One Social Worker's Snapshots: Of students and poverty, a teaching tool and supervision

Thesis submitted by

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Statement on the contribution of others

This thesis has been prepared with the contribution of Professor Rosamund Thorpe as supervisor. No other person has actively contributed with statistical support, editorial assistance, research assistance or any other assistance.

The School of Social Work and Community Welfare has supported my work by approving periods of leave and by allowing me to use my IRA monies to attend four Conferences where this work has been presented. There have been no other resources or outside assistance provided.

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Abstract

Social Work is far from 'just' a job. How can it be when one of its paramount concerns is the pursuit of social justice? In the same vein, whatever social workers are involved with, they need to be able to examine their work in relation to how what they are doing contributes to a more socially just society. It is not enough to just do 'the' job. Logically following on from this then, a social worker employed as a lecturer must act in ways that promote social justice – it is not enough to aim only to be a good lecturer or an effective teacher, for underlying these roles is that one is a social worker. The papers presented here describe some examples of one social worker's attempts to apply the objectives of social justice in her work as a teacher in a university environment.

This thesis is a portfolio of research papers and conference presentations. The common theme is students – in the higher education sector, in the classroom and in placements. The sub-themes are social work and social work education. It is the work of a practitioner researching her practice and looking for ways to improve that practice. It is therefore applied research that is descriptive and qualitative in approach.

Given the reflective research approach taken, some of the findings have been incorporated into teaching practices as part of the process. The success achieved in the application of some strategies, supports a recommendation for those involved in teaching and learning environments, to include a range of ways of cultivating the imagination of participants to enhance learning outcomes. Success also with a model of supervision which advocates the use of vision as a base for supervision, leads to a further recommendation for such an approach to be considered by workers and students wanting an egalitarian, cooperative, power sharing arrangement in supervision. Other findings such as the need for action to address student poverty and particularly when that poverty is exacerbated by the requirement of student placements, are matters for many stakeholders such as the professional associations, the universities, the government, the human services and agencies involved in placements, to address.

One does need to strive to overcome unfairness caused by unequal access, to work towards upholding the rights of participants in a range of processes, to encourage others to reduce the barriers that prevent access to essential resources, and to foster active participation so that people have real opportunities to have a voice and be involved in decision making processes. The research demonstrates that it is both possible and necessary for a social worker in a teaching role to work in a myriad of ways that do this and in so doing work to promote social justice.

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Introduction and Overarching Framework

This is the last piece I need to write, and the most important as it is the first piece I want you to read. I want to introduce you to me, the writer, and some of my work – the following three essays. I want to share with you the reasons for this work (the rationale), some thinking about the methods employed in producing these pieces (the methodology), including comments on the context in which both I and the work are located, and to offer some ideas in relation to my view of the world (my paradigm position). I hope to encourage you to read this work with a clearer understanding of what is presented and how the separate pieces do fit together.

Describing my intentions thus, could suggest a neat division of the named topics. They do not exist that way however in practice. Each is influenced by the other and influences the others in return – my view of the world is influenced by the context in which I am located and both impact specifically the methods chosen and so on. There is a messiness that is belied by the necessity of trying to provide you with a clear written framework for making sense of this work. However as you read the following you will notice the actual ideas presented do overlap and could be covered under different and several topics.

Rationale

When a person picks up a novel, a book of poetry, or a newspaper, there is an expectation of what that piece of work will look like. For those who read theses, they too will have ideas about what a thesis should look like. This thesis does bear some of the usual hallmarks of such a work – the requisite statements and declarations at the beginning, the indexes of contents and figures, and chapters presenting the main text. The work needs to be referenced and if applicable, appendices provided. This has been done here, though the location of the references and the appendices is different in that they sit at the end of the relevant chapter rather than as one list of references followed by appendices at the end of the work. The style is similar to an edited book, though in this instance all the chapters are written by the same author. In the same way that chapters in an edited text can be read individually and stand alone as a complete piece of work, each chapter in this thesis is a separate and complete piece. Also as with an edited text, where there is usually a common theme running through the collection, so too for this work.

The reason for these differences is that this thesis is a portfolio of the candidate's work over time. In the School of Social Work and Community Welfare at James Cook University, a candidate for a Master of Social Work by research has two options for the Thesis subject. As defined in the University Handbook (2005), the Thesis is:

> A supervised research study of relevance to social work and/or social welfare. The thesis may take the form of either (a) a substantial thesis of approximately 25,000 words, or (b) a portfolio of, normally, no fewer than two nor more than four pieces of work, specifically written for this subject. The portfolio is to include a further paper providing an overarching framework to the portfolio. The length of the portfolio is approximately 25,000 words.

This thesis takes the form of option (b) and as such has this introductory chapter which includes a description of the overarching framework for the portfolio's collection, and three pieces of work specifically prepared for this subject. Each 'piece of work' is a paper in two forms – firstly presented as a Chapter of written text, and secondly in the Chapter Appendix as a Conference Presentation. In some ways the guidelines for this type of Masters portfolio align with those of a Professional Doctorate; not in size or scope, but in that the work needs to contribute to the professional's (and the profession's) knowledge and that there needs to be clear links among the portfolio items. As a thesis then it is also different to the common type of higher degree thesis as it does not focus solely on one research question or topic or problem nor rely on the same research design or methodology for each paper.

As a practising social worker, in undertaking the work of this thesis, I have been very mindful of sharing the material along the way with others as work in progress, rather than waiting for a final end product to present. The Conference Presentations are included as part of the thesis as an example of such an approach. It has been a conscious attempt to apply the research, and to action change during the experience as appropriate. The thesis itself stands as an end product, but the work of the thesis has been incorporated in my work as a practitioner. This is and has been reflective practice research.

The title of the thesis – One social worker's snapshots: Of students and poverty, a teaching tool and supervision – provides in shorthand the topics covered in each of the papers. Before introducing each of the chapters, I want to make a few points in relation to the short title: 'One social worker's snapshots', as this relates in part to some of the strengths and the limitations of this study.

These essays are like snapshots/photos. They are written representations of periods in time in my working life. They are limited by time as a factor in that they are at some point a finished product; and yet, life as represented by the snapshot has moved on – it is not a finished product. We often take photos of people, places, or events that are important at that moment. Later, the person has changed, the event has passed and places do not remain the same. These essays similarly would not be the same if they were being written tomorrow, or in one year from now; though there would be similarities.

Photos can have limited widespread appeal. They are usually of most interest to the photographer; to those in the photo; to those who know the people in the photo; and so on. In the same vein these essays will appeal most to students who have shared classes and placement experiences either with me or with teachers like me. Similarly if the photo is of a place or an event, then it is of most interest to those who know the place or the event. In this instance the work may appeal to those who are interested in learning more about the landscape of the higher education sector as well as to those who are connected in some way through their own experience. These essays will perhaps mean most to those who are pictured in them or who can relate through their own experiences to those events captured in these essays. I do not expect that they will have universal appeal – not everyone wants to look at other people's 'holiday snaps', even if they are so important and terrific.

I also accept that if someone else was doing this research and writing this work – 'taking the photos' – that person may have a very different angle and the work could look distinctly different. Given this, I make no claims of expecting others to see the world the same way I have represented it here. This work is *one* social worker's presentation and representation.

Further, it is quite deliberate in the naming of the thesis as the work of a social worker; as distinct from saying 'a researcher' as a general catch-all term. I do not intend to identify the specifics of social work or what a social worker is, now – this is covered extensively in Chapter 3, in the section: 'Social Work – what we entered to do and what we do'. Suffice to say here that social work is an applied discipline and this has been the approach taken in this research. Shortly, what I do want to explain though is why this work is 'social work research'.

Before proceeding further however, this is an appropriate time to introduce you in more detail to the work of the research by providing an overview of the Chapters. Chapter 1, which is referred to with the short title of 'Students and poverty', is a paper with a dual focus of students as people, and that these people/students are in poverty. The work arose from a growing concern as an educator at one level and as a field education placement coordinator at another. As an educator it seemed that in the wider university circles including the relevant government departments, students were more and more being seen not as people but as numbers, quotas, and products of the system. This is not to suggest that everyone did this; rather though, that there was a disturbing and increasing tendency that this was happening. Students were being referred to as customers or clients of the universities, and less and less seen as members of the academic community who also carried other roles – such as spouse, carer, parent, worker – and the related responsibilities and commitments entailed in these roles. Certainly the reality was that students were more often than not, less and less able to be full time students even when they were enrolled in full time loads, and

less likely to have independent means to support themselves through their course of study. What I argue in the paper is that maintaining and promoting these market and managerial views of students lacks humanity and is inappropriate. We need to see students as people with all the incumbent constraints that operate on their lives which impact on their ability to truly be students.

Related to this is a concern that many students are in poverty and further that limited attention and almost a lack of recognition and action exists – in the university, in the government actions and policies, and in the wider society – in relation to this serious problem. It is like the classic tale of 'the Emperor with no clothes'. It is easy to see many students are living in poverty – they are 'without clothes' – and yet it is accepted as normal and even as expected. We expect university students to be poor.

In my role as field education placement coordinator I am often presented with very clear stories from students about their situations of poverty. Placements commonly exacerbate this poverty. Because placements are structured as full time and are for extended periods, students have a significantly reduced ability during those placement months to maintain other income producing work. At the same time as not being able to earn money, their expenses during placements are often significantly increased – through the cost of travel, the cost of child care, clothing costs, and so on. I was seeing this situation over and over again, and it was when working with a final year cohort of social work students in 1999, and being faced with 7 out of the 10 students seeking special consideration in relation to the placement arrangements – because of work or family commitments – that I decided to write my paper.

In July the following year I presented my paper to an international audience at the UK Social Policy Association Annual Conference. The paper has been written with this audience in mind, and therefore does contain detailed information about the Australian context – information that perhaps would be superfluous to a local audience. For that conference presentation, only the use of an overhead projector was available, so the material included in Appendix 1.1 is a copy of the overhead sheets used.

The paper has subsequently been presented at a National Conference in Cairns (see Appendix 1.2: National Association of Field Experience Administrators Conference 2005). The audience this time were predominately staff from Faculties of Education and Teaching with students (pre-service teachers) who undertake placements ranging from one day a week (observation) to blocks of two weeks or 'long' blocks of up to five weeks. It was therefore important to provide a clear description of the types of placements that social work students for instance, undertake, so that the differences could be appreciated. The paper as well as the accompanying slide presentation is provided in the appendix. Additional updated material was

included in that presentation of the work; though the same substantive issues and matters covered in the original paper remain.

The work has also been presented in a less formal setting than that of a conference. Soon after writing the paper, a colleague delivered it as an address to a union rally at the University campus. On each occasion that the work has been presented, the audience has been different, though there has been a 'sameness' in the responses – confirming that these are important matters that needed to be raised and discussed further. There has been strong support for my recommendation that there needs to be a development of policies for education that reflect the reality of student lives today. Also in line with this, that action needs to be taken to address the serious issue of student poverty. Raising these matters in presentations to various audiences has been part of the project of this thesis and fits with social work practice that aims to encourage social change.

Students – this time particularly as learners – remain paramount in the research presented in Chapter 2. Here a 'teaching tool' which has proved helpful for students is described. The paper outlines a common concern identified by students of relating academic learning to real work practice – the linking of theory and practice – and presents a teaching tool developed to aid students in recognising their abilities to make the links. At the time that students are preparing to leave the known environment of the university classroom and enter the unfamiliar environment of the workplace (as occurs for placements), their anxiety level about their knowledge, skills and ability to perform in the 'real world' of practice tends to escalate. Students can feel very vulnerable and often question their ability to succeed. Over time as the teacher preparing students for placements, I, working with the students, have experimented with various strategies to help to alleviate or at least reduce this potentially debilitating stress. Using analogies, stories, metaphors and so on has proved helpful on many occasions. The analogy of the 'Fridge, freezer, and pantry cupboard' has had repeated appeal and is the one described in detail in the paper. At a very basic level, the suggestion is that theory is like what a person has stored in their own fridge, freezer and pantry cupboard; and practice – which is the application of theory – is how a person chooses to use the various ingredients they have stored in those places.

The Conference at which this work was presented was the Global Social Work Congress in Adelaide in 2004. The theme of the Congress was 'Reclaiming Civil Society', and the approach I took with my work was the focus of helping students as a particular population in our society, reclaim what they 'know'. The Abstract ('Cultivating the Imagination – Ways of reclaiming strength and capacities') and the slides presented at that conference are provided in Appendix 2.5.

In the same way that there can be many approaches and styles of teaching, there are often a range of strategies that can be employed in dealing with problems and issues which present. Student complaints about poor or non-existent supervision during placements are a matter of serious concern. One of the ways I have chosen to address this matter is to look for effective and positive models of supervision that can easily be incorporated into a worker's practice so as to encourage better outcomes for both workers and students. In Chapter 3, the paper on supervision, the snapshot has (graduate) social workers in the foreground; though students are definitely there in the picture as well. My belief is that if I can help to bring about positive change in how supervision operates for workers, that this in turn will have a positive impact on the quality of supervision these workers provide for students.

The model outlined in the paper 'Vision as a base for supervision', has been developed over many years and through the application of a range of research approaches. It has grown from experiential learning through the receiving and giving of supervision; through ongoing dialogue and collaborative discussions directly with those I have been involved with in supervision and also with other practitioners who are similarly exploring the practices and processes of supervision; and by actively incorporating new ideas and approaches in subsequent supervision experiences and getting feedback on these new ways of doing supervision.

The model as it now stands calls for a worker (or a student if that is the case) to be clear about his or her vision of the social worker he or she wants to be. Having a clear and detailed vision is a critical component – though this does not mean that the vision is fixed or that it will not change over time. It does need to be a personal vision and not be someone else's version of what a vision of social work is or should be. Too often it seems to me, students and workers have reported how in supervision they have been told what they need to do and how they should do it, with little or no regard for their views. Similarly supervisors have at times told me of their authoritive and hierarchical stance in supervision – speaking with a conviction that they need to tell the supervisee what to do and how to do it. While I can accept that a senior practitioner may have considerable expertise to offer a beginner or novice, I have difficulty in supporting a positioning of one person as expert with power over another. Therefore the model I propose offers a different perspective. It is based on recognising the strengths that each party brings to the encounter; not the deficits or problems. This does not deny that there are problems to be addressed or weaknesses that exist; rather though, these are framed in ways that allow these to be opportunities for growth, change and improvement. The model promotes supervision as a purposeful activity, where those involved are actively engaged in the process. It is essential that it occurs in a supportive and respectful environment that values collaborative dialogue.

Those involved in the process and practice of supervision are encouraged to use their vision of the (social) worker they want to be as a base for all their discussions and interactions in supervision. Having a secure base allows one to be adventurous and uncertain – to feel secure enough to not have all the right answers though to know that the process of exploration grounded in a clear vision, will lead one in positive direction. Using vision as a base for supervision allows a worker to be comfortable and confident personally and professionally.

This work was presented at the Inaugural Australian Counselling and Supervision Conference 2005. The Abstract and the presentation slides are provided in Appendix 3.1. The practice and process of supervision, as with many other components of social work, are not a matter of concern just to social workers. The participants at that Inaugural Conference came from a range of disciplines, in this instance though, predominately from within the helping professions; and yet considering all of the differences there was a shared concern that supervision can and needs to be done better. This is definitely an area for further research and the continued integration of theory and practice.

Having presented an overview of the content of the main chapters in this thesis, I will now return to my earlier promise of explaining why this work is social work research. This is important as it addresses the first requirement as outlined in the subject description for the Thesis, which states that the work is 'a supervised research study of relevance to social work and/or social welfare'. In relation to the first part, the requirement that the research be supervised has not only been important for the overall process but also been valuable in informing part of the research. In Chapter 3, I note the parallel process of receiving supervision as a research student at the same time as thinking, talking and reading about supervision as a topic. In addressing the second part, I am drawing on the work of Fiona McDermott (1996), particularly on her paper: 'Social Work Research: Debating the boundaries'.

The title of McDermott's article highlights from the beginning that drawing boundaries around research so as to be able to delineate it as social work research is debatable. Rather than enter into the debates here, I want to focus instead on the guidelines she offers for what would be considered social work research. In developing these guidelines, McDermott reminds us that the following three points remain central areas of concern in social work:

- The relationship between the individual and society, between society and the individual;
- The nature of and possibilities for social change;
- The situation of the poor, the vulnerable and the oppressed. (McDermott 1996:5)

In the descriptions already provided of my research, I would expect that these central areas of concern have been clearly shown to have been my areas of concern. I have for instance focused

specifically on the situation of students in poverty as a particular population of poor people in our society; on the relationship between those individuals and society, and highlighted in turn my concerns about how our society views these individuals. I have identified areas of possibilities for social change not only in relation to addressing poverty as an issue, but also in changing social relationships in supervision so they no longer operate as sites of oppression. Without belabouring the point with further examples, I would submit that my research contains a social work focus.

McDermott (1996: 8) argues that having such a focus contains 'various imperatives for the social worker as researcher'. In summary she states, social work research:

1. must deal simultaneously with individual, collective, and institutional (political and economic) facets of social life and practices;
2. must use multiple methods in order to illuminate and understand the multiple levels on which social (and individual) reality is constituted;
3. must recognise the researcher as an actor who brings his/her values and beliefs to the research work in a critical and self-reflexive mode;
4. must utilise the research process as an intervention;
5. must consciously and affirmatively focus on the poor, the vulnerable and the oppressed and those who interact with them;
6. must use and develop methods and processes that involve the researched and enable them to collaborate. (McDermott 1996: 8)

Overall considering these points individually and holistically, I would believe that I have demonstrated through my descriptions of each of the pieces of research that I have substantially attended to all of these elements and this is social work research.

In this section, I have provided my reasons for presenting my research in the manner in which I have – which is slightly different to a traditional thesis presentation. I have identified my thinking in relation to the naming of the research; outlined the content of the research work and provided support from the literature for this work to be accepted as a research study of relevance to social work. In summary, this thesis is a portfolio of research papers and conference presentations. The common theme is students – in the higher education sector, in the classroom and in placements. The sub-themes are social work and social work education. It is the work of a practitioner researching her practice and looking for ways to improve that practice. It is therefore applied research that is descriptive and qualitative in approach.

Contextual Locating

This research probably would not have happened and may have not even been possible if it was not for the context in which the researcher was located. As noted above, the research is the work of a practitioner and in this instance the practitioner is located within a University environment teaching specifically social work and community welfare subjects to predominantly social work and

community welfare students. Over the years for the majority of that period, alongside of this has been a responsibility for the field education components of the two similar, though separate, professional degree programs. This prolonged and intense immersion as a social worker in this section of the higher education system has been critical to informing the areas of this research. This positioning has provided a unique perspective though one shared by others with similar experiences of history and a memory of the changes that have happened. It is unlikely that someone else beginning in these roles today would have the same contextual understanding. A 'new' person's research findings and recommendations may be quite different. It would not necessarily mean that either work is better than the other; nor could either be considered more valid or truthful. As Martinez-Brawley and Zorita (1998: 210, as cited in Crawford 1999: 126) suggest, 'truth itself is evasive and knowledge is relative and situated, that is related to the knower and … bound by place and time.' It would just mean that each is relative to and influenced by the context of the worker.

Research is also influenced by the researcher's philosophical orientation which may stem from a particular paradigm or world view and would normally be congruent with the academic discipline in which the researcher has been trained (Kumar 2005). This positioning does not always remain fixed though usually does not change readily or easily; and this has certainly been my experience. As someone who undertook her undergraduate degree in the early to mid-70s, my original research training was firmly located within the dominant paradigm of that time; a paradigm that required a positivist, objective, scientific framework for research and where quantitative methods were highly prized. Feedback on undergraduate assignments reinforced this also. I can still remember reading comments such as: 'No one is interested in your opinion. Academic work requires you to research the topic and provide quotes from the literature.' I still to this day have difficulty in saying anything as my opinion, having been 'schooled' to have evidence from the literature to back up every statement. Boucher and Holian (2001: vi) refer to this as the need to produce 'chains of evidence' as a way to mimic (the highly valued) quantitative approaches.

The legacy of that early training remains with me and it is not that I am suggesting it was all inappropriate or of no value. I still have and use from time to time my *Introductory Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences* (Welkowitz, Ewen and Cohen 1971) text. Rather, though that was the common and accepted training of the era – not only here but overseas as well (Ellis and Bochner 2000; Reason and Rowan 1981) – I held a sense of not being connected with undertaking that sort of research even during my undergraduate days. It seemed to lack 'humanity' – the numbers, and the quantities, and the facts may have a value and a place in social work practice, but the question that often arose for me was, where were the 'people' in these findings?

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There still remain a number of tensions for me in moving outside that academic traditional research framework. I question whether what I am offering as my research will be accepted as research. Part of my ongoing project throughout this study has been to explore and question what is 'research' and in particular what is 'practitioner research'? As Darlington and Scott (2002: 4-5) note, there remains a common association of research as being an activity that is 'objective, hard, cold, scientific' and so on, and that 'practice' is 'subjective' and about 'people'. Yet despite these perceptions there has been a growing acceptance of research that includes the 'subjective' and 'people'. This does not mean however that there has been universal acceptance. Lehmann (2001) for instance provides an insight into her experiences of talking about her research with others who had different and differing ideas about what 'research' is. In her 'Epilogue' (Lehmann 2001: 90) she described some of the 'demons' she confronted and her description highlights how not everyone accepts 'subjective' research. Similarly the idea of practitioner research as a legitimate and accepted practice is not without its opponents and critics (Shaw 2005); as well as its supporters and advocates.

These have been some of the areas that have been important matters for me to recognise and consider as part of the overall research process. They are significant to understanding my 'contextual location' (Cunningham 1988: 166-169) and the influence this has on the work I have undertaken. The result is a meld of what I needed to do, with, who I was and where I was located. At the end of all this exploration, I have accepted that my work has been legitimate and do offer it as (another form of) research within a specific and given context.

Methodology

At this point then, it is timely to discuss the methods used in this study and explain what I mean in saying it is applied research that is descriptive and qualitative in approach. Ranjit Kumar (2005: 8) in his text 'Research Methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners' suggests that research can be classified from three perspectives:

- application of the research study;
- objectives in undertaking the research;
- inquiry mode employed.

In Figure 1: Types of Research, Kumar (2005: 9) sets out in diagrammatic form the three perspectives and the related types of research for each.

Figure 1: Types of research (Kumar 2005: 9)

Kumar (2005: 9) states that 'most of the research in the social sciences is applied', and this work is no different. The learning that has occurred through the research has been applied to address issues, problems, and concerns identified. The study of student poverty has been to inform my concerns about placing students and I have used this information in my placement processes. It is also to contribute not only to raising other people's awareness of this situation, but also to the social policy arena in relation to this issue. My study of teaching and learning strategies has worked to inform me about ways to enhance my teaching practices. I have applied the research on an ongoing basis.

In relation to the second perspective – objectives – the defining question here is to ask: what were the objectives in undertaking the research? There were elements of wanting to 'explain' and 'explore' research questions – though there was never really any intention of looking for correlations between two or more aspects of the various situations – however, the predominate objective has been to describe what has been happening – for students as people, for students in poverty, for workers engaged in the practices and processes of supervision, and so on.

The third perspective in Kumar's typology concerns the process one chooses for finding answers to the research questions. He suggests that there are two approaches: the structured approach, which is usually classified as quantitative research; and, the unstructured approach, which is usually classified as qualitative research (Kumar 2005: 12).

Without going into the various nuances and details of each of these, my research has predominantly drawn on the qualitative research approach where I have been interested in

exploring the nature of the various issues rather than looking to quantify the extent of them. At times for instance I talk about numbers and quantities – for example, in recognising a particular cohort of final year students preparing for placement, there were only 3 out of 10 students in that group who could undertake a placement the way the subject is planned and timetabled. There could be some value in pursuing a quantitative approach; however, in this research my interest has been in a more flexible and open, unstructured approach that allowed for the exploration of the experiences, feelings, perceptions and so on of the people involved. In the chapter on the teaching tool, I was interested in exploring student perceptions as they presented them to me in placement preparation sessions, 'that they did not know any theory'. I was interested in how their feelings about entering placements were impacting on them. I was more interested in the personal aspects than in the number of instances where this occurred or the grade levels of the students to which this applied; even though these could be interesting aspects to research.

This goes some way to describing my methodology; though it is only the broad framework. What I want to introduce you to now is some of the 'fine print' in relation to the methods. In any piece of research it is likely that a range of techniques, tools and approaches will be required. Similarly in this research there has not been just one method applied consistently. One of the constants throughout though has been the use of reflection. In part as educationalists Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985: 19) define it, reflection is 'a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations'. I have specifically engaged in the reflective process and included it as a core component of my research. In fact my opening statement of Chapter 1 is: 'This paper has developed from reflection on practice (Fook 1996; Schön 1983).'

Donald Schön's work is perhaps one of the most recognised texts in relation to reflective practice. One of his key concepts is 'reflection-in-action' and this reflection-in-action process has been actively applied in my research as well. For Schön (1991: 50) this process is 'central to the "art" by which practitioners sometimes deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict'. It is about that integration within an experience and the ability to improvise during the course of that experience. It is that point for instance, in the middle of a class being able to reflect-in-action on what is happening and what actions you could take. There is also a related practice which again I have engaged in consciously which is reflection-on-action (see Gould and Taylor 1996) – whereby I have included the learning from past experience in present and/or intended actions.

I have drawn on the work of Jan Fook (1996: 6-8) – a leading Australian social work practitioner, academic and author – and her framework for a reflective process, and used her

detailed guide which provides an extensive list of questions to stimulate a critical analysis. The key components of her process are:

1. Identify and describe the practice/experience and its context in terms as concrete and specific as possible.
2. Reflect on your account.
3. Develop practice and theory. (Fook 1996: 6-8)

In part this is not an unusual framework; and Fook acknowledges this also. In talking about 'The Reflective Researcher: Developing a reflective approach to practice', Fook (1996: 1-4) provides the reader with a description of her 'Pathways to Discovering a Reflective Perspective'. Part of her pathway includes her time when she was 'responsible for the coordination of field education' (Fook 1996: 2) and her learning about the use of reflection during that time, and this certainly is something to which I can relate.

The literature on field education is full of models which include reflection as a key element. The time in the field on placement is a key time for students to experience learning, and the work of Kolb (1984) and his Experiential Learning Model is a common starting point in student preparation sessions. Burnard (1989: 9) provides a figure (see Figure 2: Experiential Learning Cycle) of a later version of Kolb's work.

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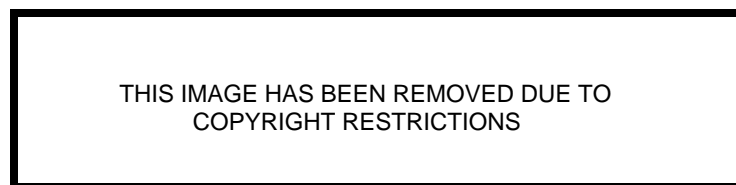
Figure 2: Experiential Learning Cycle (Burnard 1989: 9)

The idea here is that a student on placement for instance would be encouraged to identify a concrete experience they have had, note what they have observed in relation to the situation and

reflect on it. They would be encouraged then to link this to their learning about abstract concepts that fit with this, and to develop some general ideas about the situation. Having formed some new ideas or learning about the experience they would be encouraged to test these out in other situations.

Along very similar lines drawing on Kolb's work, though applying it specifically to placements, Bogo and Vayda (1985: 228) have developed what they term the ITP Loop – the Integration of Theory and Practice Loop (Figure 3).

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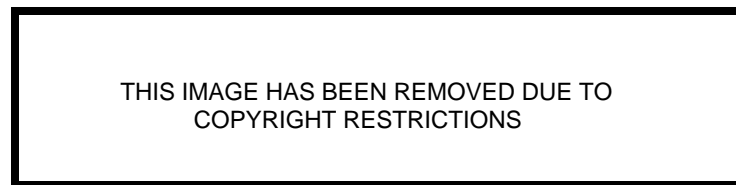
Figure 3: Integration of Theory and Practice (ITP) Loop (Bogo and Vayda 1985: 228)

They call for a period of 'retrieval', 'reflection', 'linkage' and a 'professional response', which is then followed by further retrieval, and so the cycle continues. This work is still one of the most commonly used and referred to models in Field Education and in the most up-to-date text by Helen Cleak and Jill Wilson (2004: 91) titled *Making the Most of Field Placement*, it remains on offer as a primary tool for students. In their text, Cleak and Wilson are using the 'slightly expanded view' (see Figure 4), of an adaptation of Bogo and Vayda's work as presented by Wilson and two other colleagues (O'Connor, Wilson and Setterlund 2003).

Figure 4: An adaptation of Bogo and Vayda's Integration and Practice Loop (Cleak and Wilson
2004: 91)

Some readers will be familiar with Action Research, and/or the related (similar though different)
social research practice of Participatory Action Research (Wadsworth 1998; Kemmis and
McTaggart 1988; McTaggart 1991). Using Figure 5: The Action Research Spiral from Kember and
Kelly (1993: 6) from their text *Improving Teaching Through Action Research*, one can easily
recognise a similar pattern to those of the previous approaches – the call, in this instance for a
'researcher/teacher' to reflect, plan, act, observe, followed by further reflection, and so on. It has
become a fairly common mode of investigation in research on teaching and learning, particularly
for those interested 'in classroom teaching practices' (Berg 2001: 178). In some ways, given that I
have focused a lot throughout my research on my classroom teaching and that one of my main aims
has been to improve my practice, it could seem Action Research would be one of the most
appropriate approaches to have taken. It has in fact been one of the methods I have employed in
this research, though as others also have suggested (Treleaven 1994: 142) not sufficient on its own.

Figure 5: The Action Research Spiral (Kember and Kelly 1993: 6)

What I did find slightly more helpful and certainly more detailed was the Spiral Model of Learning (see Figure 6), also called the Action-Reflection Model or the Conscientization Model (drawing on the work of Paulo Freire 1970). I am referring here to the work of Anne Bishop (2002: 126) and her text *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the cycle of oppression*. What I found most useful in this was the emphasis on 'Placing ourselves' within the model as well as an explicit recognition of context – a key part of Fook's (1996) reflective process guidelines referred to earlier.

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* Also called the Action-Reflection Model or the Conscientization Model

Adapted from: The "Core Model" of Learning, Centre for Christian Studies, Toronto, Ontario

CUSO Education Department, *Basics and Tools: A Collection of Popular Education Resources and Activities* (Ottawa: CUSO, 1988)

Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, Thomas, *Educating for a Change* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1991)

Figure 6: Spiral Model of Learning (Bishop 2002: 126)

It was however when I found Ian Cunningham's (1988) work on Interactive Holistic Research that I achieved the best fit with what I was doing. His figure, Figure 7: Testing and evolving theory (Cunningham 1988: 166) encapsulates all of the key research methods of my research. Underpinning all of this is contextual locating – not a research method as 'typically conceived' (Cunningham 1988: 166), but a crucial part of the overall (and my) process. As Cunningham (1988: 166) notes that in the figure, the 'double-headed arrows show a mutual

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interaction, that is the ideal process is one in which the different research modes cross-link, weaving together wisdom developed in different ways.'

Figure 7: Testing and evolving theory (Cunningham 1988: 166)

In my own situation I have thought of ideas from my own experience (experiential research) of say being a student on placement, or supervising a student on placement; talked with other individuals about these ideas (dialogic research) and, been involved through sharing with various groups of supervisors in a collaborative search for more effective ways of engaging in supervision (collaborative research) and tested and developed these ideas in action (action research). At the same time as experiencing supervision, I have been reading the literature, writing about it, and so on (contextual locating).

Without going into too much detail, I will provide a brief comment on each of the five interconnecting methods as Cunningham defines them, with some examples of how I have related these to my work.

Collaborative research: 'The underlying principle here is that a group of people can together pursue an investigation of a topic, and that the initiating researcher should not dictate the process of research activity.' (Cunningham 1988: 164)

Specifically this happened in working in the classroom on looking for ways to prepare for placements, whereby students could feel confident and comfortable about what they know.

Dialogic research: 'This centres around the two-person interaction and uses the dialogue as a mode of 'finding out'. At one level it is a special case of collaborative research. However, there does seem to be something about the two-person mode which makes it distinctively different. At its simplest there is no group process to attend to, only the interpersonal relationship of two people.' (Cunningham 1988: 164)

This is certainly the case in the individual student discussion sessions when organising placements; as well as is commonly the situation in supervision.

Experiential research: The way in which Cunningham defines this is that it is 'research which uses as its focus the direct experience of the person/researcher. The researcher is thus the 'subject'. There can be two kinds of experiential research: personal, where researcher and subject are one and the same; and dialogic, where experience and/or response to experience is shared with others' (Cunningham 1988: 164).

In my research I have included both of these approaches.

Action research: Basically Cunningham's definition relates to the work I have already covered earlier when referring to the Action Research Spiral (Kember and Kelly 1993). One concern he raises with this approach is that 'some action researchers still operate in a detached, disconnected mode in relation to others in 'the action'.' (Cunningham 1988: 165)

In my own research approach, it was certainly not the case; there were very real connections between all parties throughout.

Contextual locating: At its simplest form, what Cunningham (1988: 166) is referring to here is that 'one feeds into and off the context within which one operates'. He provides a 'map' of this process in his figure (see Figure 8) 'Contextual locating' (Cunningham 1988: 168). For Cunningham (1988: 168) this is the 'activity that comes first as it provides the backcloth of patterns and ideas within which more specific projects are carried out.' In my situation I have had many years of doing, thinking, reading, writing and talking about, the issues of field education, student learning, supervision, and generally students as people. This type of 'research' requires that one be 'immersed' in the field. It is not the domain of 'the one-shot researcher coming in to do a quick study to carry out this kind of research. …it takes time to do things, write about them, get feedback, apply new learning back in the field, etc.'(Cunningham 1988:169)

Again this sense of 'learning over time' has been integral to the work I have done.
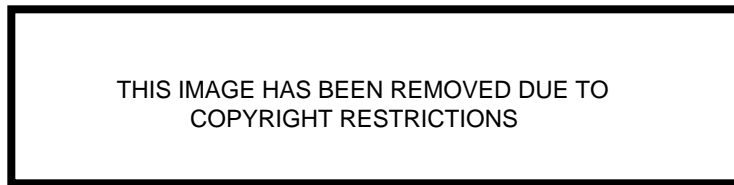
Figure 8: Contextual locating (Cunningham 1988: 168)

The value of this Interactive Holistic Research method is that it uses:

1. existing theories and ideas (contextual locating);
2. the situations and contexts of human action (action research);
3. the interaction with others (dialogic research and collaborative research);
4. and acknowledges and utilizes one's self (experiential research). (Cunningham 1988: 181)

I finally had the meld of me, the work, the location, and the research methods to address the questions and situations I was immersed in and seeking to explore through a social justice framework.

In finishing this section, I just want to say a few words about some other core components of a research work. The first area I want to comment on is in relation to ethical considerations. Not every piece of research requires an Ethics Committee approval; though every piece would have

ethical considerations that do need to be recognised and attended to by the researcher/s. The lack of formal ethics approval was certainly found to be quite common in a recent study of practitioner research undertaken by Keane, Shaw and Faulkner (2003, as discussed in Shaw 2005: 1235-1238). These researchers identified forty-two projects that fitted their suggested framework of characteristics of practitioner research. (My research would have 'fitted' with their criteria.) One of the classifications used by the researchers in auditing these projects was whether formal ethical approval was obtained. Their definition of 'formal approval' included 'all occasions on which approval on ethical and other grounds was sought from and given by an individual, group or committee, inside or outside the research setting' (Shaw 2005: 1236). They identified twenty-nine (of the forty-two) studies did not have formal approval. Similarly, though my work did not require an Ethics application and formal approval, it is work that as a social worker has been undertaken following the requirements and guidelines of AASW Code of Ethics (2002). The Professional Association specifically addresses Research in section 4.5.2 (AASW 2002: 20) of its Code and notes that 'in addition to the general provisions of the Code, social workers engaged in *research* will undertake specific ethical responsibilities.' I have conscientiously recognised my obligations and worked to meet these.

The second area I want to comment on relates to traditional research concepts – those of validity, reliability and generalizability of research. Inherent within the scientific paradigm there is a strong emphasis on a researcher establishing the validity and reliability of a research instrument; and whatever the findings of the research turn out to be, that one needs to be able to demonstrate the generalizability of those findings.

In qualitative research, these concepts tend to be treated with a different significance. Sometimes depending on the type of research, the question of generalizability may not even be asked. As Berg (2001: 232) states there can still be a 'scientific value' in 'investigating some single category of individual, group, or event simply to gain an understanding of that individual, group, or event', without any need to be concerned about generalizing to similar types of individuals, groups, or events. To judge the validity of a piece of qualitative research Ellis and Bochner (2000: 751) suggest may be about asking is the work 'lifelike, believable, and possible'. With respect to reliability, the researcher's approach may be to undertake reliability checks, such as taking the work back to the people involved to give them 'a chance to comment, add materials, change their minds, and offer their interpretations' (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 751). These different ways of thinking about and understanding these terms has been part of my work as well and fits within the 'contextual locating' sphere of the overall research methods used.

A World View

Broadly, this research has never been just about undertaking research; it has specifically been directed by the requirements of being a social worker. For a social worker, the professional association's Code of Ethics (AASW 2002) repeatedly calls for practitioners to 'research' – both formally and informally through a myriad of ways. It is part of one's commitment and responsibility as a member of the profession. Each worker though addresses this personal professional requirement in his or her own unique way, and this will be dependent on his or her strengths, resources, opportunities and abilities. One's view of the world or paradigm positioning will also influence not only the type of research one undertakes but also the commitment and investment one makes to such a project. I have already discussed some of the influences that have impacted on my own 'paradigm shift' with respect to research and research methods. I want to add just a few more comments in relation to some of the other personal professional arenas that also influence my world view. These personal professional arenas can be broken into three categories: social, academic, and practice.

Social: There have been and remain two dominant concerns for me – poverty and justice. This is not to suggest other areas such as abuse or violence or a whole host of issues, are unimportant; rather, it is that these two have particular significance for me. From my undergraduate days of first studying what has come to be known as Henderson's 'poverty line' (Henderson, Harcourt and Harper 1970), the issue of poverty has remained a key concern and one which still as an affluent society we have failed to adequately address. We may have had a Prime Minister who seemed to be committed to addressing the issue, and 'promised' that no Australian child would live in poverty – but the deadline he set has come and gone and the problem still remains. Poverty needs to be on everyone's political agenda. In relation to tertiary students and poverty, the work of sociologist Judith Bessant (2003) gives some clues as to why that particular population are 'missing from the policy agenda'; and her work with colleagues (Bessant, Watts, Dalton and Smyth 2006) offers some insightful perspectives on why poverty generally is talked about in metaphors that mean it is not (though it should be) an issue that (re)invigorates policy debate.

Why is it that we do not have just policy that adequately addresses an issue such as poverty? The issue of justice is a complex one – like poverty. It incorporates many aspects from natural justice to legal justice to social justice as well as and including the need to develop and practise everyday just processes. In field education, questions about justice and fairness and equity are common. If a student's work on placement is considered unsatisfactory, the decision making processes involved in considering what actions need to happen in relation to the student, the field educator, the agency, the service users, the liaison staff person and even the impact on the other

students in that group, invariably demand that such questions be addressed. On many such occasions one could wish for the fabled 'wisdom of Solomon'; the reality though, is that all parties need to grapple with the issues of justice as best they can. There are no magical formulas or simple answers; and instead it requires hard work to continuously maintain a sense of humanity, to really listen to what people are saying, and to truly respect the people involved and at the same time to persist in seeking just solutions.

Academic: Alongside the difficult and testing situations presented in the academic arena, there is also a very privileged position that I have experienced as a worker there. My 'job' requires that I read and stay in touch with the literature. I know many other practitioners who have a struggle to have 'reading time' considered as a legitimate part of their work. In Chapter 2 I recall the story of my introduction to Empowerment Theory. That experience as well as many others since when I have sensed 'good and competent' practitioners being intimidated and fearful of the unfamiliar terms for the latest social work theory, makes me reticent to name my work using some particular labels. I have the privilege of being able to read and consequently am comfortable with the terms; others I work with and value as practitioners, are not always.

As a practice, I tend to describe what I do rather than label it. However I do appreciate that we use labels such as 'Structural Social Work' as 'shorthand' and in certain circumstances it does have its place. Providing a description of what I do is much more 'wordy'; which can have a number of disadvantages. However, I have chosen to generally continue with this approach. Consequently throughout, I am limiting my use of some terms and not including material about some theories which have informed my overall practice and research. In my work I know that I do draw on a range of other theories such as feminist, narrative, post-modern, constructivist, structuralist, as well as theories of society, learning and so on; it is just that I do not always use those names.

In this section however, it may be useful to include here some brief comments on how these theories have informed my practice and research. As an example, Social Constructionism highlights that 'reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyse the process in which this occurs' (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 13). As a perspective for viewing the world, Social Constructionism therefore requires one (worker, researcher, academic) to question and reflect on one's ways of 'knowing' and understanding the social world and to recognise that it is in one's interactions with others, that meaning (be it of the interaction, of a relationship, of a label, and so on) is constructed. It challenges the idea that everyone 'knows' the same things; that we have fixed and shared meanings. Rather it suggests that in our interactions with others we negotiate and interpret what we know and do so in relation to a particular context and historical

point in time. One example then from my work has been examining the label 'student'. What is meant by the term 'student' today is not the same as what the term meant when I was an undergraduate student. In my work it has been important to be cautious and critical of my assumptions of what it is like to be a student today, and of my understanding of how students view themselves and how they are viewed in the social world.

Postmodernism has also been useful here and without going into a lot of detail, hopefully it will suffice if I highlight one way in which it has been helpful. One of the tenets of a post-modern perspective is that it cautions against becoming too ready to hold on to one view as being the right way of seeing the world. So, even as my sense of 'knowing' who is a student today develops, I need to remain tentative in my approaches and conclusions. From a post-modern perspective, there is valuing of difference rather than sameness that is a central guide. This has been helpful in my thinking for instance about students as learners. In valuing difference in the classroom, rather than striving for sameness, new possibilities have been allowed to emerge in the teaching and learning processes occurring within that environment.

There have however also been times when postmodernism for instance has not been particularly helpful. As Pease, Allan and Briskman (2003: 8) suggest, 'some applications of postmodernism to social work ignore the broader structures that generate oppression', and it is in trying to deal with poverty as a very real problem for students, that the post-modern perspective has seemed to offer me little guidance. Structural social work and feminist theories have been more direct and useful for me, in dealing with and thinking about poverty as a problem.

Structural social work focuses on people in poverty. The early work in developing a structural approach to social work practice was undertaken by Maurice Moreau and colleagues at the School of Social Work at Carleton University (Canada) in the 1970s. The most recent detailed presentation of the approach is in a text by Bob Mullaly – *Structural Social Work: Ideology, theory and practice* (1997). In that text, Mullaly names 'oppression' – in all its forms – as the focus of structural social work (1997: 138-159) and provides guidance on ways of understanding the nature, dynamics and forms of oppression that exist in particularly western capitalist societies. This work has been useful in again providing a way of critically analysing the structures that work to maintain inequality and restrict people's access to needed material resources.

However given my gender, my place in a predominantly female workforce specifically in the School of Social Work and Community Welfare, working predominantly with female students, and preparing them for a profession that is predominantly female, it would hardly be appropriate not to have also considered what female scholarship from the various and many feminist theories could offer my research. Perhaps one of the most obvious common threads spanning the diversity

of feminist theories was that gender does matter and that gender inequality continues to exist. As such, any analysis of my work – be it as a classroom teacher, as field education coordinator, as a social worker offering supervision – needed to have a gender perspective as well. This was a complex and important aspect that informed my views not only in developing an understanding of individual issues or problems but also in looking at ways to bring about change and take action in relation to a range of situations. At the same time, there were many other key concepts and strategies from feminist theories and practice which were valuable for me – such as empowerment, the importance of process, consciousness-raising, and the sometimes referred to 'slogan' (Dominelli and McLeod 1989: 32) of 'the personal is political', a fundamental idea of radical feminist theory (Saulnier 1996: 32).

It is important to acknowledge that much of the work of feminist theorists can now be found informing, and integrated into, other theoretical perspectives. As Mullaly (1997: 131) notes, 'feminist theory and analysis are enormous sources of information and inspiration for radical social work, in general, and structural social work, in particular'. It would be unusual nowadays to read a social work text – be it dedicated to a specific theory or a collection of theories (for example, Ife (2002) on community development; Ife (1997) on critical practice; Pease and Fook (1999) on postmodern critical perspectives; Parton and O'Byrne (2000) on constructive social work; and Allan, Pease and Briskman (2003) on critical social work) – that does not refer to and draw on, feminism and/or feminist theories. Given this therefore, it is not surprising that my work, whether looking at the struggles for an individual student or for women as a group and their positioning in the workforce, has been strongly influenced directly and indirectly, by the labours of, and teachings arising from, feminist scholarship.

As a way of concluding this section, rather than providing more detail on specific theories and their applications in my work, I would like to finish with a general comment on how I have made use of theories at different times. I noted earlier that as an academic, I have had the privilege of time to read, and in so doing, have achieved a certain level of comfort in 'knowing' theories. However, I do not want to leave an impression that I have all this 'knowledge' just sitting in my head, waiting to be applied. I think the reality of applying theory to practice and research is far different to that, and instead, occurs in various and complex ways. (Some of my thinking around the particular relationship between theory, practice and research, is also presented in Chapter 2.) At this point however, I want to identify a couple of the ways in which I work.

Sometimes I do read about a particular theory and spend time wondering and thinking about what it offers me generally, and looking at ways in which it might work to inform me about a specific situation or problem. This basically is a deductive reasoning approach. Other times, (and

this was quite common in my work undertaken for this thesis,) I come up against a problem situation and know that I need to go searching for information – some research, some theory, some other ideas – on alternative ways for looking at and addressing my 'problem'. This fits with the idea of an inductive approach, where one moves from the particular to the general. It also fits with the educational approach known as 'Problem-Based Learning' (Boud and Feletti 1997).

Neither approach is guaranteed to produce the result one hopes for or wants. Reflecting back on my efforts as a student, there were times when the approach I was using did not fit neatly with either of these approaches and sometimes seemed more like an unfocused attempt using both approaches at the same time. Sometimes the results even of my focused attempts were not helpful at all. Some theories seemed contradictory – as was the case with some of the feminist theories; some theories were difficult to understand and presented a confusing picture – as was the case with reading some of the post-modern perspectives; some theories seemed to lack direction on what they offered for and in practice; and so on. There were also real gaps in the literature and at times, little research on the topics I was researching.

Frustrating as it can be to accept, theories do not exist that will provide us with answers to all the problems and issues and situations that we encounter. What currently does exist provides a foundation for our further development and analysis. This is part of the ongoing task for all practitioners, academics and researchers.

Practice: Another privilege that comes with my academic position is that I have permission and am expected to spend time with the 'field'. In visiting workers and agencies I am able to really hear and see what is happening in practice. I also hear from students about the work they are doing in placements. There is so much good social work happening and unfortunately it is often not seen, heard or read about as ideally it should be. I am always encouraging others to write about what they are doing and to find ways to share their practice stories. Having this expectation of others, I have felt the pressure to do likewise. So in part, though researching and writing up that research is a professional obligation, it has also been a personal practice one – if I expect others to do it, then I need to do the same. This thesis therefore comes about in part as a way of addressing that commitment.

Findings and Recommendations:

Considering all of the above – my reasons for the research, my personal professional positioning in relation to undertaking the research and writing the thesis, and so on – one could be wondering what was achieved. Though each paper has its own version of findings and recommendations, it is timely perhaps to note here some of the general outcomes of this project.

Given the reflective research approach taken, some of the findings have been incorporated into teaching practices as part of the process. The success achieved in the application of some strategies, supports a recommendation for those involved in teaching and learning environments, to include a range of ways of cultivating the imagination of participants to enhance learning outcomes. Success also with a model of supervision which advocates the use of vision as a base for supervision, leads to a further recommendation for such an approach to be considered by workers and students wanting an egalitarian, cooperative, power sharing arrangement in supervision. Other findings such as the need for action to address student poverty and particularly when that poverty is exacerbated by the requirement of student placements, are matters for many stakeholders such as the professional associations, the universities, the government, the human services and agencies involved in placements, to address.

One does need to strive to overcome unfairness caused by unequal access, to work towards upholding the rights of participants in a range of processes, to encourage others to reduce the barriers that prevent access to essential resources, and to foster active participation so that people have real opportunities to have a voice and be involved in decision making processes. The research demonstrates that it is both possible and necessary for a social worker in a teaching role to work in a myriad of ways that do this and in so doing work to promote social justice.

Conclusion

In summary then, some of what I have presented here has been

- an orientation and introduction to this thesis
  - highlighting the form and content of this portfolio as a thesis
  - identifying the theme threaded throughout the separate pieces
  - included the broad aims of the research
  - identifying the context
  - identifying some strengths and weaknesses
  - noting the links between the chapters
- the methodology – the journey to, and the overall outcome
  - including a description of the general research framework
  - the various theories and methods that have informed the study
  - the relevant and appropriate framework for the study
- some of the findings and recommendations

In closing, I want to share with you an image I have as I reflect back on the process of undertaking this thesis. The image is of blowing bubbles.

For me, writing this thesis is like putting bubbles in a jar. Making the bubbles – blowing them and watching them dance in the air is terrific fun. Doing the work involved in each of these papers – working with students, listening to their stories, helping them to learn and recognise their learning – has been similarly lots of fun as well as educational; and sometimes sad also. Delivering these papers at conferences has been an active event – a time for blowing bubbles to an audience; and because that has been an active/interactive process, those experiences have been an integral, useful and a positive part of the process of preparing this thesis.

Trying to capture all of this learning, teaching, experience, the relationships, dialogue, discovery, in a written form – this portfolio – is akin to capturing bubbles in a jar – it can happen, it does happen, but then they change and no longer contain their magic fascination as they 'pop' and dissolve and become something else – words on a page. Hopefully though, the depth and range of meanings conveyed by the words are able to be imagined.

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Chapter 1

Students are people (in poverty) too!

Introduction

This paper has developed from reflection on practice (Fook 1996; Schön 1983). I am a social worker employed as a lecturer in a School of Social Work and Community Welfare of a regional university. In that position/location I am also the coordinator of the Field Education programs for the two professional degree courses. I have worked at this same University for just over ten years now, and most of that time I have been the Field Education Coordinator.

This time factor is important (Ryan 1996) as it has allowed me to recognise changes which have occurred subtly and seemingly without much recognition by others. In this paper I want to focus on one of those many changes: the personal hardships experienced by many of today's students and the implications of such hardships in the teaching and learning context.

The intimate connection with the Field Education components of the students' courses has also allowed me to witness the most dramatic aspects of those changes. A case example will be discussed later which highlights this.

Background

For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on the four year Bachelor of Social Work undergraduate degree program. This is a practicing degree for a social worker in Australia. In this program students have a generalist introductory first two years of coursework subjects. In the first semester of their third year they undertake a full time field education placement of 65 days. This is followed by further coursework study in the second semester of third year and first semester of fourth year. In the second semester of fourth year the students undertake their final field education placement of 75 days. Basically the field education component requires students to work full time, 9am–5pm Monday to Friday, in an agency or service, with a qualified social worker as their field educator. These placements conform to the requirements of the profession's accrediting body, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). For a person to have eligibility for membership of the AASW, they must have completed a degree course from an approved institution and as part of that, have undertaken a minimum of 980 hours of supervised fieldwork.

Students are not paid to do placements. More than this though, given the nature of the time requirements of a placement, the opportunity for a student to engage in other paid work is greatly reduced. It is almost taken as acceptable and expected that students are poor. It is almost a given that students today have to work in any sort of job to earn money to support themselves while they

are studying. The apparent rationale for accepting this situation is that they will only be poor for a short while (four years), and will be better off (if not rich) when they graduate.

In those semesters of coursework subjects, students will often only need to attend classes for ten to twelve hours per week. For some, depending on the timetabling of their subjects, it may mean they have two or three days each week without class contact requirements. Course counsellors' current advice is that a full time student needs to put in to their study a minimum of 40 hours each week in order to obtain pass levels in their subjects. If a student wants grades of credit, or better, then the accepted norm is that more time will be required. Outside of class contact hours though, when the other study time happens is up to the student. They can work solidly nights and weekends and reasonably work at a paid job during the weekdays and expect to pass. So for students such as these in social work programs, the requirements of placements where they do not have these 'free' weekday periods, dramatically effect their earning power for a significant part of their student life. Where a person only needing to support herself or himself may be able to manage, a single parent in particular with others depending on her or his earning power being regular and sustainable, will be often in very negative financial straits.

What often happens is those who have to work to survive, continue to do so during placement. Recently one student reported working in her 'other' job (in a retail setting) 30 hours a week on top of the full time placement. One wonders how this is possible given a student is in placement from 9am–5pm Monday to Friday. It certainly means some very long days during the week and weekends. Such feats seem to be dismissed with a suggestion that students are 'young and healthy', so they will be able to manage this. Again, even if this was true, is this an acceptable assumption?

It is certainly the case that the vast majority of the students in the course I am referring to on this regional university campus, would not be classified as 'young'. Looking at one grouping ('school leavers') of those considered to be 'young', the number of 'school leavers' in the course in recent years could be counted on one's fingers.

As to the reference to health, without getting sidetracked into the health status of students, students on placement do often highlight one related health aspect: that of being tired. Without exception, in every cohort of students undertaking placements, there are comments made in discussions, and written about in their reflective journals, about being tired. Students note that though they may work hard on their assignments or projects for coursework assessment, they do not experience the same prolonged sense of being tired that they experience on placement. Being on placement is different to attending classes. Placement requires a much more constant and total response and commitment from a student. Students talk about having so much to learn during their

placement and wanting to be involved and active in that learning. This takes a lot of energy. It is quite different to having to attend (even actively participate in) a one or two hour lecture or tutorial. There are also comments about recognising the sense of tension in themselves, related sometimes to performance anxiety — the student wants to do well, in a more real world way than in comparison to the way they perform for an oral presentation in class or preparing an assignment paper.

Students will often comment on plans they have for themselves during placement that relate to having more time for significant social and emotional activities. These expectations of having more time to spend with their children, or partners, or friends, because they will not have to do work on assignments at night while they are on placement, often are not met. They are too tired when they come home to have much energy for anything other than getting through the night's tasks.

Some people would argue that this is common for many, not just students on placements. Also, the long hours required for combining a placement and a paid job, are the norm for people running their own businesses or today's executive. So what if a student comes to class hungry because they have not had time to eat between finishing their morning job and coming to class. One could well ask though that just because this may be the case, does it mean that it is an appropriate situation? Should this be allowed to happen? Linked with this are a number of contentious issues which do not seem to be addressed: duty of care to the student; duty of care issues in relation to 'clients'; working conditions, rights and benefits; general workplace health and safety issues, and so on. Yet we know it happens and will continue to happen under the current arrangements.

Same But Different

So who are these students? In part, the above description has noted some of the conditions experienced by today's students. Certainly it is accepted that students in a course such as social work with the added aspects of the field education components are not the same as those in some other disciplines. Even where other courses have students undertake fieldwork, the duration of that work is often much shorter and therefore less intrusive in a student's life. However, the situation as my students in Australia experience it is not unique to them.

Recently I spent six months working in an area in the north east of the United States where I recognised a comparable situation. Students involved in Graduate Schools of Social Work that I was working with, could easily have been my students at home. Students in the United States go to Graduate School to undertake what they refer to as a 'terminal degree', a Masters in Social Work.

There, this degree is generally seen as the common degree for social work practice. In Australia, as mentioned earlier, our accepted practice degree is the four year Bachelors degree (or accredited equivalent).

One of the most significant differences between the two student groups at that time though, was the size of the financial debt American students incurred for their tuition. The amounts owed were roughly equivalent to what would be considered a moderate home mortgage in Australia. Our students do pay 'a tuition tax through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme' (Maslen and Slattery 1994: 161). Still today, an education in an Australian public university for a domestic student costs nowhere near those amounts incurred by American students in Graduate Schools. How long this will remain the case is questionable.

The similarities noted included the face of tired and hungry students struggling to fulfill the requirements of their courses — classroom studies and placement experiences. (The recognition of students being hungry was literally dealt with by one School I was involved with which always made sure they provided a substantial free food supply for students at any of its activities.) There were also similarities listed as to whom these courses excluded: those that could not make it into the Universities in the first place (not referring to those with limited abilities, but those who could not meet the social, emotional, financial, and time commitments that the study would require), and those who did make it in, but who could not maintain themselves (and their dependents) adequately enough to continue at that time.

Some of the Schools of Social Work visited also identified the difficulty in maintaining class numbers; attracting students to the course in the first place, and then retaining them through to completion. Agencies visited highlighted the difficult working conditions due to factors such as cuts in welfare spending and differing arrangements in the allocation of funding, which made it difficult for them to continue to maintain their involvement in supporting student placements. At the same time, many also acknowledged the difficulty they were increasingly experiencing in attracting qualified staff. The qualified graduate was becoming a sought after resource. The link between future staff and student placement opportunities was acknowledged, but how to effectively deal with the issues was not readily known.

In looking at such comparisons, it is possible to argue that this is a normal situation. That the position students are in is common and therefore without need for further comment or attention. Another way of looking at it though is to suggest that there are structural oppressions operating in the system and that these need to be challenged and changed. I would support this latter position and will argue for this further on.

The Human Face/Place in the Curriculum

For now I wish to return to the description of the students today. I strongly believe not enough emphasis is given to seeing students as people either in the teaching and learning process or in the overarching policies controlling higher education. I acknowledge that there is some awareness that students bring their life experiences and prior learning into the classroom in invaluable ways. In the Introduction to the text *Making Social Policy in Australia*, the authors begin with the following story:

> Marcia was a single parent in her thirties, sitting in the first session of a social policy class as part of a graduate diploma in community development being offered in northern Victoria. She felt intimidated by 'policy', said she had no experience with it, and thought of it as being 'up there' and out of touch with 'ordinary people'.
> As the conversation developed, it turned out that Marcia was well informed about childcare issues, services and policies. She had been active with others in collecting information on local childcare needs, writing submissions, and lobbying. Marcia had actually been involved in 'policy development', through processes that community services jargon might call 'citizen participation' or community development. (Dalton, Draper, Weeks and Wiseman 1996: xii)

I think as educators we do listen to the stories our students tell, and value the contributions they bring through their lived experiences. However, it often seems that this knowledge still stays within the context of the course being taught; it is not used in any substantial way to bring about changes to the structures that impact on the lives they lead while they are students.

Over the past two years in particular, I have been reviewing and studying the literature related to the teaching and learning process(es) in higher education. I was involved with this in a formal way as part of a Graduate Certificate in Education (Tertiary Teaching). I found significant references by leading educationalists in the broad field of education as well in the specific field of social work education, which highlighted the need for teachers to be aware of the various dimensions of their student populations.

In material related to curriculum design (Ramsden 1992; Boud 1995) as an example, one is expected to have an understanding of the 'target learners'. Factors such as the students'/target learners' previous studies, the class size, the gender mix, the life stages, cultural and location elements, socio-economic backgrounds, and so on, are required knowledge for effective design. In a model developed by John Biggs (1987; 1999), the 3P model of teaching and learning, student factors are one of the first points of consideration. However, again the student factors are considered within the context of learning in a course; they are not considered in relation to challenging or changing the living conditions of students so that students are in an improved position to take advantage of their educational opportunity.

Similar to this call for awareness of student factors, there is work that Taylor and Burgess (1997) have presented titled 'Responding to "non-traditional" students: an enquiry and action approach'. The authors make a case for their use of the term 'non-traditional' (1997: 104), though they are including students perhaps more commonly recognised as those from ethnic minorities. The paper reports on the authors' use of a problem-based learning approach with these students in a social work program in Bristol. They argue quite strongly the benefits of using the problem-based learning approach and the way it 'enables non-traditional learners to integrate their learning and manage the impact of disjuncture inevitable in higher education as it is structured today' (Taylor and Burgess 1997: 114). The focus remains though with accepting the students as they are, and helping them to 'manage' the system as it is.

In many other instances, the literature offers scant recognition of students as people. Often any reference to the personal conditions of students is picked up on as a rather peripheral suggestion. The following quote from Garrett (1998: 243) is an example of this: 'Because social work students are often busy with work and field placements, instructors should set aside class time for students to work on their projects and group assignments so that they do not need to find time to meet outside of class'

By What Name Shall They Be Known?

So how are students viewed? There is acknowledgment of students as being diverse and different to those of yesteryears given today's economic constraints and managerialist approaches. As one educationalist notes:

> The past ten years have seen an extraordinary and worldwide change in the structure, function and financing of the university system. Teaching and decision-making are more centrally controlled, and are much more subject to economic and managerial considerations than used to be the case. … Today (there is) a much more diversified student population. (Biggs 1999: 1-2)

Coaldrake and Stedman, two key members of a university management group, echo these sentiments. They note:

> Over the past few decades universities in many countries have sought to adjust themselves to new realities. They have been encouraged to increase significantly their numbers of students, to make better use of the budgets, and to raise money from industry and the professions. Universities also have been forced to comply with new regulatory requirements, and exhorted to apply to their own activities the principles and language of business and industry. …
> Universities even debate whether students should be regarded as customers or clients. This is a change in language from the idealised concept of students as participants in the scholarly community, and certainly a far cry from the long-held view of at least a proportion of university academics that undergraduate students were little more than a

tiresome necessity whose presence had to be tolerated, mercifully for no more than seven
or eight months a year. (Coaldrake and Stedman, 1998: 2)

So our students are now to be known as either our clients or our customers; yet are they really seen
as people?

Education — A Way (Into and) Out of Poverty

Why is it then that even for 'seven or eight months a year', people put themselves into the role, and

impoverished position for many, of being a student? One of the reasons is that gaining an education

is viewed generally as the 'way out of poverty', even if it is not chosen for its opportunity to join a

'scholarly community'. Mary Ann Bin-Sallik has recently edited a book titled *Aboriginal Women*

by Degrees: Their stories of the journey towards academic achievement (2000). In this book,

thirteen women including herself share their stories about how they became involved in studying

and achieved degrees. One of the contributors, Nerida White writes:

I believe that this book will contribute to the growing body of knowledge about the
educational experiences of Aboriginal women. If we can share our stories, our experiences,
successes and failures, it may encourage other women to take up study and to take on
board the strategies that helped us get through and to avoid the pitfalls. It will also remind
other academics and the community that university qualifications for Aboriginal women
have not come easily, but that with support we can rise above the negative experiences of
our past and present to become successful in our own right. (White 2000:106)

White also talks about the personal costs in undertaking studies at the higher education level —

including some costs particular to Indigenous Australians:

(W)ith the learning there has been great sadness — exploring issues of oppression, talking
about children being taken away from their families, and domestic violence. At times there
has been a feeling of powerlessness to change things, facing racism on a daily basis and
constantly having to chip away at the oppressive barriers, challenging your own personal
situation or relationships, juggling finances, family and community commitments. This all
comes with a great personal and collective cost. … For some it can be too much to cope
with, and the result is often burn-out or drop-out. Partners can be left behind, relationships
and marriages break down. For those who get through there are the rewards of good jobs
and successful lives. (White 2000: 105)

It would seem that White strongly supports the idea of education providing opportunities for

lifelong rewards, even though she knows what obtaining that education can cost and recognises that

some people will not make it through. There are others who seem to have reached the same

conclusion and for one such as Isabelle Adams this happened very early in her life.

I intensely disliked being poor, but throughout my schooling I was told by teachers that if I
finished school and got a good education I could then get a good job. So initially I viewed
education as a means of gaining good employment and earning enough money to break out
of the cycle of poverty that entrapped us. (Adams 2000: 38)

For others their stories tell of making the choice later in their lives. Professor Veronica Arbon, currently Director of the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Northern Territory, recalls:

> I found it difficult to survive in (a) small town despite the assistance of an aunt. In fact, supporting three kids on a single parent's pension in the late 1970s was very depressing and I only lasted about twelve months in this situation. I then realised I had to do something! Anything! Education became the solution, a way out of welfare dependency and poverty. I wanted more for myself and my children. A desperate need for an education began to take precedence over all else. At the same time this need was further fuelled by disappointment after disappointment on the job hunting trail where it was impossible to find even a cleaning job. (Arbon 2000: 24–25)

Arbon, White and Adams are examples of people who 'made it': as in they did gain academic qualifications and the resultant benefits they hoped this would provide. Today's Australian government would be delighted with their successes and happily take credit for having policies that have 'fostered' such. However, what their stories highlight also, is that such achievement does not happen easily and that the period of time as students had enormous costs. These consequences seem to be overlooked certainly by the government today.

Maureen Baker, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, in her recent article, 'New employment policies, poverty and mothering' (2000), provides an analysis of the most recent employment policies in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Her central argument is 'that recent employability policies in these countries have tended to overlook the changing nature of the job market and the impact of marriage breakdown on personal resources, and have falsely treated beneficiaries as gender-neutral beings without family responsibilities' (Baker 2000: 46). She goes on to ask: 'Is paid work the best route out of poverty?'

> Australia, New Zealand and Canada now require beneficiaries to enrol in programs that help them upgrade their education and employment qualifications, develop their confidence and interviewing skills, and provide community service in return for income support. These new 'employability' programs make several questionable assumptions about the motivations of beneficiaries, the nature of the job market, and the chances of being better off in paid work than on benefits. (Baker 2000: 48)

Baker answers the question by noting that 'recent research in all three countries, as well as the United States and the United Kingdom, suggest that getting a job does not necessarily guarantee an escape or even a major alleviation from poverty' (2000: 49). What Baker is calling for throughout this article is a realistic analysis of who the people are that these employability programs are supposed to be helping. Among other things, she calls for recognition of the male gender bias that exists in these programs, and strongly argues for the recognition of women's multiple roles of

caring as valid and needing to be rewarded. There are obvious parallels to be drawn in relation to the education policies that exist in higher education.

Some of the descriptors of the students I am thinking about in particular as I write this paper, have already been given. The following case example will provide further illustration, including the impact of 'women's roles' on being a student, and how the burden of multiple roles impacted on the women students with whom I was involved.

The Case Example

As outlined earlier, as Field Education Coordinator part of my role is to organise placements for students. A number of preparations for placement sessions are run and individual interviews are conducted in order to clarify students' learning needs and interests. The expectation is that all students undertake their placements in block mode as full time students. Why does all this matter? In part it relates to a need to recognise the structures – such as full time block placements – which continue to operate as if students are full time students. These structures do not seem to recognise that students are people with lives full of commitments and responsibilities and limited incomes.

In a recent cohort of final year students, there were only three students who were able to meet the expectation of undertaking a full time block placement. Seven of the ten in that particular group, applied for special consideration for the arrangements of their placements. The most common request was for a part-time placement: varying from wanting two days per week; two and a half days; three days; and a combination of some weeks full time and other weeks part-time. Six of these seven students were seeking to maintain their part time jobs while on placements; with five having jobs in related welfare work. The other student who works outside of the welfare sector has since decided that she will not continue with her studies because she can not be without employment in her other job. The requirement of completing a 75 day placement was considered just not an affordable option for her. Another, whose partner's security of employment was under threat, was desperate to complete studies so as to enter the workforce herself. In this cohort, five of the students were responsible for dependent children; three were single parents.

The three students not applying for special consideration would identify themselves as full time students (though nine of the ten are enrolled full time), who do work to support themselves but not in jobs that impact on placement. These students are in life situations which allow them to work full time during the university breaks in order to support themselves during the academic year when they are not able to work as much. This is a very real advantage not often available to those students with dependents.

The life stories of this cohort are reflective of their counterparts over recent years. They are also reflective of the stories of other students that are starting to be talked about in Conference presentations (see Kelly 1998; Clarke, Zimmer and Main 1997). Kelly provides one such example in the following description:

> The most direct effect of poverty is the difficulty which results from attempting to live and study on a reduced resource base. Important factors include: limited flexibility in or limited range of income sources; lack of confidence in committing to significant debt (through HECS or other student loans); lack of financial support networks; or limitations in the ability to arrange relief from family and other responsibilities. (Kelly 1998: 3)

Kelly (1998) asks the question: Why are students from low SES (socio-economic status) backgrounds under-represented in higher education? She goes on to note:

> The debate continues about whether the primary factors contributing to the educational disadvantage of members of this group lie outside the higher education system, and if so, whether the solution to addressing this disadvantage also lies outside the sector. There appears to be a significant amount of 'passing the buck' from sector to sector, with no sector adopting genuine responsibility or offering any working solution (Kelly 1998: 3).

Before we can offer solutions, we need though to make sure we have a clear understanding of what the problem is and what does it really mean for the people involved.

Conclusion

It has been argued by some that students entering a course such as the Bachelor of Social Work degree know the requirements of study including the field education commitments, so it is up to them to organise their lives so that they can undertake placements as currently structured. It is not seen as the School's or the University's responsibility to change to meet individual student's needs. However, this sort of attitude totally dismisses the reality of students today. It is more the exception than the norm to have a full time student in class today. Even those students not in paid work, often have informal unpaid work (caring for children, other family members, and others) which they are committed to and for which they are responsible (Baker 2000).

These considerations need to be accepted and become the recognised starting point for developing new appropriate and responsive structures and practices in Universities today. There needs to be a development of policies for education that reflect the reality of student lives today. The days of full time students who had independent means to support themselves through their course of study are all but gone.

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Appendix 1.1
Presentation to the Social Policy Association Conference 2000

Figure 9: Cover – Social Policy Association Conference 2000

Students are people (in poverty) too!

Abstract

In Australia as in most other western countries, many of the pressures on people since the advent of economic rationalist policies have been negative and severe. One population group so affected have been tertiary education students. This paper will discuss some of the current dimensions that have impacted on students, particularly focussing on the situation in one regional university location, and, the implications these have for the teaching and learning environment there. The approach in this paper is to argue the need for those involved in the teaching and learning processes to look at students as people, as distinct from 'customers' or 'clients'. Intertwined within this is a call to recognise that many students are living in poverty, and that this brings other implications into the process(es). The need to attend to such elements can readily be supported. Even if for no other reason, considering the current (political, social and economic) climate, from an economically rationalist perspective the idea that 'good' facilities are being wasted on tired and hungry students, requires such attention.

The aim of this paper is to focus attention on those who are at the centre of teaching and learning processes in order to reassert the human face of the people — people who are students today, and who will be the ones to implement social policy and practice in the future.

Students are people (in poverty) too!

Introduction

Background

Same But Different

The Human Face/Place in the Curriculum

By What Name Shall They Be Known?

Education — A Way (Into and) Out of Poverty

The Case Example

Conclusion

The Human Face/Place in the Curriculum

'Making Social Policy in Australia', the authors (Dalton, Draper, Weeks and Wiseman: 1996: xii) begin with the following story:

Marcia was a single parent in her thirties, sitting in the first session of a social policy class as part of a graduate diploma in community development being offered in northern Victoria. She felt intimidated by 'policy', said she had no experience with it, and thought of it as being 'up there' and out of touch with 'ordinary people'.

As the conversation developed, it turned out that Marcia was well informed about childcare issues, services and policies. She had been active with others in collecting information on local childcare needs, writing submissions, and lobbying. Marcia had actually been involved in 'policy development', through processes that community services jargon might call 'citizen participation' or community development.

Taylor and Burgess argue quite strongly the benefits of using the problem-based learning approach and the way it 'enables non-traditional learners to integrate their learning and manage the impact of disjuncture inevitable in higher education as it is structured today'.

(Taylor and Burgess 1997: 114).

The following is a quote from Garrett (1998: 243):

Because social work students are often busy with work and field placements, instructors should set aside class time for students to work on their projects and group assignments so that they do not need to find time to meet outside of class.

By What Name Shall They Be Known?

Professor Peter Coaldrake is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Dr Lawrence Stedman is a Principal Policy Adviser at QUT. They note:

Over the past few decades universities in many countries have sought to adjust themselves to new realities. They have been encouraged to increase significantly their numbers of students, to make better use of the budgets, and to raise money from industry and the professions. Universities also have been forced to comply with new regulatory requirements, and exhorted to apply to their own activities the principles and language of business and industry. … Universities even debate whether students should be regarded as customers or clients. This is a change in language from the idealised concept of students as participants in the scholarly community, and certainly a far cry from the long-held view of at least a proportion of university academics that undergraduate students were little more than a tiresome necessity whose presence had to be tolerated, mercifully for no more than seven or eight months a year.

Education — A Way (Into and) Out of Poverty

Mary Ann Bin-Sallik has recently edited a book titled 'Aboriginal Women by Degrees: Their stories of the journey towards academic achievement' (2000). In this book, thirteen women including her share their stories about how they became involved in studying and achieved degrees. One of the contributors, Nerida White (2000: 106) writes:

I believe that this book will contribute to the growing body of knowledge about the educational experiences of Aboriginal women. If we can share our stories, our experiences, successes and failures, it may encourage other women to take up study and to take on board the strategies that helped us get through and to avoid the pitfalls. It will also remind other academics and the community that university qualifications for Aboriginal women have not come easily, but that with support we can rise above the negative experiences of our past and present to become successful in our own right.

White (2000: 105) also talks about the personal costs in undertaking studies at the higher education level — including some costs particular to Indigenous Australians:

… (W)ith the learning there has been great sadness — exploring issues of oppression, talking about children being taken away from their families, and domestic violence. At times there has been a feeling of powerlessness to change things, facing racism on a daily basis and constantly having to chip away at the oppressive barriers, challenging your own personal situation or relationships, juggling finances, family and community commitments. This all comes with a great personal and collective cost. … For some it can be too much to cope with, and the result is often burn-out or drop-out. Partners can be left behind, relationships and marriages break down. For those who get through there are the rewards of good jobs and successful lives.

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There are others who seem to have reached the same conclusion and for one such as Isabelle Adams (2000: 38) this happened very early in her life.

I intensely disliked being poor, but throughout my schooling I was told by teachers that if I finished school and got a good education I could then get a good job. So initially I viewed education as a means of gaining good employment and earning enough money to break out of the cycle of poverty that entrapped us.

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For others their stories tell of making the choice later in their lives. Professor Veronica Arbon (2000: 24–25), currently Director of the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Northern Territory, recalls:

I found it difficult to survive in (a) small town despite the assistance of an aunt. In fact, supporting three kids on a single parent's pension in the late 1970s was very depressing and I only lasted about twelve months in this situation. I then realised I had to do something! Anything! Education became the solution, a way out of welfare dependency and poverty. I wanted more for myself and my children. A desperate need for an education began to take precedence over all else. At the same time this need was further fuelled by disappointment after disappointment on the job hunting trail where it was impossible to find even a cleaning job.

Baker (2000: 46) asks: 'Is paid work the best route out of poverty?'

Australia, New Zealand and Canada now require beneficiaries to enrol in programs that help them upgrade their education and employment qualifications, develop their confidence and interviewing skills, and provide community service in return for income support. These new 'employability' programs make several questionable assumptions about the motivations of beneficiaries, the nature of the job market, and the chances of being better off in paid work than on benefits.

Kelly (1998: 3) reports:

The most direct effect of poverty is the difficulty which results from attempting to live and study on a reduced resource base. Important factors include: limited flexibility in or limited range of income sources; lack of confidence in committing to significant debt (through HECS or other student loans); lack of financial support networks; or limitations in the ability to arrange relief from family and other responsibilities.

Kelly (1998: 3) asks the question: Why are students from low SES (socio-economic status) backgrounds under-represented in higher education? She goes on to note:

The debate continues about whether the primary factors contributing to the educational disadvantage of members of this group lie outside the higher education system, and if so, whether the solution to addressing this disadvantage also lies outside the sector. There appears to be a significant amount of 'passing the buck' from sector to sector, with no sector adopting genuine responsibility or offering any working solution.

SPA Conference 2000: OHP Slide 12

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NAFEA (National Association of Field Experience Administrators)
and James Cook University Cairns
invite you to attend

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"ELASTIC ELEPHANTS"

The 2005 National Conference for Field Experience
Administrators

CAIRNS
Thursday November 17th & Friday November 18th 2005

A conference for any University Administrators responsible for arranging
Field Placements/Practicums /Professional Experience for their students

Conference Aims: The Conference aims to support the work of University Field Placement Officers in Universities throughout Australia. The outcomes will centre on building professional knowledge, sharing experiences and practices and maintaining personal balance.

Theme: The theme for the 2005 Conference is "Elastic Elephants" which recognizes the enormity of the placement process and the need for continual flexibility.

History: The 2005 Conference builds upon the success of previous conferences "Fitting Elephants into Mini Minors" (Brisbane: 2003) and "Juggling the Jigsaw" (Melbourne: 2004).

Figure 10: Cover – National Association of Field Experience Administrators Conference 2005

NAFEA (National Association of Field Experience Administrators)

2005 National Conference for Field Experience Administrators
Cairns
16th-18th November 2005

Theme: The theme for the 2005 Conference is "Elastic Elephants" which recognizes the enormity of the placement process and the need for continual flexibility in order to balance the needs of the University, the placement sites and individual students.

Session: *Straight from the Elephant's mouth: 'Perspectives on Field Experience'*

University Perspectives (10 minute presentation)

Firstly I want to thank Jenny Jensen for inviting me to be involved, as I really appreciate the opportunity to talk with others who share my interest in student placements.

I joined the University in 1990 as a part-time Field Education Coordinator. Over the intervening years I have seen many cohorts of students move through the Field Education subjects of both the Social Work and the Community Welfare programs. One of the most worrying aspects for me over the years has been the increase in student poverty which is often exacerbated by a student having to undertake a placement, and this is part of the perspective about the placement process, I want to share with you today. I hope you too will see that more needs to be done to address this socially unjust situation.

In the School of Social Work and Community Welfare, students are required to complete many days of field work. For Social Work students for instance, they undertake 65 days for their first in their third year; and 75 days in their fourth year. Social Work students must complete a minimum total of 980 hours of supervised practice – with a whole lot of other terms, conditions, and requirements – in order for them to be able to graduate and be eligible for membership of their professional association – the Australian Association of Social Workers.

Working 9-5 in placement is very different to a student's other semester loads, where they may have only 12-14 hours of contact. One of the consequences is that placement drastically reduces a student's availability for part-time income earning work; and often means what work they can get is at night or on weekends. For many students working in paid employment (even part-time) is not a choice; it is a necessity.

Placements often bring additional costs as well –

- travel costs on a daily basis to get to placement when during other times they may only need to travel to Uni 2 or 3 days a week;

- more and more students need to use their own vehicles for placement work, as most agencies these days will not allow students to drive agency vehicles;
- placement agencies can often be in locations that also mean a student has further to travel to and from home – their home being near Uni for convenience and reduced travel costs other times; but not so cheap if they have a placement in Gordonvale or Mossman[1];
- there are commonly added expenses in relation to clothing costs – outfits one can wear at Uni are not always acceptable in an agency setting; 'pluggers'[2] for instance would rarely be suitable for any placement setting and are absolutely not acceptable if a student is doing Court work;
- Child care costs are another significant expense that increases dramatically during placements.

The list can go on and on. The reality of a student's life needs to be a major consideration in a placement process – how do they survive, what are their income producing work requirements, how do they afford to eat, can they afford to buy a pair of closed-in shoes or meet the costs of travelling to a particular placement. The process is far more complex for those involved than 'just' trying to find a placement setting to match a student's educational and professional learning needs. The demands of attending to this complexity certainly fit with the conference theme that calls for 'the need for continual flexibility in order to balance the needs of the University, the placement sites and individual students'.

In 1999 I had a cohort of ten final year social work students preparing for placement. Seven of those ten requested special consideration in relation to any proposed placement. The requests predominately were for variations around days of placement – including part-time placements of two, two and a half, three or four days per week. The minimum allowed in my School is a three day a week arrangement – which if approved, stretches a 75 day placement from being a 15 week one to a 25 week placement.

There are all sorts of implications for allowing such alternative arrangements – not only for the student but also for the other 'players' – the agency, the agency field staff and supervisor, the university Liaison person, the Field Education Coordinator; and in fact, many agencies are not prepared to commit virtually 6 months of their time to a student placement. Sometimes it is about making choices about going with an agency that will accept a 'part-time' student placement rather

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[1] Gordonvale is located in the 40km radius south of the Campus and Mossman is located in the 60 km radius north of the Campus.
[2] Pluggers are a form of footwear; in some places they are known as thongs.

than going with an agency that would provide a much better learning environment for a particular student.

It was during my time working with this particular group – who in many ways were not and are not unique in their need for special considerations – that I prepared a paper titled 'Students are people (in poverty) too!' As the title suggests there was a dual focus in that paper – firstly a call for students to be thought about and recognised as people. I had a growing concern at the time that students were not really being seen as 'people' but rather as 'something' else.

In his book *The Elephant and the Flea: New thinking for a new world*, Charles Handy tells the story of a study he undertook comparing schools to other organisations. As he visited various schools, he would ask how many people worked there. He writes that the 'primary schools might say ten, the larger secondary schools seventy or eighty'. 'Oh dear,' said a Director of Education when Handy told him this, 'they left out the cleaners.'

Handy's reply was: 'No, they left out the children.'

His assessment of this was that 'organizationally, the students weren't seen as members of the organization but more as its products, perhaps more accurately as its work in progress.' (Handy 2002: 40-41)

Along similar lines, I was having concerns about how students were being seen if at all, and doubted that they were truly recognised as human beings with real lives and often multiple roles and responsibilities that impact significantly on the student role. The students I work with often are workers, and parents, and carers and volunteers as well as being students. In that cohort of 1999 I had only three people who could proceed to placements in the way that placements are expected to operate. There were three who could start and finish the placement as timetabled for that subject. It seems as if the academic system, the agency systems, the professional association's requirements, all existed for a particular type of student; and it seems that student type rarely exists.

Following on from this, the second point of focus in my paper was that many of the students were living in poverty and yet this did not seem to be recognised. It seemed that it was taken as acceptable and expected that students are poor. The apparent rationale for accepting this situation is that they will only be poor for a short while (four years), and will be well off (if not rich) when they graduate. There is also an underlying assumption here that a student only has to look after him or her self – yet we are often in fact talking about a student who is responsible for a family.

There are lots of myths and half truths operating about who are students, and, unfortunately many of our policies and processes are based on these false and inaccurate pictures. Fortunately

there does seem to be a growing awareness in some quarters of the actual situations, and this increased awareness may one day lead to improvements in the very real material needs of students.

Since the time I wrote my paper, there has been much more attention given to student poverty. More people are writing about it – such as Judith Bessant (2003), Professor in Youth Studies and Sociology at RMIT, whose paper 'The Problem of Poverty Amongst Tertiary Students: why it's missing from the policy agenda', draws on a survey she carried out of 2,300 university students in the inner city and Melbourne metropolitan area. Her work clearly 'demonstrated that tertiary student poverty is a significant problem'.

Also in recent times there have been numerous submissions presented by student unions and associations, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, and various related agencies and services to almost yearly Senate Inquiries focusing on the same and related aspects (the Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship, Inquiry into Higher Education Funding and Regulatory Legislation, Inquiry into Student Income Support – to name a few). The topic is now firmly on some people's political agenda.

As Field Education administrators and coordinators we hear our students' stories, so we are well placed to contribute to the discussions. Many students are in poverty; placements can often exacerbate this situation. We need to make sure that the myths and half truths are challenged if not dispelled and that what the situation is really like for students trying to undertake a placement is presented. We need to include our voices in the discussion. I invite each of you to join me in speaking out '*straight from the Elephant's mouth'* against the injustice of students living in poverty.

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Chapter 2

The fridge, freezer, and pantry cupboard: An analogy

Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to present a description of a tool that has been used in teaching, particularly in preparation for field placement classes. Initially a background discussion on some elements of the place of field education within social work, the expectations of the students by other stakeholders and by the students of themselves in relation to placements, and on the circumstances that prompted the development of the teaching tool will be provided. A detailed explanation of the tool follows. The tool has proved helpful for students in identifying the broad aspects of social issues and problems. Examples are given as to how it is applied in this way. Specific applications are also presented, with one being explored in detail. Finally a common application example from the students concludes the paper.

The Background

Students studying a social work course are required not only to undertake classroom learning but also to complete experiential placements in the field. These field placements 'comprise a substantial part of Australian under-graduate courses in social work, and their successful completion remain a prerequisite for professional accreditation' (Patford 2000: 21). This is not only the case in Australia but also common throughout the world. The field placement is the period of time that each student spends working in an agency, program or service within the human services arena with the direct, expected and required supervision of a qualified social worker. It is the time for students to practice social work; not just 'talk about' it in classes. 'Field education as a core component of undergraduate education is institutionally embedded within social work' (Spencer and McDonald 1998: 9), and this is the way it has been, historically, since social work's 'formalization as an academic discipline' (Rogers 1996: 11). In this paper I intend to draw on the experiences I have had with students as we have worked together to organise their placements.

Prior to going out on placements, students usually are involved in preparation for placement sessions of one form or another. In my own institution, attendance and participation in these sessions are considered essential. This is the time when students specifically focus on the processes and requirements of the forthcoming field education experience.

Some of the content covered during these sessions relates to: defining and clarifying the expectations about placements of the School, the students, the agencies and the field educator connected to that agency; assessment and evaluation procedures; developing specific and personal

learning goals for the placement; the student and field educator relationship; and, the role of the university appointed liaison person. As well as these areas, time is also spent identifying the range of tasks a student may undertake during a placement, the skills they may be called on to apply, the knowledge needed, and so on. It is recognised that there will also be agency specific knowledge and practices that will be needed and these can only really be developed on placement. There are however still a range of general learning goals for placements that are useful to discuss in preparation. (For a list of examples see Hughes and Heycox 2000: 85–86.)

It is recognised that a student undertaking her or his first placement requires more detailed and foundational information about placements, than a student who has already successfully completed one. Patford (2000: 22) in her study purposely selected the first placement 'for scrutiny because at this stage in their learning, students must move beyond generalised academic prescriptions regarding the nature of social work and begin to develop a specific role in a specific setting'. There are unique differences with each placement experience, though for all students there is 'the realisation that learning practice is more than the application of classroom theory. Learners are required to adapt all their cognitive skills to issues of professional practice' (Cooper and Briggs 2000: 5).

It is this beginning realisation that many students focus on during their preparation sessions. For students to be attending these sessions, they must have already successfully completed all core coursework subjects considered prerequisites for that placement level. As Hughes and Heycox (1996: 85) note that 'while students may perform well in work at university, there is no guarantee that this level of performance will be matched in practice learning'.

Considering this, it is not surprising then that particularly in relation to the first field placement, 'all students, irrespective of their experiences or cultural backgrounds, come … with some trepidation, anxiety and excitement about this new learning challenge' (Cooper and Briggs 2000: 4). These emotions are common, and in and of themselves, are not necessarily negative. Mensinga and Rice (2000: 1) recently presented a workshop paper suggesting that 'it can reasonably be assumed that the student who commences practicum with excitement and confidence is potentially well placed to successfully engage in practicum learning opportunities'. However, they did also go on to recognise that not all students start placement from the same (positive) 'place' and their goal in their presentation was 'to resensitise Field Work professionals to the issues raised by pre-prac anxiety' (Mensinga and Rice 2000: 1).

Over the last few years in particular, I had noticed students are much more vocal in expressing in the preparation sessions their anxieties and concerns. One of the recurring fears relates to the use of theory in practice and whether they would be able to do this. To suggest as

Howe (1997: 170) does that 'the join between theory and practice is a seamless one', has been responded to with comments such as: 'That's all very well and good, as long as you know some theory in the first place! What do I know?' How is it that students invariably struggle to 'join' theory and practice? Given that these same students have been assessed (in that they have passed all their prerequisite subjects) as 'knowing some theory', such a student claim is of concern. In part it may relate to Ramsden's (1992: 17) claim that 'there is often an inconsistency between the outcomes of student learning as teachers and students would *ideally* like them to be and the reality of what students actually learn'. Equally, notwithstanding the research that supports the premise that 'students may not always learn what we intend and they may, sometimes alas, also learn notions which we did not intend them to learn' (Brown and Atkins 1988: 1), I believe the students do 'know theory' but have difficulty in some way such as either in making the knowledge conscious or in being able to articulate their understanding clearly.

It is however neither a new phenomenon nor just something common to students at this institution. It is referred to often in the literature, even with descriptions of classroom instructors being 'alarmed' (Kruzich, Friesen and Van Soest 1986: 22) by the situation.

From the students' position, I think they would relate to the description Pease (Pease and Fook 1999: 2) provides of his own social work student days:

> The integration of theory and practice was of particular interest to me and I struggled hard to relate the theoretical and technical knowledge of the classroom to the realities of my placement experiences. Although there were educational expectations that these should be integrated, little guidance was provided on how one actually did this.

One of the concerns then for students expressed in the preparation sessions is that if they are struggling in the classroom to feel comfortable about what they 'know', the thought of having to try to demonstrate that knowledge in the practice setting does not seem possible. As noted by Pease above, the students were certainly aware that there are 'educational expectations' that theory and practice need to be integrated and it did not just relate to them. 'The ability to "integrate theory and practice" is a powerfully sanctioned if vaguely defined expectation of social workers and their students everywhere' (Sheldon 1978: 1).

In some ways, the problem for the students may revolve around the 'vagueness' referred to by Sheldon and the 'little guidance' noted by Pease. It may also relate to our assumptions about teaching and learning processes. Bertola and Murphy (1994: 29) suggest: 'As academics we often assume that students entering university are able to learn effectively. In fact, both the research evidence and our own experiences tell us that university students are often very ineffective learners — even those who have done well at school'. This certainly fits with other current material from a number of leading educationalists such as Biggs (1999: 13) who has provided extensive research

and writing in relation to 'the concepts of surface and deep approaches to learning'. The argument is that as teachers we need to work towards developing deep approaches to learning and that in order to achieve this, such practices as 'encouraging the need-to-know, instilling curiosity, building on students' prior knowledge are all things that teachers can attempt to do' (Biggs 1999: 17).

In some ways the impending reality of placements acted as a motivator for students in relation to 'encouraging the need-to-know'. Using a range of techniques and strategies in various sessions students could recall material they had covered in their previous studies, which suggested they did have the equivalent of what Biggs refers to as surface learning. The aim then seemed to be to turn the surface learning into something more meaningful.

At one level, it has often been suggested that the placement is where this happens because that is where the theoretical and abstract academic work actually gets used in practical, experiential and concrete ways. However, there is another argument which Maidment (2000: 214) makes (and supports with the work of others) that 'the extent to which theory and practice are related and integrated during fieldwork appears to be at best haphazard, and at worst non existent (Waterhouse 1987; Walker et al. 1995)'. She does go on to suggest that 'encouraging students to use critical reflection in conjunction with experiential learning methods provides the means for integration to occur during fieldwork' (Maidment 2000: 214). Would this be enough? Perhaps it may be if the (field) educators the students work with also use reflective thinking, because as Cooper (2000: 11) suggests, it 'provides educators with instructional strategies that elicit implicit theories and value the importance of student constructs, practice beliefs and knowledge'.

I considered as an educator I still had a role to play in 'maximizing the knowledge and skill level of students' (Kruzich, Friesen and Van Soest 1986: 22) in whatever way I could while they were with me in the classroom. Together with the students, I worked on 'building on students' prior knowledge' (Biggs 1999: 17) (recognising that many of the students declared they had no prior knowledge of what social work in practice is or of what social workers really do), and, included some of the other suggested strategies for effective learning (Bertola and Murphy 1994). The latter included: 'Draw on the audience's knowledge and experiences. "How does this relate to your experiences?"; and Have fun. The best learning is fun' (Bertola and Murphy 1994: 36).

One of the things that students seemed to find useful (and 'fun') was story-telling. Another approach was when an analogy, such as thinking about the heart as a pump, was offered. Both of these approaches generally appealed because they did offer opportunities for students to relate the material to their everyday (prior knowledge) worlds. It is not an uncommon approach in the teaching and learning sphere. McTaggart (1995: 32 –33) for instance, used everyday stories in trying to define what 'reflection' means. He began first with an example from the sport, and

ordinary activity, of golf, arguing that the example 'concerns holism and fragmentation in pedagogy' (McTaggart 1995: 32). He followed this with a second example, a cartoon (McTaggart 1995: 33). Similarly, Shardlow and Doel (1996) in their text on the various elements of 'practice learning and teaching', in the section 'Examining Practice Competence' (135–161) ask the reader to consider a 'musical analogy' (141) to explain a particular point they are making.

So given that I considered I, as an educator, had a role to play in helping students prepare for, and begin, placement with a sense that they did know some theory, that they, the students, did have a sense that they had a 'need-to-know', and they were curious about the links between theory and practice, I offered them my analogy of the 'fridge, freezer and pantry cupboard' as a tool they may be able to use in making the links between theory and practice. Students generally have found it useful in a range of ways. The analogy draws on the ordinary and the everyday; it is offered as a tool for building on any student's prior knowledge. The tool is described in detail in the following section.

Explaining the analogy

To begin with I ask students to think about the following question. 'What do you have in your fridge, freezer and pantry cupboard?' Theory to me is like what I have stored in my fridge, freezer and pantry cupboard and the application of theory in practice is like how I choose to use the various ingredients available to me, when I choose to use them, under what conditions, circumstances, for what needs, considering time factors, and so on. I will now outline some of the various elements that have been covered in discussions with students. I will only be including students' material from these discussions that I have expressly obtained consent to share.

Size: Some people have very large fridges, freezers and pantries. Others, for instance some living in a caravan, or a flat or living alone may only have small sizes of these items. Those living in a room-only arrangement, a hostel, or a tent, living in prison or some other form of institution, may have none of their own at all. Someone living on a property in the outback may have a coldroom for a fridge and a pantry that is a dedicated room. Is the pantry only used for food supplies or is it also the place where you keep the first aid kit, medicines, household chemicals high on the shelf out of reach of children, the picnic basket, the plastic bags from supermarket shopping or your own material bag and basket that you use to carry your groceries home in? The idea is to think about what you have now, and recognise changes that have occurred — either in the sizes and availability, or in the contents.

Location: Has location altered what you store and where you store it? In the tropics it is common for flour to be stored in the fridge; not necessarily the case in colder climates. Some people store

coffee in the fridge; some store coffee beans in the fridge, but keep their jar of 'instant' in the cupboard. In the tropics it is common to store water in the fridge. Others do not like to drink their water (artificially) chilled; preferring it from the tap, whatever the temperature. (Water from the tap in a place like Tenterfield in the middle of winter can come out as cold as if it had been in a refrigerator.) Some people use purifiers on their taps; others drink only bottled water — 'mountain stream', 'natural spring', or 'Perrier' varieties.

Location impacts also on the availability of what people are able to grow, buy, use, and store. Fresh fruit and vegetables can be scarce or prohibitively expensive in some regions like the Cape area of Queensland. Supplies can also taste different depending on the location. Water for instance provided through the domestic system can taste distinctly different if you are in Boulia compared to Cairns.

Variety of supplies: If we were to identify items considered staple food, the list may include such things as flour, sugar, milk, bread, eggs, fruit, vegetables, and so on. There is however not just one given type of any of these. If we look at flour, we could be referring to plain, self-raising, wholemeal, white, corn, rice, stoneground or any number of other varieties. With milk it might be full cream, lite, low fat, non-fat, soy, long-life, and so on. Even with something like a potato, there is not just one type of potato. If you are invited for a coffee, what sort of coffee do you think of? (See Appendix 2.1: Coffee, for a list of descriptors that the students identified when asked to think about coffee.)

In talking about foods or supplies, it may also be important to clarify the name of an item. It is not uncommon for an item to be known by different names. What is called a pawpaw by one person (and even spelt papaw by another), may be known as papaya by another; an eggplant to one may be an aubergine to another; a rockmelon is a cantaloupe; a capsicum is a pepper; beetroot is a regular round beet; cornflour is cornstarch; thickened cream is double cream; and (pouring) cream is light cream or half 'n' half. It needs to be checked if people have the same, similar or at least a shared understanding; or do they have no idea what the other is talking about at all.

A supply of brown rice vinegar, wasabi powder, mirin, miso, tofu, nori sheets and pickled ginger may be significant and regular items for some people. For others, they may not even know what these items look like, let alone what to do with them. Where once items such as wasabi may have only been found in a speciality food store in a capital city like Sydney, it is a common item now in supermarkets. The location even on the shelves has moved from the 'hard to find' items to spaces that are bright, large, and clearly displayed. Further, the use of the word 'wasabi' and other terms particularly related to Japanese cuisine such as 'sushi', have moved into other spheres of modern life. As noted in a recent newspaper article they are part of the language of fashion — 'we

now have sushi lip gloss, the deep red colour of raw tuna, and wasabi nail polish, a soft avocado green' (Bestor 2000: 2).

Food selection: Sometimes we do not choose certain foods because they may be considered bad for our health, do not fit with our religious beliefs and practices, or we just do not like the look or taste of them. Sometimes we do not know they are foods that are good to eat. We may be like Geraldine Brooks (1998) who writes about such a situation in her childhood in Sydney:

> We didn't even recognise the gifts of our native plants. One of my chores was sweeping up the pesky brown detritus that fell into our yard from a neighbour's tree. I didn't know that the Minié balls I was consigning to the compost were macadamias. These delicious nuts didn't become famous until an American exported seedlings to Hawaii. (Brooks 1998: 89)

Sometimes some cultural groups know the value of a food, but it takes a range of events for these benefits to become more widespread and accepted. The growth of the local 'bush tucker' industry — foods used and known by Indigenous Australians, but just recently being adopted more widely in Australian society — is one example. Another example mentioned earlier is sushi. Bestor (2000) provides one view of its acceptance beyond Japan.

> Japan's emergence on the global economic scene in the 1970s as the business destination *du jour*, coupled with a rejection of hearty, red-meat fare in favour of healthy cuisine like rice, fish, and vegetable, and the appeal of the aesthetics of Japanese design, all prepared the world for a sushi fad. So, sushi, first thought of as an exotic ethnic specialty, became *haute cuisine* of the most rarefied sort, then not just cool, but popular. (Bestor 2000: 2)

As noted in the above example, foods are sometimes assigned, rightly or wrongly, certain properties like when 'red-meat' was considered an unhealthy choice. Conversely in recent times, it is being promoted as an essential healthy choice full of really valuable vitamins. The current arguments promoting it include that it is not that red-meat is 'bad' for people, it is how it is prepared that affects its nutritional value.

Butter is another food that 'went off the menu' in many households around the same time as red-meat. Butter was considered to be full of the 'wrong' kinds of fats. The healthy alternative was to use margarine — the 'low cholesterol' or 'cholesterol free' types containing limited quantities of saturated fats and more of the polyunsaturated and monosaturated fatty acids. Some people would never give up the use of 'real' butter, regardless of any 'scientific' evidence. Others went with the new trends. As with red-meat, those involved with the 'butter' industry have campaigned to encourage people to go back to using the 'real thing', with the 'natural choice' and 'butter makes it better' type slogans.

Sometimes we choose foods despite the healthy/unhealthy tag associated with them. Foods can be related to fashion; as in, certain foods can be fashionable to eat and/or be seen eating. Fashion in relation to body types and clothing can also influence what foods are chosen. There are

some foods described as irresistible. It may not be something you would make yourself, but if it is available to buy, or some is offered to you, you will eagerly eat it. Equally it may not be so much about the taste of the food, but more about what the food means to you. One of those foods for me is baklava, a sweet pastry. I will always see it or hear about it and associate it with a special positive relationship from my childhood with a very generous matriarch of a Greek Australian family. It is common for people to comment that a particular food always makes them think of someone — an apple pie or a sponge cake reminding them of a grandmother who used to always bake them; or eating crabs reminding one of the father who used to cook the crabs from his fishing trips in the old copper out in the back yard over an open fire.

There are foods that can be associated with a particular generation. To offer today's child bread and dripping as a special treat would be unusual. The practices of boiling up a piece of tripe, pressing an ox tongue, or peeling sheep's brains ready for cooking with onions and white sauce, were commonplace once in Australian society; but not so today. It is not that the foods are no longer available or that they could not be cooked now; rather that it is rarely done and/or eating habits have changed, and the recipes would not be found in current cook books. In the same way, some foods are developed (designed and packaged) to appeal to a particular age group and/or type of person. There are breakfast cereals that are for the athlete, developed by the nutritionists at the sporting institutes; and ones from health and medical foundations for those wanting to eat within specific dietary guidelines. Cereals such as rolled oats, weetbix, muesli, and coco pops, may appeal to some specific age populations more than others.

Food selection for a meal may be governed explicitly and implicitly by personal rules. For some people no meal is complete without a cup of tea. (One could wonder as to how they define their 'tea'. See Appendix 2.2: Tea, for one student group's list of words that they associated with tea.) There may have to be rice at every meal; or potatoes or bread; or a meal may have to be finished with a 'bit of sweets', a pudding, or dessert, 'even if it is only a bit of ice-cream'. An evening meal may have to consist of 'meat and three veg(tables)', as it is not considered to be a real meal if it does not. Certain foods may have to always be served together: the idea that a pie must always be served with sauce; or a roast has to be served with gravy, apple sauce with pork, mint sauce with lamb.

Some meals related to functions, traditions, and seasons are also prescribed. The idea that Christmas means you have to have a leg of ham or for some, the 'hot roast dinner', and the plum pudding (the special Christmas plum pudding), and the cake (again not just any cake, but the Christmas cake). Chinese New Year means a banquet feast; Thanksgiving means eating turkey. A wedding must have a cake: the wedding cake. Once the cake would have been fruit cake covered in

white icing, one, two or three tiers high. Today a mud cake (or any other personal preferred choice of cake) does get chosen by some; though would be reluctantly accepted, if ever, as the right choice by others.

The various human dimensions of the person making decisions about what food is selected impacts considerably on the process. The dimensions such as the age, the gender, the culture, the location, the abilities, the socio-economic resources of the person, as well as the knowledge and skills they have to use the food, and the situation for which the food will be available — a meal for one, or a family meal for six, or a wedding breakfast for one hundred — are all related and influential variables.

Preparation aspects: Following on from this, another element is the resources one has available for the preparation of the food. A family in a well-established household may have all manner of cooking utensils and appliances. A young person moving into her or his first separate type of accommodation may have very limited supplies. It does not necessarily follow that the same end result can not be achieved; rather, that it is likely to be achieved in different ways. Rice for a meal may be prepared in a specifically designed rice steamer, or cooked in a microwave oven, or simply boiled in water in a saucepan. Particular resources may help us to do a task more quickly and easily, but often we do not have all the resources we might like or think we need, so we are required to find other ways of doing things.

It is also worth thinking about how we learned to cook and prepare food. It is common for 'lessons' to come from the home. Nowadays as well it is often a requirement that high school students undertake a home economics course which includes the study of health, hygiene and nutrition particular in relation to food selection and preparation. The expectation is that regardless of what they knew before, each teenager will leave such a course having at least a basic understanding and experience of being able to prepare nutritional food to feed themselves and be competent in following a cookbook recipe.

For those students interested in food preparation there are now even more opportunities to continue their study of this field, during their high school years. For the others, they may continue practising their skills in the family kitchen or only do so later in their life when they have to manage on their own. There is no shortage of recipe books to guide them, with specific ranges of these available for the beginner. Supermarkets even supply free recipe sheets located strategically next to their display of the requisite ingredients. Magazines and daily newspapers, the local butcher shop and fish market, will all often provide free recipes and guidance on how to prepare foods. The underlying assumption here is that we all need recipes. Even experienced cooks use them.

By this stage of the explanation of the analogy, invariably students are making links between the discussion we are having in class and the discussions they have had about various theories in their other subjects. It is very common for students to name what they covered in foundation studies in psychology, sociology and anthropology, as well as in core Social Work and Community Welfare subjects such as 'Dimensions of Human Experiences' and 'Values and Ethics'. Students recognise that they do 'know some theory'.

Application of the analogy — broad aspects

Moving on with exploring the analogy often leads to looking at applying particular social work frameworks to it. In social work practice, when we begin to analyse an issue, be it at the individual, community, group, policy or whatever level, we often examine the issue in relation to its social, economic, political, and other implications. Food – its preparation, selection, storage, and use – can be examined using the same framework when one considers its place generally in our society and personally for each of us. The following are briefly some of the ideas that have come out of such discussions.

Social: Food is used for enhancing and developing social relationships. The effort put into preparing a meal may be an indicator about the stage of a relationship, with special meals signifying efforts to foster and develop a relationship. We create different foods for different occasions. We make choices in relation to the age of those involved in an event (eg a child's birthday party may have different food to an adolescent's sleepover get-together). For some people cooking for one's self is of little interest; yet to cook for others — be it guests for dinner or the family, or for the local church cake stall — gives them real satisfaction.

Economic: Our financial resources individually, as a family unit, or as a society impact on what we purchase; what we grow and develop; what we import and export. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax was a major change impacting on people's purchasing power and intending to influence people's choices. People's spending ability differs very much on class lines. For one individual the experience of one day being able to afford to buy lamb instead of mutton (the cheaper cut of meat) would be an indicator of moving out of poverty. Class can also be related to how much as a percentage of the total household resources is required to be spent on basic survival needs. Those in the lower socio-economic brackets are spending much greater percentages of their available income on survival needs than those in higher income groupings. They are also less likely to be able to purchase items in bulk or make savings by buying goods when they are on 'special'.

Political: There are specific case examples of a political nature, such as the recent call by a State Premier for people of that State not to purchase products from a particular canning manufacturer who was refusing to use produce from that State. There are other campaigns mounted, nationally and internationally, related to products from countries that 'we' are 'boycotting' or 'at war with', with a recent ban placed because of concerns in relation to 'mad cow' disease, on beef products from European countries. Sometimes a community outcry comes when a company believed to be Australian is identified as really being owned by a multinational. At the individual level, when people make choices about whether to still buy their favourite spread for their toast or that brand of biscuits that was once a wholly owned Australian company but is not now, they are making political statements.

Spiritual: Food, in reality and in imagery is very much a part of our spirituality in society. Phrases such as 'chicken soup for the soul' and 'food to lift the spirits' are commonplace. Many traditional religious practices involve the ideas about sharing a meal together; having the 'breaking of bread', and communion practices of partaking of bread and wine, are two. The absence of food when one is fasting is seen as a serious commitment to one's faith. Whether religious or secular, for many ceremonies in modern life there is the practice of coming together for a feast as part of the celebration process. The practices of having a wedding breakfast or a wake after a burial are not confined to a particular religion, culture, or other forms of spirituality.

Cultural: The idea of eating Japanese food in western society may have moved from the 'exotic' to the 'popular' as noted earlier. However for an Australian World War II Veteran it may by association mean something painful and unpleasant. Some foods will always be related to a culture: the Chinese take-away, the Italian pizza and pasta or an Indian curry. It does not mean that other cultural groups can not make or adopt and adapt a particular style or practice with food. It is that for many there will remain a primary association. Such specialised associations are also fostered for other reasons. The maintenance of the Asian speciality food stores or the local Thai restaurant may be as much for providing a business venture for the people involved, as a meeting place and a contact point for the development of a sense of community for others from their (traditional) homelands.

Environmental: More and more food items today are branded with symbols that promote these products as environmentally friendly. The tin of fish that is stamped as dolphin friendly tuna, the eggs that are free-range as opposed to battery hen produce, the organically grown vegetables, are just three examples. There are tins and bottles made from recycled products and/or are recyclable. Paper products are promoted as coming from a recycling plant or made from sustainable plantation forests specifically grown for this purpose. Products such as refrigerators and freezers are provided

with stickers identifying them as CFC (chlorofluorocarbon) free (or whatever their relevant rating is) which is supposed to be a way of gauging whether or not they will not contribute to the damage of the ozone layer and the negative consequences of global warming. These same products may also often have an energy rating sticker; again an indicator for the consumer as to how energy efficient or wasteful this appliance is assessed as being. It is not just in relation to decisions about which appliance to purchase, environmental concerns influence decisions made in the kitchen everyday. Campaigns in relation to what happens to waste products people put down their kitchen sinks are aimed at increasing awareness of the impacts of such actions. People are encouraged to consider recycling products and a system of providing domestic recycle bins is well established today.

Global: This is perhaps the most recent element to be added to an assessment framework for social work practice. Dedicated subjects are now offered in social work programs — such as the one, WS4510:04 Social Work in a Global Environment, offered in my own School. The argument for inclusion of such an element relates to the work of the Green movement and the implications that globalisation has for social justice. As Ife notes:

> The Green dictum 'think globally, act locally' requires such a global perspective. The global perspective is not new, but it has been largely missing in social justice work within countries like Australia (though there are some notable exceptions), and has not been a major influence on most social justice based community development. (Ife 1995: 87)

Earlier Ife comments:

> Global awareness requires that all actions be understood within the global context; even a simple act such as buying a cup of coffee links the purchaser to the transnational exploitation of peasant economies, the growing of cash crops, the driving of peasants from their traditional lands and the consequent repression of human rights (Trainer 1985). (Ife 1995: 87)

Such an assertion firmly places globalisation as a concern for social workers today. As Stilwell (2000: 4) notes some writers and commentators accept the process of globalisation as a given, while others, are increasingly now writing that this acceptance is not appropriate and are 'emphasising the contestable nature of globalisation'. Whatever one's position, globalisation is not something to be ignored. Our theoretical understanding needs to be informed by studies of such global natures. Our practice does not occur in isolation from the impacts of the modern (global) world, nor does it operate with a privilege that excludes it from affecting such a world.

As an example, related to foods specifically referred to earlier, Bestor writes:

> Bluefin tuna may seem at first an unlikely case study in globalisation. But as the world rearranges itself — around silicon chips, Starbucks coffee, or sashimi-grade tuna — new channels for global flows of capital and commodities link far-flung individuals and communities in unexpected new relationships. The tuna trade is a prime example of the

globalisation of a regional industry, with intense international competition and thorny environmental regulations; centuries-old practices combined with high technology; realignments of labour and capital in response to international regulation; shifting markets; and the diffusion of culinary culture as tastes for sushi, and bluefin tuna, spread worldwide. (Bestor 2000: 2)

As suggested by this 'case study', 'globalisation is not a simple process' (Ife 1999a: 14).

In the same way, social work is not a simple process. Where once a social worker may have been satisfied with undertaking a psycho-social assessment as a reasonable activity for understanding an issue or problem, it is more likely that today's worker within a generic practice will include a bio-psycho-social spiritual assessment with a structural and global analysis. This is not to say this would be the only way of looking at things, but it can provide a starting point. It does encourage the application of a wide ranging and holistic framework for analysis and opens up possibly previously little considered aspects that can be impacting on a situation.

Application of the analogy — specific aspects

When we reach this stage in exploring the analogy and applying it broadly, the seemingly ordinary discussions can have covered wide ranging concepts and elements that reinforce for students the idea that they are aware of frameworks for analysis and assessment in social work practice and again, are able themselves to think theoretically. Howe (1997: 171) in talking about the social work process suggests: 'A simple but effective way of exploring the relationship between theory and practice is to ask a series of seemingly innocuous questions about a case or a piece of practice.' The process of 'playing around with' the analogy, using the non-threatening everyday examples, provides a 'time for reflection, enquiry and vigorous analysis' (Howe 1997: 172). This next stage then is focussing on specifics by examining what one does or does not have already in the 'fridge, freezer and pantry cupboard'. To begin this section I will share one of my examples of how I relate a particular theory to a food.

One product that was part of my childhood was butter, though it was 'taken off the menu' at a later time. Freud, and his theory and the practice of psychoanalysis, are for me like butter. As Howe (1997: 175) notes, 'different theories come in and out of fashion as political values and social philosophies change with the flow of large social movements through history'. Freudian theory was and is one of those theories. 'The influence of psychoanalysis on the developing social work profession in Britain … was undoubtedly among the most significant theoretical underpinnings of social work as it developed as a profession through the 1950s and 1960s' (Pearson, Treseder and Yelloly 1988: 4). In my formal university based social work education in the early 1970s, it was common for students to include a major stream of psychology subjects in

their study and I was one of those students with Freudian theory as part of my diet. This was also a time, when 'there was very little Australian social work literature of any substance' (Ife 1999b: 20). Mostly we were taught using British and American texts, so as those texts included Freudian theory then that is what we read.

That period of my initial university study has also been referred to as 'heady times'. 'It was the time of the Whitlam Government, and the values of social work seemed at last to have come into their own, and to have entered mainstream of Australian society' (Ife 1999b: 9). It was a period of change influenced by the (re)emergence of one of those 'large social movements': radical social work. In the United Kingdom, Marjaleena Repo and Marjorie Mayo were influencing community workers with their socialist analysis writings (Ife 1997: 176). Other writers such as Galper (1975), Corrigan and Leonard (1978) and Bailey and Brake (1975) influenced the whole of social work practice not just community workers with their essentially Marxist perspectives (Ife 1997: 176). Within my immediate environment, Harold Throssell (1975) edited *Social work: radical essays* which had a similar impact locally. It was the time when like butter, Freud did not seem to be the most healthy choice. His theory did not seem to fit well with the changing context of practice. New evidence for how to do and see things differently was being offered, and a healthier more attractive choice (in radical practice) was gaining support.

Even though I stopped using butter (Freudian theory), the influence was still there, for instance in the language I used. In the same way that 'in certain respects terms such as the 'unconscious', 'fixation', 'Freudian slip' or 'phallic symbol' have entered into everyday speech' (Pearson, et al. 1988: 4), I do say that I 'butter' my bread — I do not 'margarine' it. I may not go out and buy butter much any more, but I do know regardless that some of the foods I eat contain butter. Similarly there are parts of my social work practice that still are influenced directly or indirectly by Freudian theory.

In the same way not everyone gave up butter, many social workers did not give up Freudian theory either. Recently when I was working in the north-eastern part of the United States, I attended many meetings, discussion sessions and education seminars with social work academics, practitioners and students. On more than one occasion I had a sense that Freud could have been sitting in the rooms with us. It has been said that 'Psychoanalysis is a living tradition, which was born but did not die with Freud' (Pearson, et al. 1988: 2). This was certainly born out for me in this experience. As Pearson, et al. (1988: 2–3) also note, 'Freud's ideas were to have a considerable impact within social work, particularly in the United States after his successful lecturing tours early in the twentieth century'. Some of the people I sat with could identify personal clear connections

between those lecturing tours by Freud and their own education, and the resultant influences on their current practice.

I am sure there are rooms I could sit in here in Australia, where I may experience the same sense of the influence of Freud. I do know there are organisations such as the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australian, and National Conferences are held here for practising psychotherapists, and some of the presenters and participants are social workers. I think though there has not been quite as strong a Freudian tradition develop here as say in some places in the United Kingdom and the United States due to a different history, pattern of development and cultural influences. I would suggest in the following autobiographical story, Brooks captures an historical contextual reflection of a typical Australian approach to therapy and psychoanalysis (and by association Freud):

> In January 1973, I had never heard the words 'anorexia nervosa'. The self-starvation that would become an epidemic of female adolescence was still little known in the United States and wasn't yet discussed at all in Australia.
>
> Like many Australians, I had been raised to be suspicious of neurosis. Ours was the sentiment so perfectly articulated in the movie *Crocodile Dundee*, when Mick Dundee meets a woman at a New York party who has seen a psychiatrist. Mick, alarmed, assumes she's crazy. His American girlfriend tries to explain that the woman isn't mad, she just needed to see a psychiatrist to talk over her problems. 'Hasn't she got any mates?' responds Mick. To an American audience, that's a gag line. To Australians it's a sensible query.
>
> My mother, in particular, despised what she considered the navel-gazing of psychotherapy. To her, neurosis was nothing but self-pity indulged until it had run amok. She had mild claustrophobia that made her panic when pulling a sweater over her head. Going into elevators was a penance, yet she forced herself to ride them; she never took the stairs. 'You have to fight your fears,' she said. (Brooks 1998: 114-115)

Looking beyond the negative image of psychiatry presented here, the story does offer some points worth considering. It reminds us that theories and practices which may be accepted and work well in one country, do not automatically translate into another society. The action of seeing a psychiatrist may be like an ingredient that though it has the same name, means very different things in another culture. The recognised influence on Brooks herself of her mother's teachings is also important; the same as looking at how one learnt to cook, shop, plan meals and so on. As social workers we need to know our values and part of this is recognising where they have come from and re-examining them in the current context.

One student during a discussion about Freudian theory being like butter for me, talked about how she would never read anything that talked about Freud. She always thought it would be too hard for her to understand; that in a way, it had been like not using butter herself. She added that when you took the butter out of the fridge it was too hard to spread, and that she was always in

a hurry to make the sandwiches for the children and she did not have time to wait for it to soften. She suggested that maybe if like giving the butter time to soften, she gave herself time to try to understand and digest readings about Freud and Freudian theory she may begin to understand the work and it may be of some use.

Another student who had worked in the health services in England, had a strong sense of the influence of Freud in that sector. The student talked about how butter did not need to be kept in the fridge over there. It was used by lots of people and that this was like training in psychoanalytic theory – it was comparatively readily available and lots of people used it. To this student, it was not surprising, since training institutes like those in England were not readily available here, that the theory would not be so widely used in this local setting.

Briefly now I want to present two other examples that I have shared with the students. The first is that radical social work practice is like red-meat for me. At one level, the association of the colour red seems appropriate, given that much of radical social work writing certainly in the 1970s was identified with those from the red political ideological persuasion — Marxist and socialist thinking. Further though, in the same way that social work has its early foundations ('was brought up') in radical practice, for some of us, we were brought up on red-meat. As noted earlier, there was a time when red-meat was considered an unhealthy choice and the push was on for people to eat more fish and white meats. This I equate with the demise of radical practice and the rise of individual services, including counselling and therapeutic approaches. For someone from a working class background, these approaches like eating chicken, a white meat, were for the rich or at least something that happened only under special conditions (on special occasions). With the writings of people like Fook (1993) who promotes the return from the margins of the radical approach and the inclusion of it even in casework practice, radical social work is returning to favour; once again becoming accepted as part of good practice in mainstream social work (Ife 1997: 178–179). Red-meat too is being accepted back as a healthy choice.

The second example here is the idea that empowerment theory is like boeuf bourguignonne: basically a beef stew with a fancy name, admittedly with perhaps one or two different ingredients. Those with true culinary skills may be offended by such a suggestion, however this is an association that makes sense to me. I can remember vividly my 'official' introduction to Empowerment Theory in the early 1990s. There was a continuing professional education training session being offered on what was being promoted as this new and exciting, different theory. It was offered locally by presenters from out of town. At the end of the session, my assessment of the material was that there was little new being offered; rather, that what I and others took as good social work practice was being named in a different and formal way, perhaps

with a few specific conditions attached. It was like the basic beef stew, with a clear base of red-meat (radical social work), reworked with a fancy name and some different ingredients.

For me it was a given that 'empowerment has been a consistent theme within the social work profession' (Parsons, Gutiérrez and Cox 1998: 3) and my practice. However, I had not named it that way previously. As Gutiérrez, Parsons and Cox (1998: xix) note: 'The concept of empowerment has gained currency within the past two decades', and I believe that I, along with other local practitioners at that Continuing Professional Education session, added to the weight of support for its (continued though differently named) inclusion in social work. I believe we also came away with a sense of this 'new' theory being demystified and less fearful of the next student on placement or new graduate on staff who came our way saying their practice was informed by Empowerment Theory. We had worked out the basics ingredients required.

Students often like the Empowerment Theory/beef stew story and can see the links between red-meat/beef and radical/Empowerment theory. The students will usually want to offer their own examples of where they can see other (creative and imaginary) links.

An example of students applying the analogy

For students preparing for their first field education placement, many will identify improving their communications skills as a learning objective for the placement. For the student being asked to link theory and practice, the idea of Communication Theory seems to be a comfortable starting point. It is as if it is an area they all know something about and see as important. As Greene (1996: 116) writes, 'Communications theory is very relevant to social workers because successful practice depends on our ability to communicate effectively'. In one class we decided to explore Communication Theory and it was linked to water. The rationale was that communication is seen as essential for living as water is for life. In the same way that we 'cannot not communicate' (Greene 1996: 118), we cannot live without water. Some of the points recognised, discussed and considered, included the following.

Our bodies are made up of water, and if we become dehydrated we get sick. If we do not communicate well, we develop problems also. More than this though, when you are hungry and want something to eat, you need to make decisions about what that food will be. Wanting to improve communication skills also needs to be broken down and decisions made about what this means. The most common categories of communication are written and verbal (and non-verbal) forms. It is not really helpful though to just say for instance, 'I want to improve my writing skills'. So often the next question to ask/answer is what sort of writing do social workers need to be able to do? (See Appendix 2.3 Communication – Written, for some examples that students identified of the

types of writing that a social worker might need to do.) Once a decision is made as to what sort of writing I want to become better at doing, I can then work out how to go about achieving this. (It is like finding out what the ingredients are and then maybe following a recipe or learning from others how to make it.)

Similarly, the broad goal may be to improve my oral communication skills. In any placement or social work practice setting, there can be a variety of opportunities for communicating orally. (See Appendix 2.4 Communication – Oral, for some student examples.) Even within similar situations, such as conducting an interview with a family, there will not be just one way of achieving this. Where once a social worker may have been sitting in the same room with the family, today it is also possible the parties may not even be in the same town but are connecting with each other using video conferencing facilities. This is one of the 'many new telecommunications technologies' promoted as having multiple uses in social work practice and where 'a number of benefits of this technology for clients, their families and for health professions themselves' have been identified (Kelleher, Ewert, Yastrubetskaya and Williams 2000: 55).

Effective oral communication is a complex process. The words I use and the way I express myself (verbally and non-verbally) may work well in one setting, such as in front of a video camera, but be inappropriate in another. In a text which presents material from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about what sort of helping they consider useful, come the following comments on this point of appropriate and inappropriate oral communication:

> Both Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders drew attention to the cultural meanings of non-verbal communication, many of which differ considerably from non-indigenous understandings. … Similarly, with regard to verbal communication, all of the indigenous workers stressed the unsuitability of western professional jargon or typical bureaucratic language. At the very least, 'talking plain', every day English was considered essential, with the use of traditional language or Torres Strait Creole preferred for Torres Strait Islanders. (Lynn, Thorpe and Miles 1998: 28)

Even the processes used in helping may have the same elements (ingredients) but be done in differing ways, as suggested in the following example from the same text:

> The first phase, 'Beginnings', was characterised in the words of research participants, as 'A yarn, a joke and a cup of tea: tuning-in and sussing-out'. Without exception, all of the indigenous workers considered this an essential, potentially extended phase of the helping process. … Regardless of how well connections are already known, yarning and story telling, accompanied by the sharing of food and drink, laughter, and/or spirituality is an absolutely vital part of the 'beginnings' phase. (Lynn, Thorpe and Miles 1998, 25–26)

It is like wanting to have a cup of tea — do I use a tea bag or am I letting the tea leaves brew in the pot? A number of decisions need to be made along the way. The outcome, like beginning the helping process, may be achieved, but there are various ways to do this. In exploring the example

of wanting to 'improve my communication skills', students have recognised that there is not just one ingredient (water). They do however become comfortable in accepting that if they have the basic ingredients, they can develop the skills needed.

Conclusion

The analogy presented here is offered as an alternative way of thinking about what theory is, what it is made up of, how we use it, and so on. Sometimes people can feel overwhelmed by the idea of theory and see it as something beyond them. The analogy draws on the comfortable, everyday and ordinary examples of life to offer another picture. It can be as simple or as complex as one wants to make it. It is possible to use the analogy to explore the broad aspects of social work practice and to highlight significant elements as a framework for analysing and understanding social issues and concerns. It can be used personally as a tool for making sense of specific theories or generic ones.

Even though in conversation one may identify completing a particular task as 'a piece of cake', I am sure the analogy will not influence the language of social work theory and practice in any way. I hardly expect that I will hear a student in a supervision session discussing a telephone conversation with a client as a real cappuccino or how her or his struggle with incorporating the radical social work approach into her or his practice is like chewing on an over-cooked piece of red-meat. What I do hope is that thinking about what one has in one's 'fridge, freezer and pantry cupboard' may be helpful as an another way for linking theory and practice.

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Appendix 2.1
Appendix 2.1
Coffee

hot
cold
iced
short
long
flat white
cappuccino
vienna
decaffeinated
percolated
brewed
instant
bag
roasted
freeze dried
dripolator
plunger
filter
Moroccan
Brazilian
Jamaican
New Guinea
Tablelands
Colombian
Turkish

Appendix 2.2
Tea

hot
cold
iced
weak
strong
milk
lemon
sugar
pot
infusion
bag
in a billy with gum leaves
Ceylon
Irish
English
Chinese
Japanese
Indian
Nerada / Billy / Bushells
Sri Lankan
afternoon
breakfast
supreme
herbal: jasmine
            chamomile
            dandelion
            mint
green tea

cup — china, porcelain
glass — with or without a handle
mug — thick, thin

The following list is the result of a quick 'brainstorm'. The items are therefore randomly presented.

memo
email
biopsychosocial assessment
case note
file note
referral letter
executive summary
ministerial
abstract:
       journal
       conference
       research report
       research proposal
research proposal
consent form
ethics application
invoice
receipt
tender document
press release:
       radio
       newspaper
       television

advertisement
job description
selection criteria
responding to selection criteria
resume
letter of application
letter:
       appointment
       therapeutic
       request for information, resources
       of thanks

web page
home assessment
draft policy document
final policy document
strategic plan
mission statement
monthly reports
statistical records
reference:
       colleague
       worker
       client
       group
minutes
agenda
annual report
process report
court report
progress report
incident report:
       victim/witness
       physical/verbal abuse
       motor vehicle
       sexual/workplace harassment
letter to the editor
submission
flyer / brochure
poster
grant application
education session plan

The following list is the result of a quick 'brainstorm'. The items are therefore randomly presented.

face to face
individually
in a group / family / couple / parent-child
community meeting
management committee
colleagues
case conference
conference presentation
seminars
workshops
speech: introduction
                  guest speaker
                  thanks
                  education
interviewing
counselling
chatting / social support
chairing meeting
presenting reports / AGMs
deputation
consultation

telephone
teleconference
video conference
radio: handset
         navy / ships
         commercial
interview: radio
                 newspaper
                 magazine
                 television

OVERLAY WITH
Does it need to be translated into another language?
How to communicate with someone who can not see? who can not hear? who is unable to read?
child: 2 or 12 years; teenager: 13 or 17 years; adult: young, middle, older, elderly

Appendix 2.5
Presentation to the Global Social Work Congress 2004

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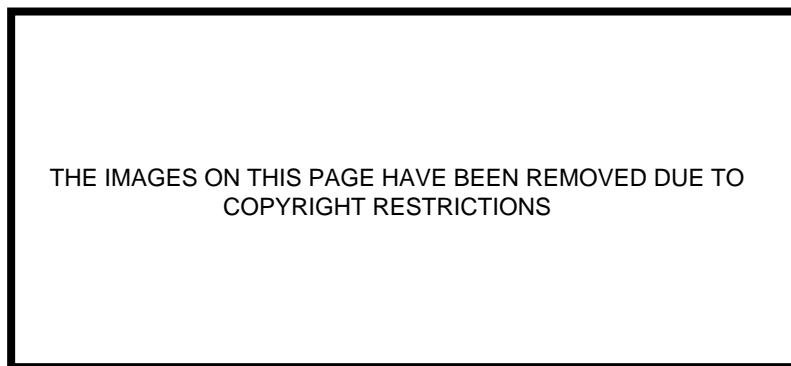COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Figure 11: Cover – Global Social Work Congress 2004

Cultivating the Imagination – Ways of Reclaiming Strength and Capacities

Abstract

The Program Committee asks how can we assist communities, families and individuals to develop strength, build their capacities and to deal with the issues that challenge them? In this presentation the focus will be on individuals, and on particular individuals – students. The suggestion is that students can be assisted to grow and develop through cultivating their imagination.

As a teacher, students saying that they do not know any theory have too often confronted me. When these students are those in upper year level classes, such a claim is particularly concerning. It seems at one level these students are stuck in their thinking. It is as if to them there is only one right answer and they do not believe they have it. In looking for ways to help students recognise their learning and (re)claim what they do know, I have found that by cultivating their imagination using analogies, imagery and metaphors drawn from their everyday worlds, they are able to value who they are, what they do know, what they are capable of and become confident to move forward to deal with whatever challenges come their way.

One of my teaching analogies is titled 'The Fridge, Freezer and Pantry Cupboard'. Briefly the suggestion with this analogy is that each of us has different capacities (sizes of fridges, freezers and pantry cupboards). We choose different 'foods' stored away, and create different (and sometimes similar) 'menus' depending on our 'strengths' as a 'cook' (practitioner) and the 'occasion' (what issue are we dealing with or whatever the challenge is that we need to address). The everyday images arising from this analogy have proved helpful and reassuring for many students.

The intention of this presentation is to share my ideas and practices in relation to my use of creative imagination in the teaching and learning processes. In the discussion time, people will be invited to present their experiences of using metaphors, imagery, visual thinking strategies, and so on. Though brief, such intentional sharing will enhance our own abilities and skills and stimulate our imagination.

Cultivating the Imagination
Ways of reclaiming strength & capacities

- Aim: To present a description of a teaching tool
  - The application of an analogy
- Background: Stimulating the creative imagination as an alternative way of thinking
- Challenging: 'But I don't know any theory!'

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Context

- Social Work courses
  - Field Education components universal
  - Australia – 2 placements (980 hours)
  - JCU 3rd year: 65 days x 7 hours (455 hours)
  - JCU 4th year: 75 days x 7 hours (525 hours)
- Placements: 'the time for students to practice social work, not just "talk about it" in classes'
- "Field education as a core component of undergraduate education is institutionally embedded within social work" (Spencer & McDonald 1998, 9)

How we learn!

- Dealing with 'Pre-Prac Anxiety'
  - (Mensinga & Rice 2000, 1)
- Concepts of surface and deep approaches to learning –
- To develop deep approaches, practices such as 'encouraging the need-to-know, instilling curiosity, building on students' prior knowledge are all things that teachers can attempt to do'
  - (Biggs 1999, 17)
- 'The best learning is fun'
  - (Bertola & Murphy 1994, 36)

Using the imagination

- An analogy for theory and practice
  - Fridge, Freezer and Pantry Cupboard

- Theory is like what you have stored in your fridge, freezer and pantry cupboard;
- Practice – which is the application of theory – is how you choose to use the various ingredients you have stored there.

Fridge Freezer & Pantry

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Explaining the analogy

- Size
- Location
- Variety of supplies
- Food selection
- Preparation aspects

Application: Broad aspects

- Social
- Economic
- Political
- Spiritual
- Cultural
- Environmental
- Global

Social Work is not a simple process!

- Once a social worker may be been satisfied with undertaking a psycho-social assessment
- Now: bio-psycho-social spiritual assessment with a structural and global analysis
- Using the broad aspects encourages students to recognise that they are aware of frameworks for analysis and assessment in social work practice and are able themselves to think theoretically!

Application: specific examples

- Butter = Freud (Freudian theory & practice)
- Red meat = Radical theory and social work practice
- Boeuf Bourguignonne = Empowerment theory
- Water = Communication theory
  - Communication is seen as essential for living as water is for life.

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Student's example:
'I want to improve my writing skills'

- Memo
- Email
- Biopsychosocial assessment
- Case notes
- File note
- Referral letter
- Executive summary
- Ministerial
- Research proposal
- Consent form
- Ethics application
- Invoice
- receipt
- Tender document
- Press release
- Advertisement
- Job description
- Selection criteria
- Resume
- Case conference plan
- Policy document
- Mission statement
- Progress report
- Submission
- Letter
- Grant application (and more...)

Conclusion

- The analogy – offered as an alternative way of thinking about
  - What theory is?
  - What it is made up of?
  - How do we use it? …
- Draws on the comfortable, everyday and ordinary examples of life to offer another picture – it's fun!

A new language for supervision

- Students suggestions:
- A telephone conversation described as 'a real cappuccino!'
- When struggling to incorporate the radical social work approach into practice, as being like 'chewing on an over-cooked piece of red meat'

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Invitation to share

- **What are your experiences in practice – be that in teaching, supervision, or otherwise – of using -**
  - Metaphors
  - Analogies
  - Imagery
  - Story telling
  - Visualisations
  - …

The end…

Time for morning tea!
And some theory building

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- With Thanks …
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Chapter 3

Vision as a base for supervision

Introduction

Thinking about supervision for you as a social worker – then read on. This paper suggests workers focus on their vision of social work and use this vision as a base for their supervision. Having a vision works as a yardstick for preparing for, measuring, and benefiting from supervision. It grounds the worker in what is really important for them not others such as managers and in doing so maintains hope and reduces negative aspects of practice such as (dis)stress and burnout. Having a vision provides direction. It acts as a guide for making sense of our work, what is being asked of us and what we are asking of ourselves. Supervision often is 'problem' based – it is offered or sought when there is a problem. Supervision can be framed on a positive, strengths base – a base informed by a vision.

This paper is written to interest ordinary social workers who aim to improve their practice and look for realistic ideas which they can integrate readily. It will be of benefit to those who seek ways to improve now rather than waiting for the next professional development or training course offered. It comes from a social worker whose interest in supervision began 30 years ago as a student considering what supervision on placement would be like, then as a new graduate being supervised, and later as a worker continuing to be supervised as well as providing supervision for colleagues and students. For more than a decade now I have also been an organiser in the provision of and training for supervision. Specifically this paper has grown through the supervision sessions currently undertaken as a research student. In these sessions there has been a parallel process occurring where I have been experiencing supervision at the same time as thinking, talking and reading about it as a topic.

As you read this paper you are encouraged to engage in a similar parallel process whereby you not only read the ideas and material presented but also think about what these topics mean for you. The first section looks at some ideas about why people enter social work. As you read this, it would be worthwhile to spend some time thinking back to what your motivation was for entering the profession. You may find similarities to the material presented; you may have very different experiences; or be somewhere in between. Ideally though, you will be able to engage with the concepts and make them meaningful for you. Some of the other key areas that follow include exploring what is social work, what is supervision and what is vision. Finally, the importance of vision as a base for supervision will be my conclusion and hopefully make sense for you as well.

Social Work – what we entered to do and what we do

> Many of you, like me, will have entered the profession of social work because we were interested, quite simply, in 'helping people'. … Some of you may still hold ideals of 'changing the world'. (Fook 2002: vi)

There is a common theme of hope and optimism expressed by those wanting to study social work, and this is 'often characterised as "I want to help people"' (Ife 1997: 99). There are other motivations for studying social work which are not always altruistic. The range of reasons identified by students cover the pragmatic and practical ones through to caring and concern for humanity. In their longitudinal study, Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000: 39) found this in the responses to their first question: 'Why are you studying social work?' These researchers concluded that 'the majority of students tended to focus on their choice of social work either as a pragmatic choice, a general desire to assist people and a concern for them or the intellectual appeal of social work's wholistic nature' (Fook, Ryan and Hawkins 2000: 41).

The hope and optimism though common, may not always be centred on helping others; it can also be 'characterised' as wanting to help myself. Crawford provides an example of this as she recalls three students who entered the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program. These students were experienced welfare workers and 'their aim was to gain a BSW to climb from immersion in the messy swamp of practice to the clear view from the top of a mountain of expert knowledge' (Crawford 2001: 13). Their initial motivation relates to (an imagined) personal benefit through a career move.

Like these students, 'the power of biography' (Harris 1996:39) – particularly experience of contact with the world of welfare through paid work, volunteering or as a service user directly or indirectly through family – can be influential in the initial decision to enter the profession. Students often start with 'a simplistic and unproblematic view' (Harris 1996:40) of what is involved in becoming a social worker – a view that their professional learning 'involves the acquisition of certain skills and procedures which if rehearsed and practised sufficiently well will result in a competent practitioner' (Harris 1996:40).

Generally however, students do recognise through the course of their studies, that there is more to being a social worker than being technically able to do a job. This is not to suggest that whatever led someone to social work in the first place is necessarily wrong or bad; rather, that there is an expectation that in the process of 'becoming' a social worker, people will learn, and change and grow. Such a transition is reflected in this excerpt from Crawford's conversation with a graduating social work student, Emma White, about the aim and purpose of a BSW:

My great discovery was that there is no social work kit bag or a neat definition of the tasks of social work. An expectation that there could be reflects the commodified notion of social work with which many of us entered the course. There is a lot of resistance from students at being asked to wonder and wander widely. We want to be told what we need to know. When you get past that mind-set a whole new world opens up. (Crawford 2001: 15)

Change such as this does not come just from being told about it. The ideas need to become our own through taking action in relation to them. It is not enough to think I know what being a social worker is; I need to try it out, experience it, and make sense of it for myself.

For many students, their time in the field during placements by being a student social worker, provides opportunities for challenging their preconceived ideas about social work. In part this is when a student clarifies what their own definition of social work is (and for many, this is the point where they decide whether a career in social work is really for them). This is when students 'see' for themselves what social work practice is really like and through this time begin to further develop and refine their own personal professional vision of social work. If they have not experienced the situation before, they will be sure to meet people during placement (be they colleagues, service users, the general public, or workers from related fields) who will be only too willing to tell the student what their role is, as '*everyone* knows how to be a social worker better than you do, and most will relish the opportunity to share their expertise with you' (Barber 2003: ix). Sometimes non-social workers go further than this by suggesting they already can do your job for you. As Camp found on her final year placement in a country town Community Health Centre, her colleagues (community nurses and health education officers) 'considered that they did all their own social work anyway' (Camp 1990: 101). This can be quite disconcerting for not only students but also graduates, and they can be left in a situation, as happened for Camp (1990: 101), where she 'was floundering, and feeling great empathy for the social worker quoted by Satyamurti (1981) as stating, "I don't at all feel like the person I expected to be before I came – a competent social worker, getting on with the job"'.

Though these feelings can be uncomfortable and unsettling, they can also be a catalyst for clarifying what it is that I can offer as a (graduate or student) social worker. Realistically we do not have a monopoly on what we do or what we know. 'The skills and knowledge base of the profession are not unique' (Bisman 2004:115). Social workers are very good at learning from others. Historically social work curriculum has drawn heavily from 'sibling disciplines such as psychiatry, psychology and counseling' (Kadushin 1992: 14) and more recently from other disciplines such as sociology and environmental studies. In part this ability to draw on others' work is a strength of social work, particularly in multidisciplinary settings, where it allows workers to understand and appreciate the perspectives of colleagues from the other helping professions. There

have also been criticisms levelled at social workers though, for taking too much on board from these other disciplines. As one worker I interviewed for my study in the US stated:

> People better figure out what we do well – and differently to psychologists and psychiatrists. … We sold out trying to look like psychologists and psychiatrists. We have lost our uniqueness – what makes us special. The profession needs to look again and redefine itself – we do something that no one else does.

Yet in contrast to this, Jordan (2004: 8), writing in the UK, believes 'social workers are required to act less like themselves in their old identities, and more like officials, police or prison staff under the old regime.' These descriptions perhaps highlight a tension that is often identified in social work between care and control functions inherent in the types of roles social workers perform. For the Editors of a recent edition of the *British Journal of Social Work*, the central question they asked was: 'if the core purpose of social work and the actions of social workers can be described as increasing the level of freedom available to individuals, groups and communities, or whether regulation, surveillance and restriction of troublesome people have become social work's defining characteristics' (Drakeford and Butler 2004: 1)? This can be quite challenging for a practitioner to consider his or her work in the light of whether I am helping in ways that liberate and empower people and communities or am I more concerned with keeping control?

So how do we define ourselves? In this next section, this point will be explored further, by drawing on a number of key writers of social work practice and teaching texts.

One such early text suggests that 'what is unique about social work *is* our diversity, that we are a generalist profession, an almost extemporaneous profession that changes according to societal needs and is willing to be used for a great variety of societal and individual purposes' (Heus and Pincus 1986: 22). This seems to give social workers an invitation to adapt and change as society changes. Yet have we done that or is social work 'essentially a conservative profession, one which primarily serves the interest of the dominant groups in society' (Fook 2002: 3)?

In thinking about what social work does, I was challenged by Martin Davies' assertion in the Preface to the third edition of his text *The Essential Social Worker*, that 'the central thesis of the book – that maintenance theory best explains the role of social work in society – remains intact' (1994: vii). He argues that it 'fits the available empirical evidence better than either of the previously dominant psychotherapeutic or Marxist models' (1994: viii). To Martin Davies, social work is clear, though he does acknowledge that: 'Sometimes it seems as though everybody has a separate or different opinion about what social workers do or should do' (1994:39). He also acknowledges there are critics of his position.

> The idea of social work as *maintenance* has drawn the wrath of critics on the political Left. … 'Maintenance', then is a dirty word. What is the virtue of maintenance if it merely

perpetuates poverty, degradation and discrimination? And from that rhetorical question it is but a short step to the assertion that social work, so defined, must be a sham, a defender of privilege, and social workers the lackeys of capitalism (Davies 1994: 45).

Davies needless to say is not prepared to take that 'short step'. He has a clear vision of what social work offers and having over time considered other positions and arguments, holds firm to his original thesis.

This does not mean the dilemma that the 'short step' poses goes away. Others wrestle with similar thoughts. Fook (2001: 22) in addressing the question 'What is a social worker?' highlights this quandary. 'In my least clear moments I question whether it really is possible to hold ourselves up as the champions of social justice, when we all live and work in, and benefit from, a system which is socially unjust.' As a counter to this, Fook identifies what she considers is a more positive vision:

> In my clearest moments I firmly believe a social worker is: *someone who believes in the ideals of social justice, and who works from these ideals, with a multi-disciplinary perspective, in relation to the specific contexts in which they are working.* Social work is thus not defined by a specific type of skill or knowledge, but rather by a specific combination of them used from a specific value-base and in a context-relevant way. (Fook 2001: 22)

It is interesting to note her acceptance that it does not matter particularly where our knowledge and skills are drawn from; rather it is what we do with these and what we are using as a base – a specific value-base – that is critical. This is echoed by Bisman (2004: 109) though her 'paper argues that an emphasis on the profession's knowledge base has come at the expense of attention to social work's values and mission.' She supports the 'emphasis on social justice' and says 'without this … there is little if any need for social work or social workers' (Bisman 2004: 115). She concludes that: 'It is the application of knowledge and skills towards moral ends that imbues the profession with meaning and defines the role of the social worker in society' (Bisman 2004: 115).

The picture of social work that is building here is of a profession that perhaps does not own a strong distinctive knowledge and skills base – rather a shared one; but does have a strong emphasis on how these are applied – through an emphasis on social justice, through a commitment to social work values and mission, and towards moral ends. How do we achieve this? Allan (2003: 51) comments: 'This requires social workers to practise self-reflexively, to constantly reflect on the interplay between their own knowledge and values and the situations they encounter.' Such a requirement brings the focus onto an immediate and personal level. It moves the gaze from the 'job' to me and the choices I make in how I act, think about, feel towards, and perceive what it is I am doing. This shifting of our gaze can be aligned with the distinction Banks (2001: 157) makes

when she talks about 'defensive' and 'reflective' practitioners. '*Defensive practitioners* go by the book and fulfil duties/responsibilities defined by the agency and the law.' On the other hand,

> *Reflective practitioners* recognise ethical dilemmas and conflicts and how they arise (for example, through unequal power relationships with users; contradictions within the welfare state; society's ambivalence towards the welfare state and social workers in particular). They are more confident about their own values and how to put them into practice; integrate knowledge, values and skills; reflect on practice and learn from it; are prepared to take risks and moral blame. There is a recognition that personal and agency values may conflict and that the worker as a person has a moral responsibility to make decisions about these conflicts. (Banks 2001: 157)

The question that then follows is how do I know I am making 'good' social work choices (for surely no one would consciously want to make poor or bad choices)? In part it comes back to knowing yourself and who you are. It is about looking at what it is you want to achieve in your work. Alongside this are the decisions related to where you work and the choices you make in how you undertake that work. These are the personal professional decisions that you have most control over; though even these decisions are not usually able to be made in complete isolation from other factors.

There are many and varied influences operating which impact on us as we make those decisions and choices. Our choice of practice may be influenced by experiences or lack of opportunity to experience particular types of practices during our student days. It may be that we choose not to work in a particular field due to our perceptions and / or the reality of what that sort of work may 'cost' us – emotionally, financially, career wise, and so on. It may be the culture in an organisation may constrain and / or control our choices. It may be that regardless of what we consider to be the best or most appropriate professional decision in a given situation, it will not be accepted for action because of the power of others' decisions – such as the power of the government of the day, the lack of a political will to provide the resources needed, or the context of the current restrictive frameworks. Some of these points will now be explored further.

What might be examples of the influence of students' experiences during their studies on future practice? Maritz and Coughlan (2004: 28) in their 'limited survey of South African students', where they were looking to understand if students would use community-based interventions after graduation, found that most 'would not opt to practise' that way if given a choice . Students demonstrated they could argue community development was a necessary and at times the best intervention strategy, but identified 'the experience of being overwhelmed' (Maritz and Coughlan 2004: 34) by it as a practice. The stated preference was for individual or casework and the reasons given 'were mostly because the students enjoyed working on a one-to-one basis, they felt more confident and believed that this method of intervention would make a difference to

the person's life' (Maritz and Coughlan 2004: 31). What the authors believe their study made clear was 'that even in universities where the formal curriculum has swung to a community focus, a significant portion of students still want a more sophisticated clinical work experience' (Maritz and Coughlan 2004: 34). Ife (1997: 198) writing in the Australian context, believes students identify clinical practice placements as safe.

> Because of the difficult political climate in which social workers are required to practice, the temptation for students to retreat into a safe, apparently 'apolitical' (there can in reality be no such thing) therapeutic social work, based entirely on interpersonal helping, is stronger than ever. (Ife 1997: 198)

The suggestion is that we choose areas of work (including placements) where we think we will feel safe and comfortable.

Another aspect Ife draws attention to in influencing such choices is the way in which placements are set up. He is highly critical of the 'largely individual learning experiences of current educational practice' and the 'dominant individualism within which the educational task is conceptualised.' He argues that 'social work education can increase its critical potential if it moves beyond such individualism to more collective understanding and action' (Ife 1997: 201).

Part of the responsibility for the educational process also rests with the profession – including the accrediting bodies and practitioners. The University can not provide placements for students in isolation from the field and the accreditation requirements. It can be very difficult for instance to provide community work placements when there are no social workers working in the sector who will fulfil the requirement of on site supervision for a placement. While the profession overall lacks commitment to this form of practice, it remains unlikely that the next generation will have much opportunity to experience practice in such an arena during their formal education.

This is not to suggest that community work as an integral part of social work will cease to exist. It may be though that 'increasingly those who do this kind of work are isolated from each other, do not share a coherent professional identity, and often take other kinds of training, such as psychology and counselling courses' (Jordan 2004: 10). Add to this Jordan's assessment that in the UK, 'Community work, even preventative work, was always given lip service, but equally was always a source of discomfort – messy, unstatusful, with few reassuring professional boundaries, and many anxieties and dilemmas' (2004: 11-12). He goes on to say that those who really believe in this sort of work often have to work in 'under-funded, struggling agencies in deprived districts' (Jordan 2004: 12). This is hardly a picture that would encourage someone to choose to work in this sector. This in part is what the South African students in the study by Maritz and Coughlan were certainly reflecting.

Even when we are working in a sector of our own choosing, there will be other constraints on the way we practice. This includes the impact of the political climate (referred to by Ife above). Professionals are not 'free' to implement their practice decisions without constraints. As Evans and Harris (2004: 74) note, 'professional decisions are not based solely, or necessarily primarily, on service users' needs but on their needs set against the backcloth of the wider policy, organizational, economic and legal contexts (Evetts, 2002, p. 345)'. Along similar lines, the decisions of whole communities can be ignored when governments have a mind to pursue their own outcomes. Lahiri-Dutt (2004:13-27) provides a case study of an urban planning situation (in Sydney) that highlights this. His work shows how 'instead of reversing its position in face of community opposition, governments are tempted to reinforce it by seeking the scientific opinion from experts … a privileging process subordinates citizens' preferences and understandings to those held by experts' (Lahiri-Dutt 2004: 13). At one level it would seem reasonable then to question what the point of social work is if we are not always able to achieve social justice. Yet it is precisely because these situations occur – the subordination of the voices of individual service users or whole communities and the lack of socially just outcomes – that social work needs to exist.

At times considering all the constraints and complexities of our social world what we aim to achieve as social workers may seem like an impossible dream. This rather than being a negative can in fact be a strength. Research suggests that it is workers with a dream – those who hold 'a broader vision of the mission of social work' (Fook 2002: 158) – who are best able not just to survive but to maintain their confidence and respond flexibly and energetically to what ever situations present. Drawing on the findings from the study she undertook with Ryan and Hawkins (Fook et al. 2000), Fook notes that for those social workers 'even if their jobs were conflict ridden and experienced as frustrating, ironically this broader vision allowed them to approach their workplace demands with vigour' (Fook 2002: 158).

When you go looking for it, you will find many writers – in social work as well as in related professions – who identify their practice specifically and practice generally as that which is related to some sort of vision. They may express it as a simple statement, as complex ideas or obliquely as suggestions. Vision can be presented as a matter of fact or a suggestion for inclusion in practice. For instance Ife (1997: 99) states: 'At the core of social work is a vision of humanity'. For Cooper (2002: 185) 'social workers share a collective vision of society in which resources are shared equitably, where people are safe and cared for by others, and in which individuals can fully participate'. For Jordan (2004:16), he has a vision of social work practice that it will eventually be made to turn back to previous dominant ways of working that valued 'informal, egalitarian and communal methods' – methods he believes are kept alive in the voluntary and community sectors.

One person who works in such a sector and keeps alive these methods is Anne Bishop, an activist. She identifies writing her book *Becoming an ally: Breaking the cycle of oppression* because she has a dream which for her 'is a deep, driving force' (Bishop 2002: 18).

> The dream is a vision of the world I would like to live in, a world based on cooperation, negotiation, and universal respect for the innate value of every creature on earth and the Earth herself. This is a world where no one doubts that to hurt anyone or anything is to hurt yourself and those you love most, a world where everyone works to understand how everything we do will affect future generations. (Bishop 2002: 18)

Bishop believes many others share her dream and certainly her work is echoed strongly by Australian writers and practitioners such as Ife (1995) and Andrews (1996).

In some areas of social work practice, such as child protection work, it may seem that positive visions are unlikely. Holland and Scourfield (2004: 21) acknowledge 'opportunities for statutory child protection to be liberating are limited, but that there is more potential than the most pessimistic accounts might allow'. In this controlled and controlling environment these authors still maintain a sense of hope – all is not 'pessimistic'. Rather than searching for unattainable goals and outcomes, they present positive ways such as Bishop's call for 'universal respect' (2002: 18) that can be incorporated into practice that considers the children, the parents and the social workers. Surely as they suggest 'even if the term "liberation" appears unrealistic or glib in this field, there are, perhaps, other goals we can aim for, such as practice that reduces shame and stigma, practice that is respectful' (Holland and Scourfield 2004: 31). Is it really possible as Rossiter (1996: 149) envisages for social work to be practised in a way 'where the polarity between client and worker is silly'?

These are challenging visions. Whether they are realised in this new century depends on the labour of those who are able to maintain the sense of hope and optimism with which they entered the profession. It will also depend on how workers respond to the constant of change and its resultant uncertainty. Any one with some history in the profession will recognise the social work of today is a practice in transition. Rossiter describes it this way:

> I believe we are in a transition from social work as an apologetic, hierarchical state function, armed with techniques garnered from theories rife with denied power to a new possibility, yet not clear, but tinged with global citizenship, with historical accountability, with self-reflexiveness and dialogue. (Rossiter 1996: 149)

The future may be unclear but for each of us we can be aware of our past and acknowledge the present – personally and professionally. We can also acknowledge our unique strengths and individual qualities which we bring to practice. Davies (1994: x) maintains a conviction that 'good social work must combine intelligence and warmth. Both qualities are crucial: without intelligence

or critical sensitivity social work loses its way; without warmth, commitment or feeling, it loses its identity.' Making sure we maintain these qualities at the highest level is an ongoing task.

Supervision – its place in social work

People choose many different and varied ways to enhance their knowledge and skills base for practice. There would be almost universal acceptance of the notion that an undergraduate degree neither can nor does teach a practitioner all she or he needs to know for any social work position. Invariably if you talk with a recent graduate a few weeks into their first social work job, they will tell you how much they are learning and sometimes hint at their growing awareness of how much the University or the course or you if you were one of their lecturers, did not teach them. The hope though is that as a student they learnt how to learn and that as a worker they will be well placed to continue their learning.

One place to look for guidance on opportunities for such learning is the profession's peak organisation. In Australia, there is only one professional and accrediting body for social workers – the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). This body has established the Code of Ethics, sets the criteria for and reviews for accreditation the undergraduate social work courses in Australian universities, and defines the related eligibility for membership requirements. To be recognised as a professional social worker, membership of the Association is not compulsory; eligibility for membership is the defining criterion.

The Association does expect that all practising social workers adhere to the Code of Ethics. Outlined in the Code are the identified Values and Principles and Ethical Practice standards and guidelines deemed necessary for professional practice. It is in Section 3.5 Value: Competence that the Principles provide direction for the graduate in relation to the requirement for continuing her or his professional education. Specific guidance is in the following:

> 3.5.1 Principles
> b) Social workers improve their practice by engaging in activities such as continuing professional education, supervision and personal development.
> e) Social workers ensure ongoing professional competence by contributing to the education, training and supervision of social work colleagues and students.
> f) Social workers are responsible for the standard of service that they, or social work students under their direct supervision, provide. (AASW 2002a: 10)

One of the recurring practices identified here is that of supervision. As noted in the above, supervision can be an activity that a social worker engages in for her or his own learning (education); for fostering others – colleagues and students (education and support); and for making sure that those she or he is 'supervising' are working competently (administration and

management). These align with the functions of supervision as commonly identified in the literature.

The other major activity promoted by the AASW is continuing professional education (CPE) and for this the Association produces a separate document – *AASW Continuing Professional Education: Policy/Planner/Logbook, 2002-2004*. It is in this Document that the Association specifies what are acceptable CPE activities such as 'participation in conferences and skill development programs, reading professional publications, providing supervision for students, providing or receiving professional supervision, academic study, writing or presenting professional papers, participation in quality assurance or research activities and active membership of boards and committees' (AASW 2002b: 7). Again the practice of supervision – either receiving it or providing it – features here. If a worker follows the CPE guidelines in order to qualify for Accredited Social Worker status, accruing a minimum number of points for supervision activities is listed first as a 'required activity' (AASW 2002b: 10). This comes under the category of Accountability. There are four defined categories, and undertaking supervised practice for skill development and providing supervision for social work students are additional activities in two of these that attract CPE points.

The dominance of support for supervision as a process and a practice in social work is evident in the guidelines of the professional association. There also seems to be wide acceptance of it by workers in the profession generally as well as by those in allied disciplines. Ife (2001: 171) comments that it is 'seen as very important in social work' and 'regarded as an essential component of professional development and competent practice'. Grover (2002: 273) argues for supervision to become part of practice for allied health professions ('such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy and rehabilitation case management') and holds social work up as an example of a field where 'the value of supervision … has been well documented'.

Yet what is supervision? Who uses it? Who 'should' use it? According to Carroll (2002: vi), 'the whole concept of supervision in the helping professions has been under scrutiny for the past 20 years. … These critiques have forced adherents of supervision to review and revise what exactly is meant by supervision and what are its values'. It is not unique to the broad arena of the helping professions or even to social work. Go to a good book store today and you are likely to be shown as many texts on the topic on the business and management shelves as you would find on the shelves for social work texts or for those of the related disciplines of psychology and counselling. Supervision as a practice and a process is another area that is not owned by social work. Again as noted earlier, it is the 'application' (Bisman 2004: 115) of it that provides the distinctive social work aspects. In social work there is a need to emphasise the vision aspects as

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related to the purpose and values of the profession; not so the coercive managerialist or other controlling aspects that potentially exist in supervision.

In social work the most cited 'starting point' (Brown and Bourne 1996: 9) for a definition of supervision is the work of Alfred Kadushin. The first edition of *Supervision in Social Work* was published in 1976 and in this Kadushin outlined the now classic framework for analysing supervision according to three principal functions: administration, education and support. It is interesting to note that primary among his reasons for writing the third edition of the text, Kadushin identified a need to respond to the increasing impact of management and controlling practices on social work.

> The ascendence of a political orientation that seeks to curtail the development of social programs and limit access to resources increases the importance of supervision for preserving the commitment of social work to a political orientation that is more humanistic. An orientation antagonistic to the objectives and values of social work has been made evident not only in legislative changes but in attempts at imposing business management technologies on social agencies. (Kadushin 1992: xvii)

Though specifically writing in the US context, it is evident that his assessment could equally be applied in Australia. Further his call for 'preserving the commitment of social work' is as much needed today as it was then. There was another significant new development that prompted Kadushin.

> Since the publication of the first edition, another previously unexplored problem – the problem of worker burnout – was 'discovered' and given considerable attention in the literature. The relevance to supervision of this new development lies in the fact that the research on burnout has concluded that supportive supervision is a key prophylactic and palliative for burnout. (Kadushin 1992: xviii)

It is supervision operating in such a way as to reduce or prevent problems in practice that workers often seek. Some of this is reflected in the description Crago and Crago present of supervision for a 'satisfied supervisee':

> Supervision provides me with a safe place where I can discuss my clinical work, and any personal or professional issues that affect my work. When I arrive in my supervisor's office, I feel relief, because I know that I can say anything, and that I won't be judged for it. I trust my supervisor's experience and wisdom, and while I don't always take her/his advice, I know I'm trusted to make the best use of whatever I'm given. (Crago and Crago 2002: 79)

As a parallel to this, Fook (2003: 7) in a supervisor's role identifies the support she finds herself providing to 'many battle weary workers'. Part of what she does is:

> I try to listen, and in listening, to recognise each person's unique viewpoints and experiences whilst opening them up to other, sometimes even contradictory, perspectives. I show them how their experience is both personal and social, how they can be valued individuals at the same time as acting and thinking collectively. I create a climate where

they feel valued, where it is safe to be themselves and to express difference. Above all, I try to create a climate where they begin to do this for each other. (Fook 2003: 8)

Some of the elements common in both these scenes of supportive supervision are the sense of feeling safe, trusted, and valued. Yet not everyone who has experience of supervision necessarily receives this sort of support nor do all those providing supervision have this aspect as their primary purpose. In relation to the former, Doel, Shardlow, Sawdon and Sawdon (1996: 7) provide an example of Mussaret, a worker about to take her first student on placement, who was wary of supervision for she had, as a student herself, 'an unhappy experience of "uninvited therapy"'. As an example of the latter, Jordan (1990: 207-208) provides a story of a probation officer who is dealing with a difficult ethical problem with a young probationer. For this worker, supervision is about the 'senior' checking his caseload and being 'a stickler for clearing up loose ends'. The description provided does not suggest any elements of support for the worker, yet this is accepted as supervision.

Kadushin (1992: 18) in defining the term 'supervision' highlights the word's Latin roots '*super* ('over') and *videre* ('to watch, to see')' and concludes that a 'supervisor is defined as an overseer, one who watches over the work of another with responsibility for its quality'. He suggests that 'the orthodox definition stresses the administration aspect of supervision, the concern with seeing that a job is performed at a quantitatively and qualitatively acceptable level' (Kadushin 1992: 18). This is perhaps the most common view of the process and leads to what Kadushin (1992: 18) calls 'the derisive phrase *snooper vision*'. Ife (2001: 171) following a very similar approach for defining the word, moves on though to argue that those 'strong elements' of 'control and surveillance' that are inherent in the 'lay' definition, need to be critically analysed. Ife does not 'condemn everything that goes under the name of 'supervision' in social work' (2001: 172); rather he stresses the need for a conscious effort on the part of workers to examine the words they use as 'language helps to define and reinforce power relationships' (2001: 173). In highlighting the power dimensions in supervision, Ife develops his critique drawing on the work of Foucault.

> One needs to ask whether the use of the word in professional discourse suggests more of a control agenda, and whether it is really just an apparently more respectable version of the panopticon described by Foucault, where more 'senior' and experienced social workers and educators exercise power and control over less experienced workers or students by keeping them under constant surveillance. (Ife 2001: 171-172)

Such a description certainly supports an image of 'snooper vision'.

It is not just the word itself that Ife draws attention to – he is also critical of the 'conventional' practice of supervision. Continuing with his Foucauldian analysis, he highlights Foucault's description of surveillance 'emphasised the maintaining of those under surveillance in

individual isolation' and for Ife this can be 'paralleled in the conventional approach to supervision: usually supervision is individual, between a single worker and a single supervisor, with at least an implicit confidentiality about the exchange, rather than any notion of collective sharing of experience' (2001: 172). Ife is not alone in raising the potential power imbalance in such an exchange. Cooper (2002: 190-191) discussing supervision arrangements as this 'intensely interpersonal process conducted behind closed doors', notes that such arrangements 'while allowing privacy have the potential to hide abusive supervisory practices'. She goes on to note that 'although social workers value a collective supervisory approach that recognises the dignity and self-directed nature of supervision, the power dimension exists in the structural and managerial context of agency practice' (Cooper 2002: 191).

Due to these inherent structures in agencies and the potential to control workers through supervision, some writers/practitioners make a distinction between types of supervision in an effort to separate the various functions. Munson (1992: 35) distinguishes between supervision for 'clinical practice' and supervision 'in the more traditional management sense'. He aligns the other usual function of education with that of the clinical supervisor. For Brown and Bourne (1996: 9) their view is that 'whilst supervision has both consultative and managerial aspects, it needs to be clearly distinguished from both these related functions'. They do include in their own definition of supervision though an acceptance that supervision does have administrative functions. To them, a supervisor 'carries the responsibility both to *ensure* that agency policy is implemented – which implies a controlling function – and a parallel responsibility to *enable* supervisees to work to the best of their ability, implying a person-centred caring function' (Brown and Bourne 1996:10). Yet as Jones and May (1992: 279) acknowledge even though workers may view supervision 'primarily in terms of professional development and personal support', managers see supervision as part of the 'organisational control structure'. Jones and May believe workers need to develop strategies to deal with the realities of organisational constraints and argue for workers to focus on ways of 'transcending managerialism' including using the agenda of managerialism (effectiveness and efficiency) to achieve more positive outcomes (1992: 385-415). So in these examples there are those who keep the functions separate; those who acknowledge the differences, but advocate for a particular relationship to be established between the functions; and those who refer to the different priorities participants place on the functions and look to those involved to do the work to make best use of the situation. In all of these, though there may be distinctions drawn and attempts to clearly differentiate between the various ways of defining supervision, inevitably all definitions acknowledge similar functions to those originally presented by Kadushin.

Given this general acceptance that supervision has basically three functions – to provide support, to educate and to provide an overseeing of work administratively, we have a framework on which to build the practice of supervision. For each worker how these functions are carried out in everyday supervision experiences will be different. There is not just one way for supervision to occur. It may be the common arrangement of a relationship between two people – the supervisor and the supervisee; or a range of other practices from self-supervision (Hawkins and Shohet 1989: 5; Lowe 2002: 67-77), group supervision (McMahon and Patton 2002a: 55-65; Maywald 2000: 70-83; Hawkins and Shohet 1989: 95-108); peer supervision (Crago and Crago 2002: 82-88) and peer reciprocal supervision (Baldwin, Patuwai and Hawken 2002: 299-312) to name a few. Within each of these arrangements, there are numerous possibilities for the emphasis given to any of the three functions. Factors such as the power and authority of the participants, their roles and relationships, the context of the location of the supervision (be it occurring inside or outside of the workplace), the skills of those involved, and whether those participating are doing so voluntarily or not, will significantly impact on the arrangements as well. Rather than a simple process of fulfilling the various functions, supervision is potentially an extremely complex and unique experience.

Another factor that generally influences the process is an individual's personal previous experience of supervision, most commonly firstly as a student and later as a worker. In social work courses in Australia (and in other countries), students are required to undertake at least two supervised field placement experiences. The current guidelines governing such placements suggest that 'there should be a minimum of at least two hours supervision (possibly one formal and one informal) for each five days (35 hours) of field placement' (AASW 2000b: 9). Given that students must complete a minimum of 140 days (980 hours) (AASW 2000b: 8), it could be assumed that they will have participated in at least 56 hours of supervision before they graduate. Yet reports from liaison staff (the university appointed contact person for a placement) question whether some students do receive regular, and even any, supervision in some placements. This lack of supervision is also reported in research studies. One study by Knight (2000: 179) found 'approximately sixty percent of the students … received weekly supervision (60.1%)'; which means nearly 40% (four out of every 10 students) were not receiving the minimum requirement. Of those not receiving supervision, 'a significant minority revealed that they never received supervision (6.9%) or received it less than once per week (9.4%)' (Knight 2000: 179). The use of the word 'revealed' is an interesting choice here and perhaps highlights a sense of secrecy surrounding the lack of compliance and could also suggest a possibility of underreporting in relation to this. It may still be reasonable to suggest that the majority of students by the time they complete their programs, will

have some sort of experience of supervision, although the quality and regularity of what they received will vary greatly.

In relation to graduates, the professional body has also developed 'Minimum Supervision Standards' (AASW 2000a). New graduates – 'less than three years full-time experience' – are expected to receive 'at least one uninterrupted hour' of weekly individual supervision (AASW 2000a: 4). For all other workers with 'three or more years full-time experience' the expectation is 'the equivalent of fortnightly individual supervision of at least one uninterrupted hour' (AASW 2000a: 5). To follow the professional association's guidelines (as outlined in their minimum standards and their continuing professional education documents) means that all social workers should be receiving regular supervision and that 'supervision by social workers should be an integral and ongoing part of the professional practice of even the most experienced social workers, regardless of field and speciality' (AASW 2000a: 5). However if this is the expectation, why is it that recently when a colleague began offering supervision she received the comment from supervisees (experienced practising social workers) that they 'never had supervision before'? Supervision was supposed to have been available in the workplace, but obviously was not being offered. It was like, as one worker commented during my study in the US, that 'the lack of supervision is leading to no one saying this is not what practice should look like'.

As Knight (2000: 195) concluded in relation to student supervision requirements, 'it appears that simply having such a standard does not ensure that it will be met'. This would also seem to apply to recommendations for graduates, though again it would be reasonable to expect, given the range of literature on the topic and the emphasis by the professional association on supervision, that many social workers do have some sort of experience of supervision. In the same way as it is for students, the quality and regularity of what workers receive will no doubt vary greatly. Overall though, whatever the previous experiences are, these will be an influence in relation to any current or future supervision.

As with many areas of social work, supervision as a practice and a process is highly contested and debated. There are those who strongly oppose supervision in any form and those who strongly advocate for it – and a range of people with opinions in between these positions. In thinking about supervision and considering the complexity of it and the effort required to develop it as an effective practice, it is worth clarifying the range of arguments surrounding it, as a way of making an informed decision about it. Some of the arguments have probably received sufficient attention already – such as those that see supervision as a form of control and surveillance – so will not be covered again. Some of the other points have been alluded to, so will only be briefly discussed further; and others will be discussed more fully.

Supervision is promoted as something that is supposed to be helpful, yet as mentioned already, it can occur in ways that are abusive – where there is 'failure to comply with supervisory contracts or agreements, exerting pressure on, harassment of, and discrimination against, supervisees' (Cooper 2002: 191). How widespread is such abuse really is not known. However given the general acknowledgement that there is an overall disturbing pattern of underreporting of violence in the workplace (Gair and Thorpe 1996: 106), it is likely that this is an all too frequent occurrence.

Alongside of this can be an organisational culture which prohibits the discussion of such occurrences. The supervisors may not actually be the perpetrators of the abuse, but they are the gatekeepers for maintaining the silence about it or denying its existence. This sort of behaviour is described by Satyamurti (1981: 139-140) in her study of local authority social workers in England where workers were not able to discuss directly problems they encountered, 'as seniors often gave the impression of being unsympathetic and judgemental about such expressions'. Gair and Thorpe's study (1996) also reports specific instances of workers and students attempting to seek support from supervisors and the resulting negative experiences. Some workers who felt unsupported identified that they 'were made to feel they were at fault, were disbelieved, and felt that their professional competence had been questioned' and for one worker 'to such an extent that leaving is a consideration' (Gair and Thorpe 1996: 100). If this is someone's experience of supervision, then it hardly is likely that person would advocate for it (nor be likely to participate in it) as a positive professional practice. As Cousins (2004: 177) suggests 'past negative experiences can greatly colour the way someone views supervision and whether or not they feel it is a helpful process'.

Those who have experienced supervision as 'uninvited therapy' (Doel, et al. 1996) would similarly be disinclined to support the practice. Supervision is not meant to be therapy. The AASW (2002a: 19) specifically identifies that 'in the event that supervisees request or require therapy, they should be referred to another competent practitioner'. However this obviously does not always happen. There are two factors that can lead to this situation. One is that supervisors often 'fall back on their treatment skills to get by in supervision' (Munson 1992: 37) so they 'do' therapy with the supervisee. The other side is that supervisees may not be skilled in supervision and be unclear about the 'boundaries and of what is appropriate to discuss in supervision conferences' (Chiaferi and Griffin 1997: 31). They may come to expect that the supervisor should be there for their personal therapy needs and be dissatisfied with supervision that does not address this. Both situations potentially can lead to negative experiences for those involved and even the risk of such experiences is too great for some workers to participate in supervision again.

Other critics of supervision challenge the practice for what it claims it achieves and for why it is considered necessary – claims such as being 'essential', of being a means of quality control, and of leading to the provision by workers of a 'better' service to users (Feltham 2002: 327-338). The challengers argue that these claims can not be substantiated and therefore should not be supported. In relation to having supervision as a requirement of professional practice, Kadushin (1992: 470) notes that 'the literature reverberates with charges that supervision "perpetuates dependency", "inhibits self-development", "violates the worker's right to autonomy", and "detracts from professional status"'. Feltham (2002: 335) raises similar arguments noting that 'the possible disadvantages of mandatory lifelong supervision include expense, infantilisation and ritualisation' and suggests that 'anything of this nature that *must* be done, regardless of expense, experience, objections, individual need, caseload, research evidence etc., is likely to be perceived negatively by at least some practitioners'. This is certainly the case argued by opponents of supervision.

By now any advocates for supervision reading this will want to put forth their side of the debate and be convinced of numerous 'Yes, but …' exceptions to the above. As is common with a debate, the rebuttal would start by dismissing obvious points such as that supervision is not therapy anyway, so any suggestion that 'uninvited therapy' experiences are a justification for opposing supervision is not logical. However for the person who has had the negative experience, logic may not be sufficient to sway that person from an oppositional stance. A range of other ideas and ideals would need to be offered that together holistically address the personal and professional reservations. The following are some of the arguments that are generally presented.

One of the most positive aspects of supervision in whichever of its many forms it occurs (such as one to one, peer, or workplace group supervision) is the experience of being listened to – of really being heard. It is the opportunity for vital 'me' time – a time of 'proper selfishness' (Handy 1997: 86-107). For most workers there is very little opportunity in everyday practice to talk about their work in the way that they want to discuss it. They may talk about it a little or a lot everyday, but this talking is usually to meet someone else's need – to find out information for a service user on what might be done next in a situation, to update another colleague or senior worker on what is happening in a particular action, to share ideas with service users or other workers about what else might be done, or maybe explaining to a student for instance why and how an action or a plan is being implemented. This is all very important talking and may be quite valuable as well to the worker. Some of these areas may even be brought up and discussed further in supervision; however the focus of supervision would centre more directly on the worker's individual needs and agenda. Supervision can be quite similar to, though also distinctly different from, consultations, case conferencing and staff meetings. In their 'vision of effective

supervision', Brown and Bourne (1996: 62-63) identify among other aspects, that supervision 'offers an opportunity to reflect upon practice in its entirety: the good, the not so good, and the problematic. It is a time out, a safe haven, and an opportunity to take stock'. It can be more than addressing a problem or finding out information or checking on the state of a workload.

As a part of the 'entirety' of social work, all workers need to examine (or re-examine) at least from time to time, their assumptions, beliefs and values in relation to those gossamer like aspects that cover social work – the 'isms': particularly including racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, urbocentrism, ethnocentrism. Each of these areas impact in very personal ways on how we think, feel, act, and on our perceptions, and given this personal aspect we may be loath to explore these in a public arena. Since they are also critically significant to our personal professional self even though we may not be consciously aware of them, we do need an avenue for such exploration. Supervision which is private and confidential (and supervision can and does operate within such parameters without abuse occurring) proves a suitable forum for this. Other opportunities for such personal examination work can be offered through participating in structured workshops on the topics, attending conferences, or doing individual self-reflection and further study and research. However the 'right' workshop or conference does not necessarily come along on a regular basis nor do we always have the support, time or opportunity to attend when they do. The possibility exists in supervision though to make a commitment to take on the responsibility for teasing out and testing our assumptions, beliefs and values.

Using supervision for this purpose gives us a structured approach for exploring and challenging what we do know, what we think we know, and for becoming aware of what we do not know. All social workers will be influenced in their practice today by the curriculum they studied as an undergraduate, and when and where they studied. Curriculums do change (thankfully in most cases) and material previously taught – though considered appropriate at the time – can be found to be lacking in current contexts. A good example of this comes from Roberts (2001: 22): 'Many social workers will recall learning about so-called "sexual deviations", including homosexuality, in studies of abnormal psychology (Kisher 1964). Hopefully, contemporary students are not confronted still by this value-laden rhetoric posturing as social science and professional research'. In part what Roberts highlights here is that as social workers we need to review our 'learning' – maybe what we were taught in our undergraduate education was 'wrong'. Given changes to legislation, changes in social attitudes, findings in relation to new ways of learning and accepting new knowledge, it is not surprising that this would be the case. It is not enough to say though 'but that was what I was taught'. It is part of a professional's obligations 'to improve and upgrade' (Kadushin 1992: 478). This may also mean 'studying' new material that was not in your

curriculum. The current push for making social work curriculums inclusive of Indigenous ways of helping highlights the historical lack of such knowledge and even the lack of recognition that western culture has much to learn from Indigenous people (Lynn and Pye 1990: 73-79). There may be little to study in the way of books available on the topic – *Murri Way!* (Lynn, Thorpe and Miles 1998) being one of those rare exceptions – but there are other ways of addressing this gap. Even beginning the process of naming the gap and using supervision as a place to explore it can be a start.

Supervision also allows and provides a space for a worker to explore the structural oppressions that the 'isms' perpetuate. This is the sort of conversation that rarely occurs in the pressured world of practice, yet is crucially vital. If we do not attend to these broader implications we may in fact be – even 'unwittingly' – 'perpetuating exploitative social arrangements' (Fook 1990: 21). There are some personal characteristics that one can not, and may not want to change, such as one's skin colour or one's gender.[1] Everyone though can become more aware of what 'privileges' ('the invisible knapsack') (McIntosh 1989) these characteristics (and more) confer and in turn how this 'privileging' can keep 'others' – those not of that same race or sex – in subordinate oppressive positions. We each have to develop such awareness for ourselves. As an example of this, Bishop (2002: 136) recalls a conversation with a colleague whom she describes as 'an ally to women'. In identifying how this alliance happened, he responded: 'I finally understood that I may not be a perpetrator of violence against women, but I'm a perpetuator' (Bishop 2002: 136). As Bishop goes on to state:

> Many others have not yet taken this step from understanding oppression in personal terms to understanding it as a structural reality. The result is that they cannot hear the structural reality discussed without feeling accused of something terrible and reacting with either guilt or anger. (Bishop 2002: 136)

Increasing one's understanding of, and coming to terms with, where one is located in the 'order' of society is a personal matter, though also a significant factor in how one behaves as a social worker, and as such can not be ignored or denied. As Bishop suggests, this process can evoke strong feelings which can be uncomfortable. Supervision provides a safe place for such emotions to surface and be discussed. One may then be in a better position to truly explore one's own possibilities for participating in anti-oppressive practice.

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[1] Even when one can and does change a personal characteristic, this does not guarantee that the oppressions created by 'isms' will no longer continue. Writing about her personal situation, Arthemis Rodhanthy (not her real name) who identifies as 'a woman of transsexual/transgendered experience', clearly reports on the hostility from 'certain feminists', and adds that 'it is a sad reality that those who I thought would be allies in a patriarchal world have caused harm to the sub-group of women to whom I belong' (Rodhanthy 2004: 18).

Sometimes social work can leave us feeling like 'it is all too hard'. There really is 'so much pain and hurt in the world' (Hawkins and Shohet 1989: 154), and no practice area of social world is immune from this. Sometimes we may be tempted to think another area of work would be less stressful, less painful. Research for instance may look like it is distant from the 'human face' of practice and be an attractive alternative immune from the pain of direct practice. One text which would seem to dispute such thinking is by Campbell (2002), titled *Emotionally involved: the impact of researching rape*. In her review, Pascal (2004: 100) describes this book as 'excellent in that it reminds researchers of the importance of acknowledging feelings as an important source of understanding including intellectual insight'. She believes one of the strengths in the book is that Campbell 'raises important questions for all social researchers' and notes this is so 'particularly for social workers, as so many social work issues involve the pain of humanity' (Pascal 2004: 100). The pain is everywhere. In her suggestions for how we can deal with this in the research process, Pascal reminds us to use supervision, along with critical reflection and self-awareness, here as well, for 'as social work researchers, whether quantitative and qualitative in methodology, we can bring these elements of practice to the research setting' (Pascal 2004: 100).

Whatever the setting, our 'place' of work and our choice of field of practice, can contribute to a sense of stress for workers. Holland and Scourfield (2004: 28) refer to a study of state social work in the UK by Jones (2001) in which he 'notes widespread sickness and exhaustion … [and] describes the child protection office as "a grim place" (p. 551)'. This sort of description begs the questions: How do workers survive in such places? What makes workers stay? The reality of course is that often workers do not stay – they 'exit' rather than 'voice' (Hirschman 1970, as cited in Jordan 2004: 13). That is, workers move elsewhere ('exit') rather than stay to 'voice' their concerns or (further) struggle to bring about change. At one level this might seem justifiable and certainly fits with the cliché that 'people vote with their feet'. The idea here is that the organisations will eventually 'get the message' when they no longer have (experienced) staff and realise they need to 'change'. The risks of such actions though are that this may not happen or it may take so long to happen that in the meantime the services offered have deteriorated further. It also means that those workers with the most intimate and personal knowledge and understanding of the organisation leave, taking that vital awareness with them.

For those who stay, the other common option for workers 'battling against the odds' can seem to be 'to keep one's head down, to "get on with it" and not take time to reflect'(Hawkins and Shohet 1989: 3). The concern with both of these options – leaving or staying with 'one's head down' – is that these workers may not really be dealing with 'the personal and psychological aspects of their work', which 'not infrequently lead to low morale, high stress and worker "burn-

out"' (Jones and May 1992: 292). This is where supervision has been found to be particularly useful in that it can 'mediate against stress and burn-out' (McMahon and Patton 2002b: 223). How does this happen? One of the things we know about stress (and distress) is that it often occurs when our circumstances lead us to acknowledge that in our lives there is 'conflict between "the way it is" and "the way we want it to be"' (Crum 1987: 196). What supervision offers in such situations is:

> A chance to stand back and reflect; a chance to avoid the easy ways out of blaming others – clients, peers, the organization, 'society', or even oneself; and it can give us a chance to engage in the search for new options, to discover the learning that often emerges from the most difficult situations, and to get support. (Hawkins and Shohet 1989: 4)

Supervision provides workers with an opportunity, time and a space to take action – to do something about what is happening, rather than be crushed by the weight of inaction through avoidance or denial.

So far, supervision has been identified as being a practice and a process that allows a worker the essential sense of being heard, through having an 'other' or 'others' to listen respectfully and openly to whatever it is that the worker wants or needs to talk about. It has been noted that supervision provides a space also for a worker to comfortably examine personal assumptions, beliefs and values as well as knowledge in relation to the various forms of oppression that exist in the world. That these oppressions can also be explored from a personal positioning of self within the structures of society and the possibility of help in recognising structural realities and how these impact on those we work with, have also been seen as a real advantage of supervision. The opportunity for supervision to be an important part of research practice as well as a means of dealing with organisational constraints and difficulties and the likely resultant stress and burnout, has been suggested. One area of practice that has not been directly addressed yet is the value of supervision for enhancing and benefiting a worker's practice skills. This will be looked at next, though somewhat briefly, for in part, skills are inevitably intertwined with the areas already covered.

Every social worker needs and uses a range of practice skills in their work. According to Trevithick (2000: 1) there are '50 skills commonly used in social work', and included in her list of 'the fifty generalist practice and intervention skills' described in her text, is the skill of 'using supervision creatively' (2000: 22-23). The author places considerable value on what can occur in supervision. Overall the text is literally peppered with examples of the benefits and uses of supervision in relation to practice. Some of these are: when 'closing the case and ending the relationship' (110-112); when providing 'emotional support' work (126-127); for 'acknowledging mistakes' (149-150); for 'advocacy' work (153-155); and, when using 'confronting skills' and 'challenging skills' (158-159). In the chapter on Basic Interviewing Skills (69-113), Trevithick

discusses the skills and tasks involved in gathering information. She notes that 'it is sometimes worrying to see how narrowly we cast our net when exploring the problems placed before us' (Trevithick 2000: 70). What she is highlighting here is that we can, and do, sometimes miss 'the obvious', and/or can selectively choose whom to interview and involve in any given process, and whom we exclude. Trevithick (2000: 70) draws on the work of Munro (1998: 93) in noting how 'absent fathers tend to be ignored', and adds that this is also the case for 'other family members deemed to be hostile to social work or to the particular service user in question'. For Trevithick (2000: 70) this is the sort of 'shortcoming that should reveal itself in supervision'.

Even those who could hardly be considered hostile or absent – those very much at the centre of a social worker's concern and likely to be the most vulnerable, such as an abused child – can also be 'missed' and not included. Just such a situation was highlighted by the Inquiry into the sad and tragic death of a little girl, Victoria Climbie, in the UK recently. 'One of the starkest findings from the Laming Inquiry was the failure of any adult professional to find out directly from Victoria Climbie how she was' (Holland and Scourfield 2004: 25). This 'missing the obvious' does not only occur in direct service work – it does occur in all areas including policy and research. As Pusey (2003: xiv) suggests, those people defining the social and economic needs and policies for Australians overall, have argued 'with mineral certainty about other people's life experience … without any felt need to ask how the lives of millions of people will be affected'. Sometimes too we might have asked and be aware of the circumstances of people's lives but not give these circumstances the consideration in planning and decision-making that they warrant. As Walker and Walker (1998: 46) note for instance 'in social work practice, there is a danger that poverty and deprivation can be overlooked precisely because they are so common and are somehow seen as "normal" for social work service users'. People's impoverished circumstances can be taken for granted or worse still, seen as something to be expected. The university setting is a classic example of this where it is accepted that there will be students in poverty; and it is almost like there is no expectation that this needs to be challenged or changed.

The risk for workers is that the realities of the lives of those we work with – their strengths and their struggles, the daily difficulties to manage and survive – are not recognised, and that we can continue regardless to work on our own agenda of what we want to achieve. We may not be listening to, or even asking about what it is, those we are working with, want to achieve or believe can happen. Supervision can help us to own our position, including recognising our assumptions, and to explore situations in ways that acknowledge people's strength and resilience, and that respect their abilities. Maidment (2004: 30) provides a transcript of a real supervision session between a field supervisor and a student which powerfully illustrates this. In the example the

student was able to move from seeing elderly people as easily confused, to seeing them as they were actually presenting to her – as people who were mostly alert; and in working through this the student was able to acknowledge that it was her own need for clarity (not that of the older people) that was directing the way she was working. Such a shift in understanding calls for a change in how one then interacts and ultimately intervenes. This is not just something for students; even experienced workers need help to look at how they are seeing the people they are working with and how they are thinking about their work. Trevithick (2000: 150) describes a time when she was working in the area of child protection and how supervision helped her recognise that her 'agenda – the protection of the children – was getting in the way of establishing a rapport' with a family. She recalls that she had failed to ask the parents what help they wanted and further, that she had not seen them as they really were – people with lots of positive strengths. Through supervision she was able to acknowledge these strengths, as she records here:

> They were always in when I visited and always allowed me to have contact with the children. They were also committed parents, determined not to see their children "dumped into care" as they themselves had been. I had not seen their commitment; only their mistrust and lack of cooperation. (Trevithick 2000: 150-151)

Again such a shift in how we see people opens up previously unrecognised options. It does not deny the mistrust or lack of cooperation – it is rather that the focus is no longer fixed on these. There is a sense of hope and optimism that possibilities for positive and honest interactions can now occur.

Apart from having someone else look at our work to help us see aspects we might be overlooking and to recognise another way of looking at a given situation, supervision also can allow us to get a second opinion generally. Social work interventions frequently require skilled decision-making abilities on the part of the worker, and it can be valuable to have someone to talk with about how one has reached certain decisions. It can perhaps also help us to be structured in our ways to hopefully safeguard the rights of those we are working with. Unfortunately as Kadushin (1992: 479) suggests, 'only the most optimistic and charitable assessment of worker behaviour would suggest that all decisions are made in the best interests of the client'. Social workers work with some of society's most vulnerable people, who even in the best circumstances can have reduced abilities as far as having their needs expressed and respected. Social workers have a responsibility to be alert to this. Evans and Harris (2004: 77) draw on the work of Roe, et al. (2001) who looked at decision making in mental health settings, and part of their findings concluded that perhaps decisions were being made based on the professional's 'personal value system and preference' – not on an accurate assessment of the whole of the 'patient's' situation. Social workers and their colleagues in the other helping professions need to be challenged about

the decisions they make. Such challenges need to occur in ways that allow workers to critically review their practice skills – including their communication skills, assessment skills, and intervention skills – and accept feedback in relation to these, and this will only occur in a supportive and respectful environment, such as can be offered in supervision.

Using vision as a base for supervision

> I just can't help but wonder where all those supervisors are that you describe so beautifully with all their right techniques and all their wisdom and all their understanding and time and patience. I can tell you I have never seen such a one and neither has anybody else here. (Quoted in Kadushin 1992: xix)

This is part of a letter from a reader to Alfred Kadushin about his book, to which he responds: 'Touché and mea culpa' (Kadushin 1992: xix). He goes on to write that 'supervision as described in the text exists nowhere in practice' (Kadushin 1992: xix). In part for those who have questioned their own supervision – either receiving it or providing it – there is some satisfaction in knowing that perhaps what you want supervision to be is an ideal and that it is not surprising that the experience of supervision may actually not match this. If this is so, then why does Kadushin keep writing about it the way he does, and why should a worker continue to try to reach for something that may not be realistically available? For Kadushin (1992: xix) his justification includes that there is value in 'presenting a systematic synthesis of the best in social work supervision' and further that,

> It reflects Cicero's reminder that 'no wind is favourable unless you know the port to which you are heading'. The modern translation of this is: 'If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else'. (Kadushin 1992: xix)

The same can be said for why workers need to keep trying for their ideal of supervision – for surely not aiming for the best in social work supervision is a poor option? It does not mean that this will be achieved in its entirety; rather that there is some direction and focus for all the effort involved in the process and the practice of supervision. It is a purposeful activity that the worker is actively engaged in; not just another requirement of practice to be fulfilled. If you know that you want a supportive and respectful environment in which to critique and receive feedback on your work, then you will head to that 'port' and not be just satisfied with ending up 'somewhere else'.

There is another significant element that is operating here – the role of you, the worker, taking a primary position in any supervisory interaction. In the reader's letter to Kadushin, the focus was on finding the 'right' supervisor, and the suggestion was that such a person does not exist. Equally, we may not always be in a position where we have much choice over who our

supervisor will be. In some workplaces the supervisor will be the agency designated person. Similarly this can happen in student placement situations as well. However as Chiaferi and Griffin (1997: 5) remind students in their placement guide, 'that although you cannot select the person who will be your supervisor, you can significantly influence the quality and content of the supervision you receive'. The emphasis here is on owning the responsibility for what a worker or a student wants to achieve in supervision and developing ways for this to happen. This is about having an active rather than passive approach in any supervisory setting. Instead of waiting for the ideal supervisor to come along, the emphasis shifts to making the most of the available situation. As Ife (2001: 184) suggests one needs 'to construct supervision so that the "supervisee" is an active contributor to the process with at least equal control and the "supervisor" sees it in terms of dialogue from which he/she too can learn and develop'.

One way to 'construct' supervision as 'an active contributor' is by using your vision of you as a social worker as a base from which to engage in all supervisory experiences. Quite simply this means whatever is being discussed in supervision – be it a specific case study, a piece of research, a workload assessment or a need for support – that this would be explored in relation to how it fits with your personal professional vision of you. It is about questioning and acknowledging at the same time how this piece of practice works to help you become the social worker you believe you can be. It moves beyond just checking that you are doing a good job today. The process will also highlight potential incongruence between the work you are doing and what you believe you need to be doing. Being alert to such incongruence allows you to be in a better position to take steps to address this before it negatively impacts on your own health and well-being.

There are two key terms that perhaps need a bit more explanation in order for this proposal to make sense – one is the word base; the other is vision. The idea of having a base is to suggest that as workers we can develop our own safe place from which to move away from and to come back to as needed. When we think of having a base, we are likely to be able to relate it to the idea of being 'grounded'. It does not mean we are stuck in one spot; rather that it is like having a home that we leave, yet know to which we can always return. Part of this relates to the age-old maxim often quoted in social work of really being in a position where you 'Know Yourself'. In doing this, we know where we have come from, we know our values, our beliefs, our skills, our strengths, and all those parts of ourselves that are public and private. These form our base and if we are comfortable and confident in who we are, then we have the strength and resilience to cope with change, challenges and uncertainty in life.

The importance and value of having such a base applies in all sorts of social situations. One recent example comes from the research of Beek and Schofield (2004) who are working on a

longitudinal study of a group of children who are growing up in long-term foster care in England. These researchers have recognised that having a secure base has been critical to the stability and security of these children. They have found what they describe as an 'apparent paradox' – in that those children with a secure base are able to move away from it 'in order to explore the environment' (Beek and Schofield 2004: 4). This parallels with the use of the concept of base being suggested in this paper. It is not about never leaving the security of what you know or where you are comfortable; rather that having a base, allows one to be adventurous, and uncertain, and not have all the answers.

Whereas the concept of base relates to knowing the parts of self that are defined as who you are and where you have come from, the concept of vision relates to who you want to be. Heus and Pincus (1986: 70) suggest that when people think about the word 'vision' it often is in terms of 'hoping someone at the head of the line' has some. That may be true; though what I am suggesting is that we each need our own personal vision about how we want our lives to be. It is that forward looking aspect of self. Having a vision allows for the potential that something better can happen or be achieved. This is not to suggest developing and maintaining vision is always easy. It can be that when people are 'radically disempowered' – and this happens to workers, not just 'clients' – they 'may not even be able to envisage something better, when even a vague or indistinct vision is a prerequisite for pursuing one at all' (Wadsworth 1998: 12). This is a really sad situation for anyone to be in. At such a time people need others to help them to achieve a 're-vision' (Callaway 1981: 457) of their lives; and this too can be part of supervision.

Overall what I am suggesting here is that in developing a vision, the aim is not to look 'for constraining "commandments set in stone" but rather guiding principles' (Hawkins and Shohet 1989: 150) that will help us recognise the strengths we already have. Everyone has strengths and visioning (and re-visioning) helps us to acknowledge them. If we place the importance of vision at the base of our involvement in supervision, we will have a strong foundation on which to build.

Conclusion

People enter social work for a range of reasons with the most common being that they believe that there is something positive that they can contribute to others' lives. This is generally accompanied by a sense of hope and optimism. Along the way, people can experience a range of positive and negative influences on the work they do. Even in supervision which is ideally a supportive and helpful process, people do not always experience it as such. The right supervisor and the right type of supervision do not naturally occur. The literature does present ideas about 'best practice' in supervision. Workers however, do need to take responsibility for deciding for themselves, what the

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direction and focus of their supervision needs to be. Supervision does need to be a purposeful practice and process with the participants being equal and active contributors. Having a secure base to work from, improves one's ability to deal with uncertainty and explore the unknown. Having a vision of the worker you want to be is one aspect which can inform and guide supervision. Using vision as a base for supervision allows a worker to be comfortable and confident, personally and professionally; and this is a great position for any worker to achieve.

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Appendix 3.1
Presentation to the Australian Counselling and Supervision Conference 2005

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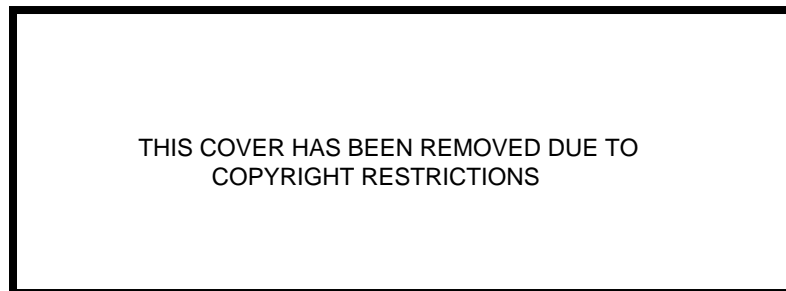COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Figure 12: Cover – Australian Counselling and Supervision Conference 2005

Vision as a base for supervision

Abstract

Thinking about supervision for you as a social worker – then read on. This paper suggests workers focus on their vision of social work and use this vision as a base for their supervision. Having a vision works as a yardstick for preparing for, measuring, and benefiting from supervision. It grounds the worker in what is really important for them not others such as managers and in doing so maintains hope and reduces negative aspects of practice such as (dis)stress and burnout. Having a vision provides direction. It acts as a guide for making sense of our work, what is being asked of us and what we are asking of ourselves. Supervision often is 'problem' based – it is offered or sought when there is a problem. Supervision can be framed on a positive, strengths base – a base informed by a vision.

This paper is written to interest ordinary social workers who aim to improve their practice and look for realistic ideas which they can integrate readily. It explores some ideas about why people enter social work, what is social work, what is supervision and what is vision. Finally, the importance of vision as a base for supervision will be my conclusion and hopefully make sense for you as well.

Coda[1]: A concluding passage

It must be a wonderful experience for writers when they know that they are about to share their stunning, novel, exciting, 'leave-the-reader-with-mouth-wide-open' conclusion. I wish I had such a one to present here. Instead, my conclusion is that I have more work to do – not on this thesis per se; rather on the themes, and areas, and issues, covered in the thesis. As a social worker, I know I have not 'done myself out of a job' through my research. It is not that I think I have failed; far from it. It is that the more I have learned and worked to bring about change, and fostered more collaborative and cooperative human focused relationships, and supported (small 'c') community building and alliances, and so on, the more I need to continue to do just that. This is not to suggest that it is just up to me and what I need to do; these areas are the concern of all of us, and as such the future and continued work for all of us. Therein lies the beauty and strength of this project – the reality of working with others and knowing others share the concern. This provides me with a great source of optimism and hope.

Perhaps one of the most well known and inspirational speeches of the last century, was Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" (delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 28 August 1963, Washington DC). At the time of that speech, how many would have really believed that any of those things King referred to, would come true? How many people that day would have truly believed that Mrs Rosa Parks, 'the black woman who refused to give up her seat on a bus' (in Montgomery, Alabama, 1 December 1955), would on her passing in 2005, lie in State in the Capitol Rotunda (and to be the first woman to be accorded this honour) and be afforded the highest rituals of respect that the United States of America provides to any of its citizens? Or how many of us who witnessed the events of the 'Dismissal' of the Australian Government of the day, on 11 November 1975 would ever have imagined the key opponents that day – the 'sacked' Prime Minister and the 'caretaker' leader of the opposition – would three decades on, speak with and about each other in terms of such genuine respect? Rifts can be healed; and respectful relationships established. Structures, attitudes, and relationships that oppress people and put people down and deny us all of a just civil society, can be and have been challenged and changed.

At the time of an experience it may be difficult to imagine, let alone believe, that one day things will be better. Living in Australia at this moment in time, particularly for those working in the Higher Education sector, it may seem like a dream that students will ever really be valued for who they are as people, and not as numbers to fill a quota; that they will live with their basic material needs met – and not be tired and hungry and overburdened – so as to be able to truly

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[1] With acknowledgement to the late Thea Astley for introducing me to this concept.

participate and benefit from their educational opportunities; but these things can really happen. At the time I prepared my snapshot of students and poverty, there was little discussion on the topic. It was starting to appear briefly as a topic in some conference proceedings. Since that time, there has been much more attention given. More people are writing about it – such as Bessant (2003) – and there have been numerous submissions presented by student unions and associations, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, and various related agencies and services to almost yearly Senate Inquiries (Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship, Inquiry into Higher Education Funding and Regulatory Legislation, Inquiry into Student Income Support – to name a few) focusing on the same and related aspects. The topic is now firmly on some people's political agenda and as such I know that others too are working to address this unjust situation.

There is still much more that needs to be done as far as raising the broader community's awareness of the issue of poverty and its impact on students. If the problem is acknowledged at all, the dominant perception would still place this problem in the personal/individual arena – at best, sympathy might exist for the 'poor' student, struggling hard; and at worst, the problem is dismissed quickly as not being a matter of significance. The 'personal is political' has been identified as the 'slogan' of radical feminists, but as with much that has developed through feminist scholarship, it has a wider application than just for a feminist audience. The critical analysis that results when one engages with the personal is political perspective provides a very different view of the world to the view one holds under an individual problem focus. Rather than seeing the individual student as totally responsible for his or her impoverished circumstances and blaming the individual for poor management of his or her life, particularly with respect to financial management, an analysis would focus on the power structures and the systems operating in the broader society which work to keep people poor. It would lead to an acknowledgement that we have a collective responsibility as a society for the well-being of all students.

There is not the space here now to explore this in detail. However just briefly, some of the ideas that arise from such an analysis and that could be followed up in another study, include why as a society do we choose to see education for some (such as for 6 – 15 year olds) as a compulsory requirement and a right and 'free' of fees, and yet we choose to charge for education at Universities? In Queensland currently, there is discussion around the possibility of increasing the upper leaving age for secondary school students to 17 years. This suggests that some sections of our society at least, consider further education is valuable and needed. What prevents us from allowing for an undergraduate degree to become the accepted 'exiting' point? This is not to suggest that every person should go to University. There are many people who do not want to go to University; but there are also many who do. There are also many who leave their University studies

part way through because they are no longer able or prepared to live in poverty, and seek paid employment – including transferring to apprenticeships which do not pay much, but at least pay something. When we consider other further education and training programs, why do we as a society support the practice where some people are paid while they are 'studying' (someone for instance in the Defence Forces or undertaking an apprenticeship) yet others are not? How did we decide that we think one student needs an income to live on, yet another student does not? Why do we not treat all students the same?

Alongside of this, the questions need to be asked about who benefits from, and who is disadvantaged by, the systems currently in place? There will not be simple answers to these questions. As post-modern theory would suggest, there will be multiple and diverse positions which people will present as their responses. At present however, there is little discussion let alone debate occurring. In presenting my work through various forums, I have been addressing mainly students and colleagues. This has been important as one step in the process; though far from sufficient on its own. We can come up with our own solutions to the problem as we see it; though the risk too is that being so involved within the system can mean we miss out on exploring other options. A wider audience needs to be involved in order for different perspectives to be heard. Only then will there be a possibility of 'better' solutions becoming available. What will it take to engage a wider audience? Maybe the problem will need to become bigger – as in a greater decline in the number of students taking up University places, more students exiting courses before completion, a shortage of graduates available to enter the workforce – before we as a society recognise that we need students and we therefore need to be investing more of our resources in maintaining and supporting their well-being. In the meantime, those of us who already recognise the problem need to continue our efforts in working to address this unjust situation that many students are experiencing.

Along similar lines, I know that there are many colleagues who are actively working to improve their teaching and learning processes to create more empowering and just environments for themselves and for those with whom they work. Teaching is one of those jobs like social work where you often are not sure about the impact or the influence you are having on those you are working with. You can use a range of formative and summative feedback and evaluation strategies which can provide some guidance. Sometimes though the people involved might not have processed an interaction fully at those times, and the impact will come into effect weeks, months or even years later. I know I am not the only teacher (and social worker) who has had an ex-student (or a long ago ex-client) approach them in a shopping centre with comments like: 'Do you remember when you said …? I have been thinking about that and realise …'. In part this can be a

scary experience as it reminds us of the potential ongoing impact of our past performances. It can also be a wonderful experience confirming that somewhere along the way you may have helped this person find the power within to make their own sense of a situation.

This to me highlights one of the positive aspects of the teaching and learning relationship – where what I am teaching is not so important as how I am teaching, and that how I am teaching works to facilitate the student's learning. In essence it is what the student learns and encouraging his or her ability in learning to learn that is so important. Developing a teaching tool using an analogy may not seem very sophisticated – indeed, it has been suggested to me that it is rather childish. I would accept that it may be childlike to 'play around with' theoretical concepts but that if the approach is successful in helping someone enjoy learning and achieve a sense of knowing for one's self, then it has its place within the diverse range of teaching and learning strategies. I know I am not alone in suggesting this. At the end of my presentation of this tool at a conference I invited the audience to share their experiences in practice – be that in teaching, supervision, or otherwise – of using, metaphors, analogies, imagery, story telling, visualisations, and so on. The response to this invitation was lively and full of positive experiences. It has encouraged me to continue to look for ways to tap into people's strengths drawing on their ordinary everyday examples so as to encourage and facilitate learning. People can be overwhelmed by the idea of 'theory' – making it seem like an everyday part of life by relating it to the ordinary, can help to reduce a student's anxiety about applying it.

As mentioned earlier, it can be difficult to gauge the impact of teaching strategies and I am certainly not in a position to suggest that this tool will lead to better learning outcomes necessarily. I can not clearly name exactly what learning each or any student achieved through our application of the tool as directly attributable to it that may or may not have occurred using other methods such as lectures, rote learning, worksheets, and so on. The tool was also developed to meet a specific learning situation and it is expected that it will be limited therefore in its applicability for addressing other learning needs. These are definitely some of the points that need further research. At this stage, I remain tentative as to the effectiveness and usefulness of the tool. However, I am encouraged to continue using it rather than not, for a number of reasons. Some students have reported that those sessions where we have explored theories through the discussion of the analogy have been more interesting to them directly, engaging them in ways that the 'dull and boring' lecture does not. Ideally of course, lectures need not be 'dull and boring'; but if the processes used in applying the analogy are interesting and engaging, then that at least is one advantage recommending the tool.

Another aspect that students have identified as positive has been the creativity involved in the process. In part this is about having fun, which is important; yet it is also more than this. Using the analogy definitely involves imagination and visualisation much more so than commonly would occur with reading text or listening to a speech, lecture or presentation. Drawing on research into the way our brains work and how our memory operates (Wiles and Wiles 2003), those activities where we are making use of both spheres of our brains (as in the right hemisphere which is associated with holistic thinking processes like visualisation and imagination and the left hemisphere which is associated with analytic thinking and symbolic processes like language and logic) are usually considered to offer significant positive benefits for one's ability to remember and recall knowledge, events, and so on. When the students are saying that they do not know any theory, they are generally meaning that they can not remember or recall what theory they have learnt. Forgetting things – names, places, events, and even theories – is common and sometimes upsetting and people can become very anxious about 'forgetting'. For a professional who is expected to draw on their knowledge base and evidence from their studies of research and practice, to not be able to remember what they know is far from an ideal situation. This is not to suggest that the recall of knowledge gained from theory and research is the only requirement for effective social work practice; however it is definitely needed and so we need healthy memories. Activities which encourage a healthy memory are usually identified as those that draw on both spheres of the brain. The tool has been developed with this process in mind.

As with any technique or strategy, the use of the analogy is not necessarily likely to appeal to everyone. Some learners are much more comfortable with other formats for presenting material, such as the lecture. Various learning styles do need to be considered in the preparation and presentation of material. The decision by a teacher to use a tool such as the analogy presented in this thesis, needs to be based on many factors including an understanding of the learning styles and needs of the people involved. Using the tool does require a different approach in one's thinking and calls for a highly interactive approach in the classroom. Not everyone will be comfortable with such differences and it is accepted therefore that it will not have benefit for all class group settings.

Supervision is also an arena like the classroom that can be a site of significant anxiety for students. Part of my project has been to explore the various elements of supervision so as to develop another way for a student or worker to experience supervision. The final paper of this thesis presents some ideas for 'another way' for supervision to be framed. It is proposed that when a worker (or a student) uses the vision of the social worker he or she wants to be as a base for supervision, there are many benefits to this approach. The approach is framed on social justice principles of increasing a person's access, equity, participation and rights within the process. It is

offered as an alternative to the common situation where the supervisor is the 'other as expert' in the relationship. It avoids the hierarchical, managerialist approaches and supports the strengths of the supervisee as an active participant capable of making the most of the process.

As I reflect back over the work in the three papers presented, one of the recurring underlying themes I think is the pressure on people today and a reported sense that there is a 'poverty of time' in their lives – they are so rushed or busy that they just want 'the' answer; that they have not even got time to think. Yet to bring about positive and effective changes in our lives, we do need to make time available for this to occur.

So it is also that visioning and developing a vision requires time – including time to think. There are a variety of ways to 'discover' our vision, including activities and processes such as: to read about 'visionary' people, organisations, practices, etc; to have a chance to talk with another or others (which can happen in supervision) about their suggestions, thoughts and ideas; and, to spend time integrating the reading and talking and the ideas that develop. A vision might include statements relating to one's philosophy of life and death; statements naming one's core values and ethics – and these for a social worker would relate to the profession's values and ethics; and statements containing ideas that have promise of hope and optimism; of humour and creativity; of positive thoughts and actions. This does not all have to be achieved by a person working in isolation. Supervision that is supportive and positive, which actively engages both parties in working to develop opportunities to talk about such ideas, that encourages a person to name and define and refine their ideas and thinking, is one place and an appropriate place for this to occur.

Other options that could be explored are for an individual to engage with a Life Coach or a Mentor. Certainly in recent times, in the business sector as well as in welfare services and programs, there has been a growth in the number of people offering their services as Mentors and Life Coaches. The growth in this personal services sector has occurred in response to the need that people have for someone that they can go to who will listen to and work with them directly. People need people to listen to them. Life Coaches and Mentors are there to do just that – to listen to a person, and to help that person to identify and to achieve what that person wants in his or her life. Identifying one's vision is the sort of work that does not just happen; it needs to be specifically allocated space and time for it to occur; and it needs to be ongoing – reviewed, refined and further developed on a conscious basis. It is also not necessarily easy to develop one's vision – sometimes it can be very hard to put into words that are meaningful, what one wants to say. Doing it with the support of another person – be that in supervision, with a Life Coach or with a Mentor – may make it easier and more likely to happen. The outcome of achieving a clear congruence between one's vision and one's work, one's mind and one's body, will lead to a greater sense of personal harmony

and well-being which is vitally important particularly in this pressured world. This is an outcome that is definitely worth the time and effort required to achieve it.

Another professional activity that requires time and effort is preparing for and attending Conferences. It was an encouraging experience for me to participate in the Inaugural Australian Counselling and Supervision Conference 2005. Being there with all those people, sharing, and listening and talking with both presenters and participants, reinforced the optimism I hold that there are others who are keen to improve the process and the practice of supervision in the helping professions. We can do better than most of what is currently on offer as supervision generally. This is not to say all that is currently offered is poor or bad – though some is. It is not that the model I have described is the answer for everyone either. Rather, my work in the paper on supervision – as with my work in the other papers – can be viewed as another contribution to seeking to improve our ways of operating in social work, in teaching, and in the helping professions. More work needs to be done and it will be – by me and by others.

It can be tempting to want to hold on to a piece of work in the hope of being able to find a better way to write some point or to include another idea or to say one more thing. However there comes a time when one needs to finish and move on to other things. It is like the time when one realises that one is now a young adult, and not a child any more. It is the time to put away or give away the toys of childhood and to engage with the world in a different way. So it is that this is the time to put away the books, and journals, and notes of a Masters student and move on. I can now afford to indulge in other reading – to allow myself to choose from the accumulated *fat (for after thesis)* pile of books and journals littered with post-it notes and reminder stickers, that the singular disciplined focus required to achieve 'completion' demanded that they be temporarily put aside. The time of being a Masters student must finish and the world of other work and projects needs to be explored. Much has been learned, confirmed and clarified throughout these student days and as such I am very grateful for having had this opportunity. My vision of who I want to be is clearer and I finish here with a sense of confidence about making changes in my world so as to be doing more of the things that matter most.

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