corner of the school</p>
WDG amplifying staff voice	<p>Amplifying staff voice (to management)</p> <p>Encouraged staff talk/diverse narratives</p> <p>Gendered communication</p> <p>Risk in speaking</p>	<i>so many men don't talk. This school is so male... daring for those men to offer themselves</i>

<p>WDG and health</p>	<p>WDG validated emotional expression</p> <p>WDG allowed (healthy) processing of affect</p> <p>Alternative modes of communication are less healthy</p> <p>WDG promotes good-health</p> <p>Replaying old themes</p> <p>Overwhelming negativity in discussion</p> <p>Individual misuse of group</p>	<p><i>just feel what you're feeling and you're feeling it so that's okay</i></p> <p>people have to be articulate and that helps the thought process, doesn't it? It's less emotional, I think.</p> <p>when we're all cycling back hammered, it's like, "I don't even know what I said to Jeff this evening, what's going on?"</p> <p><i>it's so much more healthy when it's out here</i></p> <p>which I think helps you to cope because you tell a story</p> <p><i>feels like we create this big hurricane of stuff that's not happening</i></p>
<p>Feeling diminished through role (disempowered woman)</p>	<p>Feeling reduced by the role</p> <p>Feeling stuck in role</p> <p>Feeling attacked by role</p>	<p><i>I always feel like, "I'm a silly little girl, what am I doing here? Everyone thinks I'm really weak, I just can't cope with the big boys" and all that kind of stuff, "I've been put with a little group" and so I feel quite pathetic in a way.</i></p> <p><i>How to communicate? 28.23</i></p>
<p>Positioning the facilitators (as empowered)</p>	<p>Facilitators being used by group members</p> <p>Outsider status yields power</p>	<p>Even because there are two of you and one senior leader when you're feeding back</p>

women?)	<p>Outsider status offers alternative perspective</p> <p>Ambivalence around facilitators' relationship with management</p>	I suppose as the work discussion group and your role was always to feed back to Jeff or Bruce afterwards. Linguistic markers here – conflict (p4/5
Dealing with difference in WDG	<p>Concern about other's opinions</p> <p>Ambivalence about the different ways the group is used by members</p> <p>Struggling with her own response to others in group – not wanting to own her judgement of others'</p>	You have to be very daring in a circle like that to be able to say what you actually feel, don't you? You never know how you'll be received.

Colin		
Subordinate themes	Emergent themes	Illustrative quotations
WDG allowed staff to strengthen relationships with	<p>WDG allowed experiences to be shared</p> <p>WDG allowed staff to support each other emotionally</p>	<p>The female experience was shared 17.26 it's good to listen to the women</p> <p>Men and women could discuss gender issues and then protect each other 19. 14</p>

each other	WDG strengthened relationships	
WDG helped staff safely work through difficult emotions (extracting trash)	WDG felt safe/ confidential WDG allowed a release of affect Unloading in WDG Extracting negative stuff (trash) through WDG Sharing/pooling affect in WDG Emotion is work (in SEMH school)	But what goes in there really stays in there, you know, in a sense, you know. 6.2 Stressors of job can result in suicide 3.8 'Get all this trash out' 26.30 just get the raw feeling out, you know, and then the cup... the full cup starts to empty it out. 25.7
Emotion is dangerous/ objectivity is preferable	Emotion is work (in SEMH school) Objectivity is preferable in role Concern about the strength of his emotions on others in group	'I'm like a cog in the wheel and I don't always work on my emotions; I can be objective.' 7.35 Being a cog in the wheel – metaphor suggests motion and also denies individuality/humanity (mechanistic) You have to teach boys how to be a 'normal human being' and not chose 'the violent way' 19.19 Being objective is preferable - So I can unload but I can also be objective. 8.7. , it's kind of good to be objective and see the reality 8.11
Facilitators as	Facilitators as witness to anger	The facilitators can learn why staff are so angry 27.1

witnesses to staff's unseen humanity	<p>Staff needs are not always met in school</p> <p>It's a stressful role</p> <p>Staff are abused in school</p> <p>Staff are taken for granted by school</p> <p>Staff have other responsibilities</p> <p>Staff members' humanity is forgotten by school</p>	<p>WDG humanised colleagues - not just in a, in a, in a working mode but as people, as human beings 6.17</p> <p>Staff member has 'little ones' 3.5</p> <p>I got attacked more times than I had hot dinners 22.16</p> <p>Violence against men is acceptable 22.22</p>
Masculine strength is a powerful currency in the organisation	<p>Physical strength is important in the school</p> <p>Trying to teach alternative masculinities (to physical domination)</p> <p>Being a male role model in school</p> <p>Women require gentle handling</p>	<p>Pupils are, 'some big lads' 14.14</p> <p>You can get more women in but make sure you've got some really strong men as well. 14.17</p> <p>Listing martial arts 15.9-13</p> <p>You have to be willing to take being bruised in this role 21.28</p> <p>(modelling how to be around female staff) 'the right way about being gentle with women' 17.30</p> <p>pretending to take on a feminine role 21.8 And I had to educate him so I pretended that I was really weak, you know, and I took a more of a feminine role,</p>
WDG helped him to	WDG supporting him in his role	(aligning with SMT or facilitators?) so you can help 'em, you know, so, you

perform his (distanced) role	<p>Standing apart from other group members</p> <p>Being the Dr/researcher of the WDG</p>	<p>know 9.4</p> <p><u>Dr/researcher</u> 'pulse', 'non invasive' 3. 23 'Dr J' (9.5), 30.20</p> <p>Not just with my emotions but more scientifically, analysing the... you know, the data, a bit like a computer 8.18</p>
WDG helping to shape a better future 'new order' (but there are shadows of the past that cannot be spoken of)	<p>Things were worse before (in school's past)</p> <p>WDG allowed discussion of negative practices in the past</p> <p>WDG helping to shape vision of a more positive future</p> <p>Some things (race) can't be spoken about (in WDG)</p> <p>Hard to measure impact of WDG</p>	<p>WDG allowed participants to face up to 'new realities' and get on with life 2.32</p> <p>what's left will be in a sense the new order 3.27</p> <p>'dynamite stuff' 10.25</p> <p>It wouldn't have come up in the group, no, no. 12.35</p> <p>14.5 before the cameras came up I used to get attacked nearly every day of the week.</p>
Desire for balance/ difference is hard to speak about in WDG.	<p>Some things (race) can't be spoken about (in WDG)</p> <p>Balance is important in the organisation</p> <p>Racial balance in school</p> <p>Gender imbalance in school</p> <p>WDG promotes balance/ equilibrium</p>	<p>Ethnic make up of staff should reflect diversity of area - 'nice mix' 5.4</p> <p>There's not enough women in SEMH schools because they are scared 19.12</p> <p>WDG was set up by SMT to help the organisation reach an equilibrium 27.11, 28.4</p> <p>Redacted section about race</p> <p>'dynamite stuff' 10.25</p>

SMT had a secret agenda – WDG as intelligence?	<p>WDG caused management to think differently</p> <p>Suspicious of SMT's relation to WDG</p>	<p>when you're playing chess you don't know when you make that pawn move that you're gonna lose the game. 29.8 – Loss/ risk of participation in WDG?</p> <p>Facilitators can report staff grievances to SMT (26.35)</p> <p>Management had ulterior motives when setting up WDG 27.27, 28.1</p>

Mark		
WDG improving connection across physical/ organisational disconnection	<p>WDG as opportunity to connect with staff</p> <p>WDG Feeling alike</p> <p>WDG Sharing experiences</p> <p>Lack of communication amongst staff in organisation</p> <p><i><u>Physically separated from main school</u></i></p>	<p>Other people are going through what you are 1.20</p> <p>Not an alien 1.23</p> <p>Finishing each others sentences (35.9)</p> <p>physically disconnected/ as a separate dehumanised section of the organisation - 'the hierarchy', 'the main school' v's 'construction' (10.32)</p> <p>14.34 – repetition of 'here' – separation</p> <p>47.34 – staff are abandoned with their own problems. "I'm still gonna prioritise my stuff and if I remember I'll deal with your stuff."</p>

<p>Suspicion and alienation</p>	<p>Feeling like an alien in the organisation (less alienated in WDG)</p> <p>Something he can't quite put his finger on about organisation</p> <p>The organisation is crazy</p> <p>It is dangerous to show vulnerability in organisation</p> <p>Distrust of management's intentions (with regard to WDG)</p> <p>Does not want to feel indebted to management/share his feelings with management</p>	<p>Not an alien (in WDG – but elsewhere alienated) 1.23</p> <p>30. 36 "God, this is crazy, it's crazy."</p> <p>I dunno, there's something about this place, something ain't right, there's too many secrets, too many people that's hush-hush. There's... (23.30)</p> <p>Distrust of SMT 'sneaking' into WDG 19.14</p> <p>Rep - I know what, I know what he was doing, I know what he was doing, I know what he was doing. (19.19)</p> <p>Initially thought that WDG was a way of reporting to head (22.20)</p>
<p>Empowering staff through amplifying voice</p>	<p>WDG empowering – giving voice</p> <p>WDG Presenting united voice to management</p> <p>Making changes through WDG</p> <p>[...as opposed to] feeling disempowered/deflated</p> <p><i>Feeling deflated in role</i></p> <p>Having to assert his value within organisation</p>	<p>(9.16) "You're good in numbers" "when there's three, four, five of ya they sit up, they take note, they take notice."</p> <p>WDG allowing 'professional' and 'constructive' resolutions to be made with SMT (21.22)</p> <p>There have been some changes And it has worked. It has worked. It has worked 9.31)</p> <p>Loss/ lost 28.10 Well here I've lost (inaudible 00:30:11), I've lost that here. [...] I've lost that.</p>

But raising your voice/
expressing yourself is
potentially exposing?

	Being left to stagnate within organisation	“Carl, are you busy? Carl, are you still working at the school? Carl, we’ve gotta job for ya.” (13.35)
WDG felt like losing control; a dangerous release	WDG allowed a release of affect WDG was experienced as a loss of control Facilitator is stoking something up Being impelled to speak in WDG Speaking is dangerous in WDG	40.12 - You’re like a balloon, innit, you’re full of air, you’re gonna burst sooner or later Yeah, she kept putting fuel on that fire, kept it, kept it burning.(18.16-18) 49.7 – WDG facilitation linked to alcohol – heady experience? Oh she’d make you come out of your shell [...] she’d open you up and then you, you, you just, you just release on it. 42.11– If I say anything, then my mouth’s too big, I become the enemy.
WDG allowed reflection in an unreflective organisation	WDG as opportunity to reflect on practice (as opposed to unthinking doing) Organisation is not reflective Coming to realisations about the school through WDG Coming to realisations about personal position in school through WDG	47.26, throughout the day, “you’re listening but you’re not listening.’ 47.31 - “Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, I’ll sort that out,” Repetition suggesting lack of reflective listening in staff briefing. WDG highlighted a lack of consistency in practices across school (16.10) WDG made him feel he had to make some decisions about his future career (28)
WDG as a performance of strength;	You had to be courageous to participate in WDG It is dangerous to show vulnerability in	The WDG as shocking to management 43.20 Life’s a risk; if you want things to improve you’ve gotta take risks. (17.15)

<p>(Mental) Strength is important</p>	<p>organisation</p> <p>You had to be selfless to participate in WDG</p> <p>You had to be proactive to participate in WDG</p>	<p>'she was crying about... She... No, she shed a tear about something' 37.10</p> <p>46.2 'not under that title' (mental health).</p> <p>- In an SEMH school, who <i>has</i> Mental Health?</p> <p>No 'brownie points' or certificates for participating. 17.26</p> <p>45.11 'soldier on'</p> <p>No one coming to the aid of women being abused (40.28) when I do get abused I can't shout out help to no one 'cos no one's gonna come to my aid,"</p>
<p>Mirroring pupils' feelings of abandonment/abuse</p>	<p>Emotional needs of pupils are not met within organisation</p> <p>Aligning (connecting) with the pupils (against the school?)</p> <p>I've been there – aligning with pupils</p> <p>Sharing a sense of rejection with pupils</p> <p>Sharing a special understanding with pupils</p> <p>Feeling abused by the organisation</p> <p>Being left to struggle within organisation</p>	<p>You should not isolate kids (11.11)</p> <p>Yeah, the school doesn't wanna know us now (10.11)</p> <p>show them that you're not that worthless, pointless child (10.18)</p> <p>Once you get that trust with your students, oh it's lovely, it's lovely, it's lovely. (Laughs) (8.10)</p> <p>"You know what, you need to start looking at Construction, the, the students. (10.32)</p> <p>the construction kids were not recognised for their hard work with allotment (and nor was he) 24</p>

	Being used by organisation	
Doing more for pupils than other staff	<p>Feeling lack of alignment with school's practices</p> <p>Emotional needs of pupils are not met within organisation (but recognised by him)</p> <p>His personal approach is incongruous with the culture</p> <p>Workload is untenable (but he is industrious)</p> <p>Excessive workload</p> <p>Going the extra mile for the pupils</p>	<p>38.30-31 "Oh this student's smashed the window" or "Blah, blah this and blah and blah, blah." [...] 30. 36-7We just look at each other and I think, "God, this is crazy, it's crazy."</p> <p>Performative – involving interviewer in appreciating literal weight of work (files) (30)</p> <p>34.30 – 'kinda professionals we are'</p>
Confusion (meta-level)	<p>Narrative confusion</p> <p>Difficulty in staying on topic of the WDG, as opposed to his (difficult) experience in school generally – was it unimportant, or is the experience still being processed in the interview – does he still connect me with the role of facilitator and so is kind of re-enacting the WDG in the interview?</p>	<p>There was something. Something about the work. Umm... Oh my God. Umm... (Pause) (8.17)</p> <p>Too many secrets in the school. 23. 30</p> <p>Hmm hmm, hmm hmm, hmm hmm, hmm hmm. That taught me a lot. (Inaudible 00:26:53) say, "You know what, Carl, just hold back. I know you can do certain things but don't put yourself out there. If it has to be done, so be it, but no 'Alright then, I'll do that for ya'." No, no, I don't do that no more, don't do it no more. You don't get appreciated. 25.6</p>

	Or is the organisation confused/ confusing?	
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Steven		
The rational outsider	<p>Being able to support colleagues through WDG</p> <p>He took up an outsider perspective within WDG</p> <p>Him taking up outsider perspective affords him a view of the whole – the common goal</p> <p>Being separate compared to other members of WDG and less concerned/affected (less need to vent)</p> <p>Others in WDG having to share/ vent more</p> <p>The voice of pragmatism within the WDG</p>	<p>just basically getting a gauge of how the s... other members of staff felt about how things were running 1.8</p> <p>I'm on the outside and I'm looking in 10.27</p> <p>if you're from the outside and you can see over a period of what's been going on 25.28</p> <p>It's like if they need to vent, let them vent because they're not looking for a solution. 10.13</p> <p>where I just took a back seat and just let people vent 22.3</p>
Tunnels and open spaces	<p>Venting negative affect leads to breathing space and a more open mind</p> <p>Finding commonalities 'common ground'</p> <p>WDG opened out discussions from</p>	<p>As in nobody usually talks about it actually on... like out in the open as, umm, usually you probably hear people talking like in corners, 9.12</p> <p>they've got tunnel vision, they've got tunnel vision 14.28</p> <p>because they've got the main thing what's bothering them, then they're not</p>

	<p>corners/closed circles into open/common ground</p> <p>Other members having 'tunnel vision' - Runaway train</p> <p>There was the possibility for the discussion to get stuck (in the tunnel?) without facilitator structuring discussion</p>	<p>gonna move forward. 22.19</p>
<p>Hijacking the WDG (it was a place for storytelling, not balanced rationality)</p>	<p>Personal grievances aired in WDG</p> <p>WDG discussion was one-sided</p> <p>You need have a balanced perspective in WDG</p> <p>WDG was not the place for balance/ rationality</p> <p>Story telling as performance within WDG</p>	<p>it seemed it was more of a personal thing1.30</p> <p>one of their friends has lost their job; it's the sentiment about it, it's not the actual common sense or the logic in why things have happened that way. 31.19</p> <p>And if I'm telling, if I'm telling the story I'm gonna say it to my benefit because I don't wanna feel like I'm the bad person. 30.17</p>
<p>Feeling attacked in WDG/ aligning with absent management</p>	<p>Hard to speak in WDG</p> <p>Supra-group conversations (with facilitators)</p> <p>Feeling attacked in WDG and unable to respond</p> <p>Other group members seem unnecessarily negative/ hard to align with SMT</p> <p>Taking on the voice of management (staffing and</p>	<p><i>Biting tongue</i> 10.4</p> <p>I did feel a bit defensive at the time13.34</p> <p>you can't always defend what's wrong if it's something there to help you. 3.21</p> <p>They're costing so much money, we can save money here. 27.30</p> <p>Even though this is what they was complaining about in the first place, they</p>

	budgets)	seem to forget all of that when reality hits. 31.25
The importance of the collective goal (over the individual)	<p>People's individual beliefs and actions can harm team</p> <p>People are responsible for their own choices/actions (it's not the fault of management)</p> <p>People need to face reality in their jobs – be adult</p> <p>'It's your job'</p> <p>People need to adapt to change</p>	<p>the whole school's working towards a goal and you're dragging your heels because you don't think it's right 4.5</p> <p>So you can't really, you can't really expect sympathy if you're not looking after yourself 26.8</p> <p>people need to have a reality check 25.30</p> <p>Change is inevitable - you'll resist as much as you can but eventually you're gonna have to change regardless. 4.33</p>
WDG led to changes in the organisation (negative?)	<p>WDG led to changes in the school</p> <p>WDG lead to negative change?</p> <p>WDG did not lead to enough change?</p> <p>WDG as a potential tool for evaluation</p>	<p>New procedure 20.32</p> <p>when they're talking about the people who was getting the jobs, that's coming back through to... in the meetings now. 32.36</p> <p>He feels it should still be only two assessment/settling in days 19.11</p> <p>WDG should have been ongoing – 32.7 Umm, I think it should have been an ongoing thing, really and truly.</p> <p>Because obviously there's always room to, to progress and it needs to be monitored. 32.23</p>

Facilitators as validating authority figures	<p>Facilitators emphasising the positive</p> <p>Facilitators as line-managers</p> <p>Facilitator's validated staff ideas</p> <p>WDG as a tool for communicating with SMT</p> <p>No other line of communication except WDG</p>	<p>a ploy to actually get me to talk. [perceived as nice] 29.11</p> <p><i>Facilitators as line-managers</i> - 'Cos it's like you would your... our line manager talking to the senior management. 33.31</p> <p>you could see the positive in everything what everybody was saying 23.18</p> <p>it's like if you're with your partner, umm, they've got an issue, you say, "Well why don't you do this, why don't you do that?" they don't listen to you and then one of their friends comes to say exactly the same thing that you said and they say, "Oh yeah, that's a good idea." 35.21</p> <p>this has been the most effective, umm, line of communication we've had. 34.8</p> <p>if we go into the manager's office and speak with the headteacher or if we're down the pub and we talk. 34.2</p>
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Jen		
The WDG allowed agency through voice (where	<p>Communication within WDG is valued/ valuable</p> <p>WDG as communication portal with management</p>	<p>3.5 communication portal</p> <p>Priority list (safeguarding)</p>

<p>otherwise she had felt silenced) WDG as mouthpiece</p>	<p>Facilitators as mouthpiece for staff voice</p> <p>Your own voicing of your experience is less valid (than when spoken by an outsider)</p> <p>It is hard to articulate a criticism of management</p> <p>There are many barriers to communicating in organisation</p> <p>Staff concerns are not responded to in organisation</p> <p>An outsider needs to validate and articulate anxiety</p>	<p>Makes a difference to have an outsider voicing concerns to management</p> <p>20.18 having someone else to actually talk to, senior members of staff, umm, and explain to them exactly, you know, what the feeling or, you know, what the feeling in the whole group is</p> <p>15.17 someone from outside come in and really evaluate like the, the things that we, we go through</p> <p>11.12 It feels like you're listened to, it feels like, you know, you're, you're valued, your opinion's valued. So in... I think, umm, (sighs) because it's sometimes you don't have, you know, the time or the relationship or whatever to kind of talk to a senior member of staff</p> <p>13.7 there was a particular case with a female student, it was a safeguarding issue, but nothing seemed to have done or happened,</p>
<p>WDG as a break/ safety cord?- arresting/ punctuating doing – 'hold on!'</p>	<p>"Hold on" WDG – feeling held on to</p> <p>Hold on – <i>punctuating experience, re-sensitising – that is hard</i></p> <p>Hold on – being held on to? Is that your role – concern around doing too much</p> <p>An outsider needs to validate and articulate anxiety</p>	<p>4.4 we discussed at length is how we kind of get desensitised being in the environment that we are and actually an outsider just saying, "But hold in, that must be very stressful, that must be..."</p> <p>6.4 , "Hold on, is that really what your job consists or your role extends to or in your remit?</p> <p>8.7 the male staff members were like, "Well hold on, that's not what's supposed to happen," and they became very much aware of that.</p>

	<p>WDG as protective (safeguarding issue)</p> <p>Women feeling more protected</p>	
<p>It is difficult to talk about feeling unsafe</p>	<p><i>Feelings are hard to speak about</i></p> <p><i>SEMH needs of students are hard to talk about</i></p> <p><i>It is difficult to take verbal abuse against women seriously</i></p> <p>The things that happen are shocking</p> <p>Dealing with abuse by blocking it out (desensitised/ denial/disassociation)</p> <p><i>Re-enacting the trauma experienced by young people</i></p> <p>Feeling vulnerable to attack</p>	<p>10.9 “Oh you work with students for...”</p> <p>8.2 The main thing thing is just kind of like the verbal abuse, umm, and that to me... So I just kind of... I got to the point where I just blocked that out,</p> <p>6.1 What I’ve realised is that there’s definitely a culture in our school... Because we work with, you know, almost exclusively just with boys, I felt like, umm, I particularly went through, umm, more kind of abuse,</p> <p>7.1 culture where, umm, female staff members have it a little bit harder than male staff members, as it were. (Laughs)</p> <p>13.7 safeguarding issue with female student</p> <p><i>Needing to be protected from pupils – ‘I could step in’17.19</i></p> <p><i>Echoing language/ experience of young people? ‘somebody’s got your back’ 17.10</i></p>
<p>WDG as an outlet for stress</p>	<p>WDG was an outlet for stress</p> <p>Some members came across as just moaning (as opposed to assertive)</p> <p>The work can be stressful</p>	<p>10.2 luxury</p> <p>18.13 people vented their, their kind of emotions because there was a lot of frustration from different staff members in that group</p> <p>15.19 open discussion about feelings, emotions, stresses at work</p>

	The work can be shocking	15.4 just moaning about something
WDG offering connection across isolation	<p>Shared experiences explored in WDG</p> <p>Supporting colleagues/feeling supported in WDG</p> <p>Increased understanding of others' experiences</p> <p>Improved relationships/understanding between male and female staff members</p> <p>Feeling isolated within organisation</p> <p>The nature of the work (SEMH) is isolating</p>	<p>3.13 that I can maybe have a discussion with them about things that are bugging me.</p> <p>16.7 but it turned out like everybody else had exactly the same kind of experience as I did, so...</p> <p>20.2 so just knowing that, you know, you're not alone makes a massive difference.</p> <p>17.5 especially the male members of staff, they would like step in to situations a lot more faster than they did,</p> <p>17.13 I didn't know that I had the support from other staff members</p> <p>10.5 There's only a limited, a finite number of people that actually know what goes on at Belmont Park School</p>
WDG as mirror/reflecting experience	<p>WDG was a unique experience</p> <p>WDG Illuminated normalised practice within the school</p> <p>WDG Illuminated negative practice within the school</p> <p>External perspective of facilitators helped reflect on organisation</p>	<p>7.1 It was enlightening because, like I said, you, you get so desensitised and you get so...</p> <p>10.15 an outsider view that listened to you and then just kind of reframed things and put it into perspective</p>

	Nobody had expressed their feelings before	
WDG led to change through sharing different perspectives	WDG allowed new perspectives/ideas to be shared WDG led to changes in wider school	2.19 And you could definitely see an impact kind of straightaway as to, you know, school rules, umm, being a bit more kind of clear, umm, transparent, with decisions being made

